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## Background

The true scale of child sex abuse in England is significantly greater than official figures suggest. Only about 1 in 8 victims of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) come to the attention of the police or children's social care. The majority of victims go unidentified because the services that protect them, including the police and social services, are geared towards children self-referring or reporting abuse, although they rarely do this. Often, children do not even recognise that they have been abused until they are much older. For full information please see [Children's Commissioner Report 2015](#).

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## Why it matters

Our childhood matters – it is important in its own right but it also shapes every aspect of our future lives. Child sexual abuse is one of the adverse childhood experiences, the impact can last a life time. [A report](#) reveals that the vast majority of child sexual abuse (66%) takes place within the family or its trusted circle. There are additional barriers to children reporting this type of abuse resulting in most going unreported.

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## Information

Sexual abuse which happens in and around the family is a significant challenge for professionals working on the frontline. Taking action to protect children demands a high level of expert judgement. Research demonstrates that the prevalence of sexual abuse could be as high as 11% of the population of England.

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The Commissioner estimates that child sexual abuse in and around the family is likely to account for around two-thirds of all child sexual abuse. Fear, coercion, loyalty to the perpetrator and/or a desire to protect other family members may prevent a victim of child sexual abuse in the family environment from telling anyone. Their emotional response to the abuse is manifested in a number of ways.

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In terms of the signs and symptoms which might indicate child sexual abuse, they are all things that might indicate other things as well. The evidence in the [Inquiry](#) demonstrates that children and young people are often identified as victims of sexual abuse following the provision of support for other issues, such as domestic abuse in the family, challenging behaviour, or issues with mental health.

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## Questions to consider

How might you observe any of the warning signs?

What sort of issues might make some young people more vulnerable to CSA?

How might you come across children or their families where Have you considered CSA as an issue or are there other presenting issues too prominent?

Have you thought the unthinkable? Most CSA is perpetrated by family or close relatives.

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## What to do

If you are worried about a child suffering from child sexual abuse please initially consult your designated safeguarding lead to discuss what action and procedure you should follow. There may be a need to discuss your concerns with children's social care: Blackpool dial 01253 477299 or Lancashire 0300 123 6720