

## Abuse Recovery Services

Many children who have suffered abuse need therapeutic support to help them to recover, but there is a great shortage of abuse recovery services in Scotland. Children often have to wait for months, if not years, to get this specialist help. This waiting can prolong children's suffering, holding them back from healing and moving on with their life.

### What are the effects of child abuse?

All forms of abuse and neglect have a harmful effect on children and young people. Below is an outline of some of the most common effects of abuse on children:

- **Emotional scars** - Children who suffer abuse or neglect feel most of the pain on the inside. Many children suffer low self-esteem and feelings of guilt, often blaming themselves for the abuse. Children can find it difficult to have trusting relationships and experience loneliness and bullying. Children often have feelings of hopelessness, hate, despair, misery, and rage, sometimes talking about feeling suicidal.
- **Physical scars** - Where physical abuse or neglect has occurred, children can have direct physical effects such as bruising, cuts, broken bones, health problems or under-nourishment.
- **Impact on future wellbeing** - Research shows that children who have suffered abuse are more likely to have lower educational attainment and suffer from drug and alcohol dependency. Scottish Government research into Scottish women prisoners indicates links between experience of sexual abuse, later addiction problems and the potential to commit serious harm. Long-term mental health difficulties including depression are often a consequence.
- **Impact on families** – As well as the impact of abuse and neglect on the child themselves, their family can also be affected with family members anxious and unsure about how to support a child who has been abused. A child's behaviour and attitudes can be difficult to deal with, and families often struggle to know how to cope.

The Childline report 'What children say about being abused' (1995) notes:

*Take any book describing the effects of domestic violence on women, replace women with children and it will describe the impact of violence on children. Bruises and cuts, even broken bones, dislocated shoulders and burns heal. The physical pain they experience can be short lived; what they suffer is an assault on their identity and spirit, on their trust and confidence in themselves and their parents and on their emotional development and their capacity to feel loved.*

Sarah (11) was desperately missing her mum who had died suddenly. She was then raped by a 'friend' of the family. She was living with her dad but it was so much for them both to bear – her dad didn't know how to help her, she didn't know what help she needed.

Sarah's trust in adults had been shattered. She needed our skilled workers to help her trust them enough to talk about how she was feeling, to understand that it wasn't her fault, and to get the help she needed to move on from the trauma. Her Dad needed help in knowing how to help his daughter, knowing how to support her so that they could work together to move on instead of becoming in his words 'a broken unit rather than a family', and he needed help in feeling confident of being able to protect his daughter in the future.

### **How do abuse recovery services help?**

Abuse recovery services provide the skilled support that a young person and their family need to help them gradually recover from the effects of abuse. Through therapeutic support, children can slowly begin to make sense of what has happened to them, so that the healing process can begin.

The abuse recovery support is shaped to suit the individual child and their family and can include a range of methods and activities. For example, abuse recovery services can often include:

- Play Therapy
- Counselling
- Storytelling
- Structured discussion with parents and wider family group
- Art and drama
- Befriending
- Advice and information
- Educational support
- Group work

### **CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>'s abuse recovery services**

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> provides 8 abuse recovery services covering the following local authority areas: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Dumbarton and Clydebank, East Ayrshire, Fife, City of Glasgow, Highland, Inverclyde, Moray, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Scottish Borders, South Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire.

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