

Information management

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Suspected or actual child abuse can come to police attention from a number of sources, including:

- victims
- witnesses
- health services
- housing providers
- children's social care or education professionals
- anonymous reporters
- police officers identifying concerns about children through routine contact with the public

These reports usually refer to ongoing concerns for children and, occasionally, there are emergency calls reporting a violent incident in progress.

Linked series

Child abuse can involve patterns of behaviour and an accumulation of individual minor abuses that can constitute significant harm. An officer may be presented with an apparently minor issue which does not in itself cause concern but which is actually part of a pattern of abuse. It is also possible that concerns about children that appear to be unconnected are actually part of a pattern of abuse by either the same offender or different, but connected, offenders. Concerns about one child may also lead to concerns about another child or children with whom the suspect has contact. Identifying such patterns depends on careful, accurate and coordinated record keeping by the police and other agencies. It also requires officers to be vigilant to potential child abuse in all areas of their work.

For further information, see forthcoming APP on managing major investigations.

Use of the term referral

Passing information between agencies is a referral if someone believes a child may be suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm.

One of the key issues in safeguarding children is that agencies often need to share information which does not always involve issues relating to significant harm.

When the police receive a referral from another agency, it should be recorded and subject to a consistent decision-making and risk-assessment process. Arrangements should exist whereby all information and intelligence about children at risk is collated centrally within a police force and cross-referenced to other appropriate information and intelligence relating to:

- sexual and violent offences
- domestic abuse
- young offenders
- missing persons
- management of sexual offenders and violent offenders

Forces have different approaches to managing information about child abuse (for example borough-based assessment and referral or a central referral unit). The role of the child abuse investigation unit may depend on whether a central referral unit exists or not. Forces also use different terminology from one another to classify information.

Other agencies may have IT-based information, referral and tracking systems to assist with analysing child abuse information. Police IT systems should have the capability to record information from partner agencies and details of decisions made and subsequent action taken, thereby providing an audit trail.

If a particular concern for a child indicates that a crime has been committed, according to [Home Office \(2011\) The National Crime Recording Standard \(NCRS\): What you need to know](#), supervisors should ensure that the incident is investigated and a crime report is completed. Incidents not identified as a crime should be recorded in accordance with national and local guidance. The police should retain details of these incidents should there be any future concerns for a child, criminal investigations or requests for information by other agencies.

As many child abuse records are organised under the victim's details, it is particularly important that those of suspects or offenders are clearly identified within the record to allow cross-referencing.

External referral

This is used where one agency refers concerns for a child to another agency with an expectation that action is required and that the action will be reviewed. The police can make referrals to other agencies such as health or children's social care services.

The police may become aware of child abuse cases through contact by a representative from another agency (for example, children's social care, education or health sector, or the [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children](#)). This information may be received as a documented or verbal referral, or arise where another agency is providing information as part of the child protection process (for example, a strategy discussion or child protection conference).

[HM Government \(2018\) Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) states that whenever children's social care (or the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) encounters or has a case referred to it which constitutes, or may constitute, a criminal offence against a child, 'they should always discuss the case with the police at the earliest opportunity'. This enables both agencies to consider how to proceed in the best interests of the child. If a decision is made not to share information, the reasons for this must be recorded. See also [Welsh Assembly Government \(n.d.\) Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004](#).

External referral can also describe a situation where a child abuse investigation unit in another force is notified by a police force or police agency (for example CEOP) of concern for a child connected to their police force area.

Internal referral

This term is used where an individual or unit within a police force has concern for a child and informs the child abuse investigation unit. Such information should also be entered onto force intelligence systems and actioned appropriately.

Report

This is used where an individual, rather than an agency, informs the police of concern for a child. Any officer or member of police staff taking details from an individual should establish the immediate safety of the alleged victim(s).

Assessment of external and internal referrals, reports and intelligence

All information and intelligence relating to child abuse, including that from other agencies, should be held within a police force's central referral unit or equivalent arrangement.

The process of managing, recording and assessing referrals and other information relating to child abuse should be actively supervised and audited by a suitably trained frontline supervisor. This ensures that incoming internal and external referrals, reports and internal intelligence indicating concerns for children are risk assessed. Such an arrangement has the advantage of establishing consistency in decision making and ensuring resources are allocated to cope with demand.

Risk assessment

This process should prioritise the attention of other agencies by signposting them to internal and external referrals, reports and other relevant intelligence. All information held by the police about significant adults should be risk assessed in terms of the impact it may have on the victim or any other child. The information in isolation may not primarily focus on a particular child, but if considered with other facts it may have an impact on the welfare of the child. This risk assessment should link with processes in the force relating to the [management of sexual offenders and violent offenders](#), and potentially dangerous persons. When a referral is received, the child abuse investigation unit supervisor should ensure that information and intelligence checks have been conducted in respect of all the relevant individuals.

