



National Action Plan  
for Preventing  
Child Abuse  
and Violence  
in Teenage  
Relationships

by Sarah Champion MP





## Foreword

Child abuse. Our nation's dirty little secret. We know it goes on. We've probably seen the signs and we may even be one of the millions of survivors. However, as a country, we seem more comfortable to turn a blind eye and to fail to equip parents and professionals to deal with abuse, than to consider it might be happening to our children.

That's just not good enough - especially when preventing child abuse is possible.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have had the privilege of meeting many survivors of abuse and speaking to hundreds and hundreds of children so that I may better understand the world they live in. I have also been fortunate to meet the professionals who work in this field; an incredible group of people who are often sadly ground down by the enormity of their job. All of this research has led me to realise that while child abuse has always been with us, the scale is now definitely increasing.

Largely, this increase is due to the Internet. Where previously a paedophile would groom one or two children over months and years, now they 'spam' a thousand at a time. Sexual abusers find other perpetrators online, they hunt for, and generate, new images and videos of abuse online, even write and share online manuals on how to groom and abuse children. The Internet has also made the consumption of child sexual abuse images international, with some of the poorest countries now housing this vile industry out of the reach of our legislation.

The Internet has also spawned other forms of child abuse: cyber-bullying, sexting and grooming. In addition to all this, it has also become obvious to me that young people are much more tolerant of relationship violence than previous generations were - they now almost expect abuse if they enter into a relationship. Why? It is natural for children to be curious about sex, but without good statutory education, children do their own research through online pornography. Children are regarding porn as a lesson in how to have sex, without the context or the understanding to view it as a fantasy, promoted by an industry that normalises violence against women and girls.

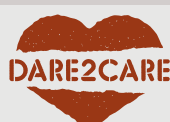
The statistics in this **National Action Plan** will shock you. They have been generated by many of our leading charities and organisations. This is the first time they have been collated in one place and the picture they paint is one you cannot ignore. Unless we all take responsibility to prevent child abuse, the picture will get much worse. We cannot sit on our hands and only act once a crime has been committed. That crime represents a childhood taken and a life shattered. We owe our children so much more than that.

***We can prevent child abuse and this National Action Plan will show you how.***

***Please Dare2Care.***

**Sarah Champion**

Member of Parliament for Rotherham



**[www.dare2care.org.uk](http://www.dare2care.org.uk)**



# Executive Summary

The **Dare2Care National Action Plan** is focused on preventing child abuse and violence in teenagers' relationships before it has occurred, rather than treating these devastating crimes as an inevitability.

The **National Action Plan** demonstrates that in order to prevent abuse, we must equip children, parents and professionals from the earliest possible moment to recognise exploitative and coercive behaviour - and have the tools to challenge and prevent it.

## Key Recommendations

Children must be equipped with the knowledge to recognise abuse, the resilience to stay safe and challenge what makes them feel uncomfortable, as well as the support to sustain healthy, respectful and consensual relationships when they are older. This can be achieved through the **implementation of compulsory, age-appropriate resilience and relationships education from Key Stage 1**.

Parents must be equipped with the tools, understanding and confidence to recognise and challenge abuse, to address sensitive issues with their children and to keep their children safe both online and offline. This can be achieved through a broad, **long-running public health campaign that aims to upskill parents on the signs of exploitation and abuse and provide support in tackling these issues**.

There must be a 'whole system' approach so that agencies are working together to share information as well as solutions to protect the child and prevent abuse. **Every frontline professional who comes into contact with a child, including staff in the health, education and social care professions, must be equipped to spot the signs of abuse and know how to respond effectively if a child discloses to them**.

Society needs to recognise that the Internet has dramatically changed the methods used by abusers. **The Government must strengthen the current content of the e-curriculum taught in schools to mitigate these risks**.

Every child deserves a happy, safe and fulfilling childhood, free from the pain and trauma of exploitation, abuse and relationship violence. The recommendations outlined in this **National Action Plan** are the first steps in creating a country that does not tolerate abuse and fundamentally changes the cultures and practices that allow abuse to happen.

***It is within our gift to make that a reality. Let us Dare2Care.***

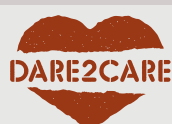
## Introduction

The **Dare2Care National Action Plan** started with the question: "How do we prevent child abuse?"

Through extensive research and roundtables with charities, academics, survivors, parliamentarians and statutory organisations, we focused on five areas: parenting, early years, sex and relationships education, online abuse and violence and pornography in teenage relationships. That work forms the basis of the recommendations contained within.

