

'Protecting children from harm and promoting their welfare depends on a shared responsibility and effective joint working between different agencies' (introduction: Working Together to safeguard children 2010)

'The Police have key role in safeguarding children. They recognise the fundamental importance of inter agency working in combating child abuse, as illustrated by the well-established arrangements for joint working with social work colleagues' (introduction: Working Together to Safeguard 2010)

There has been a steady increase in the commitment from Local Authorities to participate in joint training since SCD5 centralised their training unit. The feedback to the London Safeguarding Children's Board is that social workers believe it is an essential requirement for good working practices in safeguarding children in London. One of the challenges in London is that local LCSB each provide a varying degree of multi agency training to meet the needs of their population. The JI and ABE course has to date offered something unique to social workers which they would not be able to access locally, and this needs to be reflected in any future training to ensure continued commitment

The Police have a duty to carry out thorough and professional investigations into allegations of crime and the obtaining of clear strong evidence is in the best interests of the child, since it makes it less likely that a child victim will have to give evidence in criminal court (5.60 Working Together 2010)

Since the introduction of the memorandum of good practice and the subsequent ABE guidance, there has been a necessary shift for police to take the lead in the criminal investigations and it may therefore be appropriate for a police officer to take the lead in any forensic interview. However in doing this it is of equal importance to ensure that the child's welfare is paramount and that a joint working approach exists in all areas of child protection including the interview.

Joint Investigation training is essential for the two agencies that have responsibility for the investigation of child protection issues. There has to be a level of compromise as both agencies enters this training environment with previous training, experience and a differing culture of working. The training should reflect the need to appreciate specific roles with the focus in working together to ensure that the child's welfare is paramount. Areas considered vital in this delivery would be:

- Understanding agencies roles and responsibilities
- Understanding thresholds including how our experiences and values and norms impact on our work along with our individual working culture
- Understanding the process and the legislation that impacts on our work
- Professional dangerousness including judgments and prejudice, challenging others, issues around apparent compliance and over stepping boundaries

- Understanding children's experiences within the abusive relationship, using grooming and offender profiles and child sexual accommodation syndrome

Interviewing children

'Children are a key and sometimes the only source of information about what has happened to them especially in child sexual abuse cases but also physical and other forms of abuse. Accurate and complete information is essential for taking action to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child, as well as for any criminal proceedings that may be instigated concerning an alleged perpetrator of abuse. When children are first approached, the nature and extent of harm suffered by them may not be clear, nor whether a criminal offence has been committed. It is important that initial discussions with children are conducted in a way that minimises any distress caused to them and maximises the likelihood that they will have separate communication with a child. Learning or suggestive communication should always be avoided' (pg 5.66 Working Together 2010)

Social workers have commented that they do not feel they receive sufficient training in talking to children. They have regularly commented on their course evaluation forms that they want more practice time and feel that police officers attending the course have an advantage because they have experience in investigating crime and have usually attended previous ABE courses. They often feel ill equipped to speak to children about allegations they have made and are concerned about leading them.

Social workers need to appreciate the process of interviewing, have an understanding of what a crime is, particularly when Police Officers ask them to speak to the child first, and be able to assist any interview ensuring that the focus remain on the child. Using social workers with experience in working directly with children may also prevent the inappropriate use of intermediaries when the officer does not have experience working with a particular child.

Future Training Programme

Separate courses will be delivered and tailored to the specific requirements of social workers and police officers

- Police Officers on joining CAIC to be deemed 'competent' in ABE prior to attending Joint Training,
- Social Workers will need to attend a 3 day ABE foundation course run by SCD5 and again be deemed 'competent' prior to attending a specialist child interviewing skills course jointly with police

Joint Police/ Social Worker 10 days course in Specialist interviewing skills for child victims or witnesses

The focus of this course will be Joint Investigations and communicating effectively with children who have been victims and witnesses of crime rather than ABE as a process.

The Joint Training will include:

A child focus input on the 4 phases of the interview

A visit to a child care facility – with task around rapport and asking questions

Child development – on understanding, language, memory, suggestibility and impact of trauma on recalling account

Questioning skills development in clarifying allegations and interviewing children as victims of crime

Understanding pitfalls particularly when interviewing children

Planning Interviews and the roles of professionals in this process

Pre interview preparation with a child

Challenging oppressive practice when interviewing children

Recorded interviews, with focus on reflective practice. A group of 3 or 4 prepare and undertake an ABE interview which is recorded on a DVD. At the end of the interview the group will be asked to go away and prepare a presentation identifying one area of good practice, one area where there needs improvement and their learning of the process. The group could do more than one interview so that all delegates have a chance to participate and the remaining group members can act as the child. The feedback to the wider group will follow the interviews.

London Safeguarding Children Board Training Sub-Group

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