

# Initial visits to victims of non-recent child abuse

Independent sexual violence advisors jointly attending initial visits to potential victims of non-recent child sexual abuse.

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## Key details

<b>Does it work?</b>	Untested – new or innovative
<b>Focus</b>	Reoffending
<b>Topic</b>	Child sexual exploitation and abuse Criminal justice Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
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<b>Region</b>	North West
<b>Partners</b>	Police Local authority
<b>Stage of practice</b>	The practice is at a pilot stage.
<b>Start date</b>	May 2022

## Key details

<b>Scale of initiative</b>	Local
<b>Target group</b>	Adults Children and young people Victims

## Aim

The aim of this initiative is to provide enhanced support to victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). The support is given at the point of initial police contact when the team approaches a possible victim to seek information.

This approach of using joint visits is regardless of whether or not the victim is engaging with the police investigation at that time. It has been incorporated in the complainant and witness approach strategy. It's used when conducting initial or unannounced visits. Immediate support from an ISVA, when approaching such an emotive issue provides immediate support and signposting.

Most importantly this supports the victim's wellbeing and may reduce the risks. This process may also increase a victim's willingness to disclose to the police and attain and maintain their support for a criminal investigation with the aim of bringing offenders to justice. Victims feeling supported can have a cascade effect on other victims and their willingness to feel confident in the police and make their own disclosures.

## Intended outcome

- The primary intended outcome is to increase support for victims of CSEA. A consequence of this is improved engagement with the investigation team and subsequent prosecution.
- To attain and maintain support for criminal investigations by having an independent party whose agenda is purely on behalf of the victim from the point of initial contact, right through and beyond the conclusion of any criminal justice outcome.
- To increase prosecution rates for CSEA.
- To improve signposting for survivors/ victims and to ensure that CSEA investigations are managed with appropriate resources.

- To reduce risk to West Yorkshire Police through the effective management of unannounced visits.

## Description

When potential victims of non-recent CSEA are visited unannounced, an independent sexual violence advisors (ISVA) either attends with officers or is on standby a short distance away. They remain in place to provide immediate after care and support to the victim, regardless of any disclosures made at the time of the initial visit. This provides immediate support and wrap around care, and clear division of responsibilities. The ISVA also provides a comprehensive information and signposting pack, which officers were able to give to the victims.

Prior to the visits consideration was given by the detective or senior investigating officer (SIO) as to whether face to face or telephone meetings were required for each potential victim.

The visits were conducted by the non-recent CSEA team. The rationale for visiting those potential victims was either intelligence or evidence-led.

At the initial door knock, for face-to-face visits, the non-recent CSEA team had the following with them.

1. Introduction and support letter from the detective or SIO.
2. Research document to assist the attending officer.
3. Bespoke question set for the potential victim.
4. Social media agreement.

The non-recent CSEA team completed the initial visit. Then, regardless of whether or not the potential victim had made any disclosure to the team, they were immediately referred to the ISVA who works for victim support and was available a short distance away. The ISVA was then able to attend and offer the relevant, independent support from the moment of the first visit.

All visits were planned in conjunction with the ISVAs to ensure they were available in the area immediately after the police visit to offer immediate support and advice following the police visit.

## Evaluation

Evaluation is ongoing and examines how the initiative is being implemented. The evaluation is being led by West Yorkshire Police.

## Overall impact

There has been positive feedback from officers and victims themselves so far. But monitoring and assessment will continue as the investigation progresses.

Prior interactions without an ISVA and adequate support package led to victims informing us that they had been suicidal, dropped out of university and self-harmed. There have been no similar reports following this pilot.

The early indications are all positive. An ISVA attended on initial visits with 12 potential complainants and all but one of them accepted this support. The one who did not was already working with an alternative.

As above, this was introduced as we were seeing very worrying behaviour as a result of unannounced visits (or 'cold calling' as referred to in the guidance).

We have an increase in engaging victims and no reports of destructive or dangerous behaviours. This has significantly reduced harm to the victims and risk to West Yorkshire Police.

Following the visits accompanied by an ISVA, feedback was obtained from officers attending the visit and this was very positive. All felt that the immediate support was very helpful for the victims. They felt reassured that the victims were supported after having the shock of speaking about something that they had often never told anyone about and had buried away for many years.

The ISVAs themselves appreciated the close relationship with the police and being able to start supporting the victim at the point of initial trauma, rather than waiting some weeks before initial contact. All parties found that the victims felt listened to and supported, and as though they were being treated with compassion from the offset.

## Learning

Initially upon implementation, the ISVA went into the house with officers. But it was found that generally it worked better for the ISVA to go in immediately after or within a short time after the

officers left the address.

This meant that there was a clear distinction between ISVA and the police and their respective roles.

As there were generally two officers, this also meant there was less of a crowd overwhelming the victim. They had time to process what had happened and then ask all of the questions of the ISVA.

ISVAs could then discuss support options without the police present, which many people see as a barrier to speaking openly for a number of reasons.

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## Tags

Violence against women and girls   Child sexual exploitation   Child abuse