## Key Facts

- There are currently over 57,000 children identified as needing protection from abuse in the UK. <sup>1</sup>
- One in 20 children in the UK will experience child sexual abuse. <sup>2</sup>
- In the past year (April 2015 to March 2016), 39,813 sexual offences against children were reported to the police as outlined in the Crime Statistics for England and Wales. These offences include rape, sexual assault, sexual activity with a minor, and sexual exploitation. <sup>3</sup>
- This demonstrates a 23 per cent increase in the number of sexual offences against children reported to the police last year and a 138 per cent increase in the last 10 years.
- All four countries in the UK have seen the number of recorded sexual offences against children increase over the last year. <sup>4</sup>
- Forty per cent of child sexual abuse is carried out by other (usually older) children or young people. <sup>5</sup>
- Nearly a quarter of young adults (24.1 per cent) experienced sexual abuse (including contact and non-contact), by an adult or by a peer during childhood. <sup>6</sup>
- In 2015/16, ChildLine held 1,392 counselling sessions on sexting, which is a 15 per cent increase on the previous year. <sup>7</sup>
- According to the Internet Watch Foundation, in 2015, over 68,000 URLs were confirmed as containing child sexual abuse imagery, either having links to the imagery, or advertising it. This is up 118 per cent since 2014. <sup>8</sup>



# Early Years and Parenting

There is an assumption made that people innately know how to be parents and have all the necessary parenting skills. Yet, rather than proactively equipping and supporting parents, too often the state becomes involved once a child is vulnerable, a family is identified as high risk or, shamefully, once a child is a victim of abuse.

Because of the Internet, children are now growing up in a world very different to that of their parents. Parents need to be equipped to spot the signs of abuse and exploitation, whether online or offline, to have difficult conversations with their children, and to know who to turn to for support and advice if they suspect their child is being abused.

## Key Facts

- The way a child develops in their early years has a huge influence on every aspect of their lives, their future economic wellbeing, educational attainment, health and emotional development as well as their ability to sustain positive and meaningful relationships. <sup>1</sup>
- According to the Department for Education's most recent Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results, one in three children are starting school without having achieved the expected level of early development. <sup>2</sup>
- Nine out of 10 children know or are related to their abuser. <sup>3</sup>
- Eighty per cent of child sex abuse happens either in the child's home or the abuser's home. Boys are more likely to be abused outside the home, for example, at leisure and sports clubs. <sup>4</sup>
- A fifth of parents feel ill-equipped to prepare their children for the digital age. <sup>5</sup>

## Recommendations

- (1) The Government must fund and run a far-reaching public health campaign on spotting the signs of abuse and exploitation and reporting it. Parents, teachers and communities must have the skills to take responsibility for keeping every child safe.
- (2) The Government must support local authorities to fund community-based Sure Start (Children's) Centres, to ensure parenting support is available early in the child's life and is universal - not just targeted at families considered to be 'at risk'. They must also provide targeted support to parents who may be struggling or not confident in their parenting abilities.
- (3) The Government must provide trusted parenting support at every point of intervention in a child's life, including using the Personal Child Health Record (the 'red book'), given to parents at the child's birth, and the two-year health check to give parents face-to-face support and written information on spotting the signs of abuse.
- (4) The Government must review all the existing ways in which frontline professional services, such as midwives, social workers and day care staff, currently interact with parents to establish consistent, trusted points of intervention in every child's life and to introduce continuous and up-to-date parenting support.

### Footnotes Page 3

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# Online Abuse

The Internet has provided us with a world of new possibilities and opportunities, but it has also created a tidal wave of new risks and dangers.

Round-the-clock access to the Internet has meant children now forego any 'safe space' from their abuser. They can face relentless cyber-bullying, harassment, sexism, racism and homophobic bullying. This is often particularly extreme for LGBT young people, who often turn to the Internet for information about their sexuality which they may not be receiving at home or in school.

Many parents often fail to appreciate the severity of the threat faced by their children, largely because they don't understand everything their children are doing or experiencing online. Parents must be supported to apply their offline child protection strategies to experiences online.

Abusers are using the Internet to groom and exploit children, share indecent images and videos, as well as sharing their knowledge and advice on remaining anonymous.

Online child abuse is an international crime. Abusers in every country use the Internet to produce images and stream videos of abuse, and also have access to an online community to affirm their abusive and exploitative behaviour. This is crime that doesn't recognise borders and requires a global response.