The supervisor should also ensure that information received through an internal or external referral, and any other relevant information is:

- reviewed
- recorded on the local child abuse investigation unit or central referral unit database or index system
- cross-referenced with the files of other family members

The supervisor should assess whether this information should be referred to partner agencies. See forthcoming APP on identifying and reducing risk.

Where a referral to the child abuse investigation unit is not subject to any further police or multi-agency action, this information and the reasons for decisions should be recorded and filed in a searchable format. Any subsequent referrals will then alert the unit to review the previous ones and to consider passing on the combined information to other agencies. In some circumstances the supervisor will need to make checks with other police force areas or agencies.

Role of intelligence

Police forces should use intelligence and information relating to child abuse to:

- identify and safeguard children at risk of harm
- identify risk factors associated with victims and suspects
- identify and target persistent offenders and groups of offenders
- indicate further information on local and national computer systems
- make links with other investigations relating to child abuse, including domestic abuse and missing persons
- monitor the accuracy of child abuse intelligence data
- disseminate to police personnel
- produce statistical information
- make referrals to partner agencies

Open-source information is increasingly useful to an investigation. This includes:

- press articles
- official records relating to births, deaths and marriages
- internet sources such as social networking sites (for example when developing family trees and identifying possible suspects)

Information and intelligence checks

Information and intelligence checks of all available databases are critical to effective investigations and safeguarding children. These checks should apply to all individuals relevant to an investigation. The information gathered should be recorded. Violent or sexual offences committed against victims of any age by a child abuse suspect are relevant, in addition to any other offences that may influence an assessment of risk. Information on the circumstances of each offence will assist in

determining the extent of risk presented.

Depending on the circumstances and what is proportionate to the situation, checks should include the following databases or systems:

- Integrated Children's System, Contact Point and any local systems for accessing information about children who are the subject of child protection plans
- PNC
- ViSOR
- PND
- child abuse investigation unit database (or equivalent database for recording concerns for children)
- local databases
- Missing Persons Index
- Young Offenders Index
- force intelligence systems
- force control room records for any related incidents occurring within a specified area and at relevant addresses
- records of crimes and other incidents in respect of relevant addresses and individuals
- CEOP Child Exploitation Tracking System searches relating to identified email addresses, user names and associated relevant information
- Childbase
- European and international

Forces should ensure that there is appropriate access to these systems outside office hours.

For further information, see forthcoming APP on identifying and reducing risk.

Use of the National Intelligence Model

Information about child abuse can come from many different sources and is usually managed by the child abuse investigation unit. Staff should be alert to the opportunities for gathering intelligence (for example through police sources and information from the public and other agencies). Analysis of such information, in consultation with intelligence officers and analysts, can be converted into intelligence which, after application of the [National Intelligence Model](#) and the strategic

assessment process, can result in the use of tactics which will reduce or remove any threats.

Analysis

This should be used to decide how to resource child abuse investigations and contribute towards the risk-assessment process. Analysis is of particular importance when assessing the risks posed by MAPPA offenders, potentially dangerous persons and groups of linked offenders. Intelligence relating to alleged child abuse should be applied using the National Intelligence Model to provide information for strategic and tactical assessment. Consideration should be given to the benefits of dedicated analytical support for the child abuse investigation unit. See also forthcoming APP on managing public protection information.

Analysis should include making decisions about strategies to prevent abuse, and methods of enforcement. It can also identify gaps in knowledge, which can be reported as intelligence requirements and communicated to staff so that they can search for information when engaged in daily duties (for example attending incidents, and visiting schools).

A [subject profile](#) can be used to identify particular individuals and groups who are suspected or identified as a threat to children. Intelligence, when used properly, should enable resources to be focused on identified offenders (both individuals and linked groups) and locations (for example a school or children's home) to prevent child abuse and/or drive effective investigations of child abuse.

In consultation with intelligence officers and analysts, information and intelligence should be examined regularly to identify patterns and concentrations of behaviour. Any recent or new information or intelligence should lead to further assessment. This assessment may require that a particular child abuse issue is included in daily briefings, or that a particular suspect or group of suspects is made the target of subject profiling.

Intelligence relating to child abuse should be captured, assessed, retained and managed in accordance with relevant local and national guidance. Failure to record and use such intelligence could significantly reduce the effectiveness of the police response, and endanger children.

Feedback to agencies and individuals who report or refer concerns about children

Forces should have systems to ensure that those who identify concerns for children are given feedback on the action taken, where possible. Members of the public should be reassured that they have done the right thing in coming forward. Feedback may also be relevant in cases of internal referrals from those within a police force and external referrals from other agencies, other police forces or police agencies such as CEOP.

Tags

Child abuse