

New service to help children's workforce combat harmful sexual behaviour

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Today, in response to findings of an Ofsted review, [SWGfL](#) and the [Marie Collins Foundation](#), launched the [Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service](#) to provide advice to a range of professionals across England, who encounter developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour, which may be harmful or abusive, among the children and young people they are working with. The Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service, funded by the Home Office and developed in

collaboration with the Department for Education, will be hosted by SWGfL and available Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm on 0344 225 0623 or hsbsupport@swgfl.org.uk.



The telephone and email support available through the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service is for education and safeguarding professionals, from early years provision to further education, as well as the police, social workers and health practitioners. The service, provides the tools to equip and empower education and safeguarding professionals to address the alarming normalisation of harmful sexual behaviour in children and young people both in-person and online through:

- 1.) Advice on individual cases or incidents of harmful sexual behaviour, to ensure an appropriate response both for children displaying this behaviour and others affected by it.
- 2.) Guidance on policy development on tackling harmful sexual behaviour.
- 3.) Sharing relevant resources, best practice and contacts around harmful sexual behaviour, both locally and nationally.

The 2021 Ofsted review, which was commissioned by the government to better understand and

tackle concerns of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, spoke to over 900 children and young people, as well as school leaders, teachers, governors, local safeguarding partnerships, parents and other stakeholders. It revealed a prevalence of child-on-child sexual harassment and abuse so widespread that, for some children, incidents are 'so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them' and 'consider them normal'.

Over two thirds (68 percent) of girls and over a quarter (27 percent) of boys interviewed said that they felt pressured into sexual activity they were uncomfortable with and nearly 90 percent of the girls and 50 percent of the boys report that they had been sent explicit pictures or videos of things they do not want to see. 80 percent of girls and over half (55 percent) of boys say that they have received unwanted or inappropriate sexual comments.

Safeguarding Minister Rachel Maclean said: "Sexual abuse and harassment can have a devastating impact on children and young people, and through our Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy we are committed to ensuring professionals working on this issue have the tools and support they need.

"This new service will ensure expert-led advice and guidance is easily accessible and the response to harmful sexual behaviour will be significantly strengthened.

"I look forward to seeing the impact of the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service and thank everyone involved in this vital work."

Minister for the School System Baroness Barran, said: "We know that sexual harassment and abuse between children and young people has become far too commonplace and in some instances, school and college staff lack confidence in knowing how to respond.

"That's why we have strengthened support for schools and colleges to help them respond appropriately and create healthy environments for young people. Relationships, Sex, and Health Education is also teaching about important topics such as consent and respect, and the NSPCC's Reporting Abuse in Education Helpline provides vital advice to individuals who have been a victim of sexual abuse.

"The Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support Service will offer a new route for education professionals and those responsible for keeping children safe to receive advice to help keep more young people safe."

Carmel Glassbrook, lead for Harmful Sexual Behaviour Support at SWGfL, said: "A widespread cultural shift is required to de-normalise the actions and language which damage the lives of the young people involved. We know that the majority of the children's workforce is under-equipped to address the growing issue and help the young people affected, so this service is there to provide them with vital professional guidance and tools they need."

Lawrence Jordan, Professional lead of the Marie Collins Foundation, said: "Recent findings regarding this issue, have emphasised that sadly for a vast number of children, sexual abuse and harassment are commonplace. It is essential that children can learn and develop in an environment where they feel safe.

"The impact of this cannot be underestimated and our work at the Marie Collins foundation has highlighted the importance of knowing how to respond to this issue to ensure that no further harm is done to the child.

"As the scale of this problem is now recognised, it is vital that those on the front line have as much support as possible to enable them to respond appropriately. We are proud to be part of this initiative that will ultimately protect children from harmful sexual behaviour."

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Harmful Sexual Behaviour - Definition

Harmful sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people (under the age of 18) and which may be harmful or abusive. It can be displayed towards younger children, peers, older children or adults. It can be harmful to the children and young people who display it, as well as those it is directed towards.

About SWGfL

SWGfL (www.swgfl.org.uk) is a charitable trust that has worked with schools and other organisations to provide safe and secure online resources and services since 2000. SWGfL has developed an international reputation within online safety, having spoken at conferences across Europe, America and Africa. SWGfL works with a number of industry partners, participating with their global safety panels and is also a founding member of UKCIS (UK Council for Internet Safety)

SWGfL, alongside partners Childnet and Internet Watch Foundation, lead the UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC). UKSIC is the national awareness Centre: responsible for raising the nation's attention to online safety issues as well as managing online criminal content, reporting harmful but legal material and supporting professionals via its unique helpline.

About Marie Collins Foundation

The Marie Collins Foundation (www.mariecollinsfoundation.org.uk/), founded in 2011, is a charity based in the UK that is leading the way both nationally and internationally when it comes to responding when a child is sexually abused online. We are dedicated to supporting victims of technology assisted child sexual abuse and exploitation on their recovery journey to go on to live safe and fulfilling lives. We provide a voice for the victim and survivor community and support professionals who work with young people through training, mentoring, and promoting the sharing of best practice. We advocate for victims and survivors by lobbying and sharing our expertise with government and policy makers to improve safeguarding responses for victims and their families.

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