## Key Facts

- There has been a 417 per cent increase in reports of child sexual abuse images and videos since 2013. <sup>1</sup>
- Around 50,000 people in the UK downloaded or shared online images of child abuse in 2012. <sup>2</sup>
- Currently 78 per cent of 12-to-15 year olds own a mobile phone, of which 65 per cent own a smartphone. <sup>3</sup>
- One in three children have been a victim of cyberbullying. <sup>4</sup>
- Eighty two per cent of 13-to-17 year olds have seen or heard something hateful on the Internet in the past year, i.e. something that has targeted people or communities because of their gender, transgender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality or religion. <sup>5</sup>
- One in four gay young people experience homophobic bullying online. <sup>6</sup>
- Half of young people living at home report that their parents only know some of what they are doing online. <sup>7</sup>

## Recommendations

- (1) The Government must strengthen the content of the e-curriculum taught in schools at all key stages to include recognising abuse and exploitation online and mitigating risks.
- (2) Teachers and other frontline professionals working with children must be trained to understand the dangers posed online and to tackle them effectively with the children they work with. Training must be provided regularly to keep up-to-date with new online platforms, applications and trends.
- (3) Parents must be given up-to-date support that specifically focuses on recognising and mitigating online risks, including online abuse, exploitation, cyber-bullying and sexting.
- (4) The Government must work with international partners to create regulations and monitoring aimed at tackling international web platforms that are used to circulate images and videos of child abuse.
- (5) The Government must create a cross-party, cross-sector, cross-departmental digital advisory group with the purpose of monitoring trends in online abuse and ways to prevent it.

<sup>1</sup> Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), (2015) Annual Report 2015. <https://www.iwf.org.uk/assets/media/annual-reports/IWF%202015%20Annual%20Report%20Final%20for%20web.pdf> (last accessed 11/08/2016)

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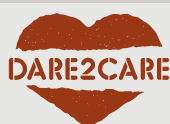
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# Violence and Pornography in Teenage Relationships

Through exposure to online pornography from an increasingly young age and messages conveyed in the media, children are growing up believing that violence and non-consensual sex in relationships is not just normal, but is to be expected.

Concurrently, children are being pressurised by adults and other children to engage in harmful sexual behaviour, such as sexting or sharing indecent images.

Children therefore do not have the knowledge, resilience or confidence to recognise abusive or coercive behaviour, or to challenge or contextualise the messages about sex and relationships conveyed online or in the media.

## Key Facts

- A survey of more than 1,000 children aged 11-to-16 found that overall, at least half had been exposed to online porn, with almost all (94 per cent) of this group having seen it by the age of 14. <sup>1</sup>
- There is a growing body of research looking into the impact that porn has on the brain. These effects can be greater on children and young people as their brains are still developing. <sup>2</sup>
- Twenty five per cent of girls and 18 per cent of boys had been physically abused by their partner and 75 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys had suffered emotional abuse. The study also found that sexual violence happened to one in three girls and one in six of boys. <sup>3</sup>
- Seventy one per cent of girls aged 17-to-21 agree that online pornography makes aggressive and violent behaviour towards women seem normal and 53 per cent of 17-to-21 year olds think that girls are coerced into sex acts because boys are copying what they see in pornography. <sup>4</sup>
- There were 1,160 reported incidents of revenge pornography from April 2015 to December 2015. Within this, three victims were 11 years old with some 30 per cent of offences involving young people under 19. <sup>5</sup>
- Sexting is often coercive and girls are most adversely affected. <sup>6</sup>
- One in five indecent images of children shared online were taken by the child themselves. <sup>7</sup>
- Currently, 53 per cent of children in schools have not learned how to recognise grooming or sexual exploitation. <sup>8</sup>

## Recommendations

- (1) The Government must introduce compulsory, age-appropriate resilience and relationships education. This would ensure children have the knowledge to contextualise or challenge what they are viewing online and in the media, and also provide the tools to rebuff harmful requests and behaviour from abusers. Children must also be supported to recognise abusive behaviours from other children and know who to turn to for help.
- (2) There must be regulation across different media platforms, including the Advertising Standards Authority and the British Board of Film Classification, to achieve common standards around decency, gender stereotypes and the sexualisation of children in all media.

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# Resilience and Relationships Education

Through the research undertaken for **Dare2Care** and the resulting **National Action Plan**, one thing has been universally agreed – in order to prevent child abuse all children need resilience and relationships education throughout their schooling.

