

## Wigan Safeguarding Children's Partnership 7 Minute Briefing – Child F and G

### Background

The Serious Case Review on Child F and Child G was published in August 2016. Child F and Child G are siblings born in another North West local authority in the late 1990s. The Serious Case Review was agreed after it became apparent that Child F and G had been subjected to sexual and physical abuse over a period of at least 9 years by their Stepfather.

There was a history of physical and emotional abuse between Child F and G's mother and father. Child F and G's mother had also suffered sexual abuse as a child. Child F and G moved to Wigan in 2003 when their mother started a new relationship. This relationship later became very controlling and abusive.

Whilst at Primary School, Child F made several disclosures of physical abuse by their stepfather. They later retracted these allegations when professionals investigated these disclosures. School staff witnessed Child G being physically assaulted by their stepfather in the grounds of the school, however, when asked about this Child G denied that it had happened. From 2010 onwards Child F made disclosures to two friends that their stepfather was sexually abusing them.

These two disclosures were reported and explored by the Police, however, Child F again retracted the allegations. In 2013 Child F contacted Police and disclosed her experiences of abuse. This was later followed by a disclosure by Child G who reported that physical and sexual abuse had been ongoing by their stepfather from early childhood. Stepfather was arrested, however, the Crown Prosecution Service took the view that there was no reasonable chance of conviction and did not proceed. The case was taken to family court by Wigan Children's Social Care for protective proceedings, in 2015. In the Judges 'Finding of Fact' he stated that he believed on the balance of probabilities that the abuse had occurred as described by the children.

### What was the learning?

- Processes of transfer of cases between Local Authorities in cases where a child is on a Child Protection Plan need to be robust.
- Police and Children's Social Care need to work closely to co-facilitate Achieving Best Evidence interviews. This has been established in new protocols.
- Professionals need to understand that disclosure and subsequent retraction are normal parts of the disclosure process. This is understood as an established sign of Child Abuse Accommodation Syndrome (first described by Summit in 1983) and have little correlation to whether the disclosure is truthful.
- When children disclose abuse they need to be believed by professionals. In this case School were asked to comment on Child F's history in School or "telling stories / lies". Whilst the police investigation needs to consider the reliability of the witness this should not factor into the investigation of the case.
- Just because a case does not meet a higher burden of proof in a criminal proceeding (beyond a reasonable doubt) it does not mean abuse has not occurred.
- Professionals need time to read, consider and understand the historic information to complex cases. They also need supportive, effective supervision that promotes this.

### Why is this important to Wigan?

The Deal for Children and Young People promotes the recognition of unique strengths and values of young people and centres around doing what is best for them. The Deal allows practitioners to work differently, promotes effective interventions and outcomes for children and young people. The Deal promotes integrated working with partners, promoting interventions which wrap around the needs of the child.

### What can we consider?

- How does your service gather information from other partner agencies on their involvement with an individual or family?
- How do you consider this information in starting work with the family, particularly when a family is new to the borough?
- What do we need to do to understand the themes that link a parent's experience of childhood sexual abuse to their susceptibility to abusive relationships as an adult?
- What do we need to do to acknowledge the impact that childhood trauma has on parents and how this impact on their ability to parent?
- How might a child / young person behave if they make a disclosure of abuse, and how should we respond?
- Is the criminal court the only place that can validate a young person's allegations of abuse as being factual?
- What should our response be to children / young people who disclose abuse and there are concerns about the veracity of this.

### Want to learn more?

GM Safeguarding procedures: [Child Sexual abuse in the family environment](#)

Information about: [Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome](#)

Information about: [Achieving Best Evidence Interviews](#)

Ward, H, Brown, R, and Westlake, D (2012) Safeguarding Babies and Very Young Children. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Conte, J, Wolf, S, & Smith, T (1989) What sexual offenders tell us about prevention strategies? Child Abuse and Neglect, 13(2), 293–301

[www.wigan.gov.uk/WSCB](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/WSCB)

[www.wigan.gov.uk/WSCB/News/Articles/2016/Serious-Case-Review-Child-F&G.aspx](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/WSCB/News/Articles/2016/Serious-Case-Review-Child-F&G.aspx)