

Guidance packages for recognising harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

North Yorkshire Police created videos on harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) and technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour (TA-HSB) to upskill frontline officers in identifying and handling incidents of this nature.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Child abuse Training and professional development
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Region	North East
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	August 2024

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Communities Families Offenders Victims Workforce

Aim

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive.

The aim of the guidance packages are to upskill frontline officers in their understanding of HSB and how it presents to protect children from sexual abuse by other children, while also seeking support for the child who is displaying the behaviour.

Intended outcome

- Increase identification of HSB.
- Improve officer knowledge of safeguarding options.
- Improve positive outcomes for children who are victims or perpetrators of HSB.

Description

HSB briefings

A child protection audit in West Yorkshire showed that HSB was not identified by officers on the ground, leading the force to design a briefing pack for sergeants and inspectors to deliver at shift briefings. The pack focused on identifying HSB and was used as a quick stopgap for the topic.

The briefing pack included:

- an overview of what HSB is and how to identify it, including explanatory videos developed for this purpose
- three written scenarios developed for the briefings, each including an example of harmful sexual behaviour and an example of an appropriate response
- instructions on how officers should deliver their briefing, and the relevant resources such as video and the written scenarios provided to open discussion

The pack was delivered at all shift briefings over two weeks and the force monitored the number of staff it was delivered to. Staff who missed the input were directed to the guidance and scenarios. The pack is now included in training for new officers or transferees.

Bitesize learning

The content was translated into 'bitesize learning' videos so that officers and staff could access this information beyond the briefing. These are located on the force's intranet 'Keeping Children Safe' page, which contains information on safeguarding of children. The new resource was advertised on weekly bulletins and the safeguarding bulletin.

The content was created by the child protection team using guidance from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Lucy Faithfull foundation and the Youth Justice Team. Neurodiversity and trauma-informed working groups were also asked to share their thoughts on the content and format.

The bitesize learning includes an introductory video on the subject, covering:

- what HSB is
- how it may present
- what it may be linked to, such as childhood trauma
- initial response and identification of what behaviour this child may be displaying and whether this is a concern which needs addressing
- initial safeguarding decision-making such as submission of public protection notices (PPN), strategy meetings and other agency intervention options, such as the Youth Justice Service, as well as support from third sector organisations for families.

- the Hackett continuum tool, developed by Professor Hackett to identify sexual behaviour that is problematic or abusive, that breaks down sexual behaviour into 'green,' 'amber' or red, depending on its severity

The force used an adapted version of the Hackett continuum tool, developed by the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire local authorities alongside Professor Hackett. In addition to the original, this highlights examples of normal and problematic sexual behaviour based on different age groups (under 4, 5 to 9, 10 to 13 and 14 to 17 years). This version was used as it is similar to the Brook traffic light tool.

The three scenarios were also translated into 30-second-long videos for the bitesize learning and a further five were developed. Officers and staff are asked to consider where in the Hackett continuum the example belongs while watching the scenarios. The team originally planned to deliver the scenarios in video form in the briefings, but this could not be achieved in the given time.

The force's learning and development team produced the scenario videos using artificial intelligence (AI) voices. The scenarios reflected the types of incidents officers may come across in day-to-day policing. For each scenario, two videos were created:

- one that explains the scenario
- one that explains where the situation sits on the Hackett continuum and what should be done as a result

Written guides detailing the information included in the videos are also available for those who prefer a text format.

Alongside the videos, the page also contains links to other sources of support for HSB.

The idea, creation, roll-out and impact of the training was overseen by the force vulnerability board.

Overall impact

Feedback from officers and staff

Officers and staff can provide feedback on the bitesize learning using an Excel spreadsheet.

The feedback on the videos is regularly monitored and overall has been positive. Officers like the format and the short scenario videos which assist their understanding of the guidance. Officers also like the fact they can go back to it and re-view as and when required, and that the videos helped explain the Hackett continuum. The team will consider making refresher videos or new scenarios if required.

One officer reported that they had been asked to attend an incident they felt may be HSB, and this was recognised because of the briefing input from their line manager. The officer then reviewed the videos and guidance again and attended the incident with confidence. The officer used the Hackett and submitted a comprehensive PPN to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). They stated had they not received this input and guidance, they would not have identified the HSB and may not have dealt with it effectively.

Child protection audits

The force conducts child protection case audits jointly with local authorities every six months. These are conducted using national child protection inspection methodology which includes initial response, risk assessment and referral, and investigation. Based on discussion with local authorities, the chief auditor in the force has reported improvements in the following:

- identification by police officers and staff
- outcomes for children who are victims or victim/perpetrators of HSB
- earlier identification and prevention as well as therapeutic work for these children
- support and signposting for families to agencies who can support such as Lucy Faithful foundation

The force cannot be sure to what extent the new learning packages are responsible for these improvements.

Learning

- The videos are an informative addition which assist the sergeants delivering the session. The guidance given to them about what needs to be delivered helps explain the expectation.
- Ideally, someone from the safeguarding team would have been better placed to deliver the content in the initial team briefings. This would have made the training more interactive; however,

this was not possible because of the short time frame.

- This topic would be best covered in a face-to-face session with staff so two-way engagement can take place. However, with limited options for delivering training and the urgency for this to be addressed, the force opted for a shift briefing delivery which has previously been used such as for Voice of the Child products. The shift briefings are an ideal time to get officers together with supervisors for discussion.

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