We teach toddlers not to snatch toys or push another child, so why don't we teach children more about respecting others and themselves? From Key Stage 1, children need to understand boundaries, that it is their right to say no if someone makes them uncomfortable and that some secrets are bad secrets. In relation to abuse, the NSPCC's 'PANTS' Campaign<sup>1</sup> puts it very simply - what is in your pants is private.

If we really want to protect children, we need to give them age-appropriate tools to understand what abuse is so that they can identify it online or offline and know how to keep themselves safe. Unless they are taught, how can children recognise coercive or abusive behaviour? Unless we give children an education in respectful relationships, they will turn to the Internet for answers, thus exposing themselves to the fantasy and dangers that lurk there without the knowledge or understanding to contextualise what they find. We also need to be realistic. Child abuse can start at an early age and often children are not aware until later in life that what they experienced was a crime.

## What is the current state of Sex and Relationship Education?

Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) or Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is not universally taught in schools across the UK. In England it is only compulsory in maintained secondary schools (which account for 40 per cent of secondary schools). Primary schools, academies, free schools and home schools in England do not have to teach SRE.

Currently, SRE is introduced at Key Stage 3, when a child is 11 years old, and is often taught in single sex classes. The content of the programme is decided by the individual school and parents can remove their child from SRE classes if they wish. The only compulsory element of SRE - which a school must teach and a child must be present at - is the biology of sex, provided as part of the National Curriculum on Science.

The Department for Education does provide guidance on what should be included in the non-compulsory sections of SRE, including building self-esteem, teaching about love and the responsibility of your actions, but this was last updated 16 years ago, in 2000, well before the Internet and social media became so universal.

More than half of gay young people are never taught anything about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues at school and 85 per cent are never taught anything about biological or physical aspects of same-sex relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Ofsted found that PSHE is not currently of a high enough standard, with 40 per cent of schools requiring improvement or findings being of an inadequate standard.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence has shown that good SRE has a protective function and young people who have access to good SRE are more likely to choose to have sex for the first time later in life, are less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy and their first sexual experience is less likely to be against their will and they are more likely to use protection.<sup>4</sup>

## What needs to change?

I am calling on the Government to introduce compulsory, age-appropriate resilience and relationships education in every school, regardless of governance structure and including home-schooled children, from Key Stage 1 until the end of compulsory education, which would be in addition to SRE/PHSE.

Resilience and relationships education must be taught by teachers and frontline professionals who have received comprehensive, up-to-date and on-going training. It must be underpinned by a broad syllabus that supports teachers to have difficult and sensitive conversations with pupils of all ages. This training must also include responding effectively if a child goes on to disclose to the teacher or another member of staff.

It is necessary to ensure that a 'whole school' approach to preventing abuse is taken and consistently reinforced. This means every individual working in a school, from the receptionist to the caretaker, the kitchen staff to the teachers should be trained and supported to instil a culture of respect and tolerance and ensure they do not unwittingly reinforce negative gender stereotypes. Every employee in a school must be trained to safely and effectively address disclosures and spot the potential signs of abuse.

It is important that resilience and relationships education is taught in mixed-sex groups and recognises that any child is vulnerable. As they get older, this approach will also support children to recognise the gendered aspects of relationship abuse, for example, supporting girls to understand that they need not comply with requests for harmful sexual activity and supporting boys to challenge and say no to engaging in this behaviour.

The Government should look to ensure that every child, including those who are not taught in a formal school environment (such as home-schooled children) must still be included in the statutory teaching of resilience and relationships education. The parental right to withdraw children from school-based resilience and relationships education should also be regularly reviewed.

The Department for Education should provide Governors and parents with an understanding and examples of what good age-appropriate resilience and relationships education looks like so they can understand the significance of it in preventing abuse and be able to demand that their children are given the most effective support.

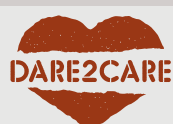
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Brook	NSPCC
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Carolyn Harris MP	Office of Sharon Hodgson MP
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Elly Hanson - Independent psychologist	Tender; Acting to End Abuse
End Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition	The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)
Professor Erika Rackley	British Association of Social Workers
Family Nurse Partnership	The Children's Commissioner for England
Gavin Newlands MP	The Children's Society
Girlguiding	The Early Intervention Foundation
Glebe House, Friends Therapeutic Community Trust	The Sex Education Forum
Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)	London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council
Institute of Health Visiting	UK Safer Internet Centre
Internet Watch Foundation	Vanessa Johns
Jim Cunningham MP	Victoria Brown
John Nicolson MP	Women's Aid
Kirsten Oswald MP	Wonder Foundation
Labour Friends of Sure Start	YES Matters
Liz McInnes MP	



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