



FACT SHEET: Complex (Organised or Multiple) Abuse

The investigation of organised or multiple abuse is complicated, due to the number of children, adults and places involved, the time period covered, and the number of agencies involved, often in different geographical locations and crossing organisational boundaries. Children and young people as well as vulnerable adults may be victims of this kind of traumatic abuse.

Definition of complex abuse

Complex abuse is defined as

“... involving one or more abusers and a number of children. The abusers concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse.”

Complex abuse occurs both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community, and within institutions such as residential homes or schools.”

(Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2010 para. 6.10, 6.11)

A number of children means two or more.

Referring concerns

Practitioners must not delay in taking action to safeguard children by contacting Children’s Social Care or the Out of Hours Service and the Sheffield Public Protection Unit, South Yorkshire Police.

They may have come across information:

- As they are working with a child who discloses abuse
- As they receive information about complex abuse
- An adult makes a historical disclosure of child abuse
- An adult discloses that they are, or have been, abusing children

If the allegations or concerns involve a person, who is a professional, worker, volunteer or carer the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) must be informed promptly.

Key elements of the investigation

A **Strategy Discussion / Meeting** will reach a decision about carrying out a complex abuse investigation which will then be carried out by a **Joint Investigation Team**.

A **Strategic Management Group (SGM)** will be convened within five working days of the original referral and an **Operational Management Group (OMG)** will be established to take responsibility for safeguarding the children and starting the criminal investigations.

The SMG will draw up the Terms of Reference and will be responsible for the strategic leadership of the investigations and decision making in relation to the Safeguarding Children Board.

The OMG will lead the investigation on a day to day basis and take decisions to safeguard children, process information and inform Ofsted as required.

Full details of the process can be viewed in **chapter 3.5** of the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection procedures.

Outcomes of investigations

The OMG should, among other duties, plan:

- To inform the Independent Safeguarding Authority of the final list of indictments
- To inform all complainants, witnesses and agencies of the outcome
- To offer ongoing support to children, families, witnesses as needed.