

NSPCC Cymru/Wales Manifesto

Our vision for Children in Wales

Senedd 2021-2026

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Contents

Introduction	3
1. Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility	4
Our vision: Early and adequate support to create a social safety net for families who are struggling	4
Adversity	5
Perinatal Mental Health	6
Domestic Abuse	7
Child Sexual Abuse	9
2. Every child is safe online	10
Our Vision: Every child in Wales is aware of and supported to realise their right to be safe online	10
3. Children get the support they need to recover from abuse	12
Our vision: More children get the mental health support and help they need so abuse doesn't shape their future	12
Support children to speak out	13
Ensure more adults take action	14
Children's Mental Health	15

Introduction

Child abuse and neglect is happening every day, in every walk of life. The devastating impact of Covid 19 and school closures for most children has exacerbated inequalities and intensified already difficult situations.

For many children, the uncertainty and worry from the pandemic has taken a toll on their mental health, while others have felt trapped in unsafe homes – cut off from their usual support networks. Children living in homes with domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance misuse, parental mental health needs or other adversities may have seen their risk increase due to Covid. This increase in need, combined with the ‘newly vulnerable’ cohort of children created by Covid will compound the strain on services we were already seeing prior to the pandemic.

The response to the pandemic must not be short term and we ask the next Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd to put children at the centre of long-term recovery plans.

Together, we can overcome the impact of the pandemic on children. This can be achieved by working with communities across Wales to stop further abuse and neglect, transforming our approaches to the online world to make it safer for children, and making sure every child has a place to turn for support when they need it.

In 2021, we are launching our new organisational strategy to ensure we are still here for children. We know there isn't a quick fix to ending child abuse and neglect and so our strategy takes a deliberately long view. Over the next decade our guiding principles will include a focus on preventing child abuse and neglect, working in partnership with communities, safeguarding professionals, the children's sector, Governments and elected representatives across the UK and ensuring we embed equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do.

We can't do this alone. We want to work with elected members and Welsh Government to ensure everyone in Wales takes responsibility for keeping children safe. Over the next Senedd term, we will keep fighting for every childhood, answer every call and reach every child who needs us. Child abuse isn't inevitable and if we come together we can prevent and end abuse and neglect. We are experts in how to end cruelty to children and this manifesto sets out our vision for how this can be done. Will you join us and pledge to put children first in the next Senedd term?

1. Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility

- Early and adequate support to create a social safety net for families who are struggling with **perinatal mental health, domestic abuse or adversity** linked to poverty.
- A renewed Welsh Action Plan to prevent child sexual abuse in all its forms.

2. Every child is safe online

- Every child in Wales is aware of and supported to realise their right to be safe online. This should be delivered through:
 - A concerted approach to disrupt online abuse with robust UK-wide Online Harms legislation and;
 - Enhanced prevention through complementary national Online Safety strategies.

3. Children get the support they need to recover from abuse

- More children are able to speak out, so they feel safe, heard and understood.
- Ensure more adults are equipped with the knowledge and skills to take action when a child makes a disclosure.
- More children get the mental health support and help they need to recover, so abuse doesn't shape their future.

1. Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility

Our vision: Early and adequate support to create a social safety net for families who are struggling

Intervening early to stop abuse and neglect, at the first indication that a family is struggling and ensuring adequate service provision must be a key policy priority for the next Welsh Government. We know, through evaluation and testing, that effective early intervention can improve outcomes for children and families – while failing to intervene at an early stage can lead to a multitude of negative consequences later in life.¹

In this section, we highlight our asks centered on early intervention and provision of services which ensures everyone takes responsibility when a child, and their family, is in need of support. This includes;

- **Adversity** – it is imperative that families facing adversity linked to poverty are identified early and provided with additional support.
- **Perinatal Mental Health** – parents must be supported at the earliest opportunity if they struggle with their mental health in pregnancy or after birth.
- **Domestic Abuse** – a coordinated, community response to domestic abuse ensures everyone takes responsibility for prevention; it also considers a holistic approach to support. Our asks for a response to domestic abuse in Wales would support the next Welsh Government to deliver against the three pillars (prevention, protection, support) of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act.
- **Child Sexual Abuse** – a public health approach ensures it is everyone's responsibility to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. The response must include fully resourced, multi-agency service provision to children who have been subject to sexual abuse.



¹ <https://www.eif.org.uk/why-it-matters/what-is-early-intervention>

Adversity

The Problem

29% of children in Wales are living in poverty.² The Welsh Government has not met its commitment to eliminate child poverty by 2020. Families facing adversity and stressors due to poverty should be identified as soon as possible. Wales' flagship Flying Start programme is an essential tool in this response. Flying Start is an early years' initiative for families with children under four in some of the most deprived areas in Wales. It aims to support low-income families with part-time childcare for 2-3 year olds, enhanced health visiting services, parenting support and language development. We welcome planned expansion of this service, which will help identify more families in need of additional support.

All children deserve a fair start in life, growing up in a stable environment where their physical and emotional needs are met. Poverty can create additional stressors in the home, which impacts on parents' capacity to meet their children's needs. While poverty is not in itself a cause of child abuse, research has shown that children growing up in homes where there is poverty, domestic abuse, problematic substance use or parental mental health needs are at an increased risk of abuse and neglect.³ A strong social safety net and support for families is needed to ensure all children have the resources they need to thrive.

The pressure on local authorities in Wales has also increased, with a rise in looked after children, court orders and more children on child protection plans. At the same time, core grant funding has reduced by 22%⁴ since 2010. The Covid pandemic has placed further strain on already stretched services and the UK's exit from the EU will have further implications, particularly the loss of the EU Structural Funds for Wales' economy.⁵

According to the Secretary General of the UN the pandemic has turned into 'a broader child rights crisis' with an increase in violence, abuse and neglect against children'.⁶ Covid has starkly highlighted existing inequalities in Wales.

For children and families who already experience systemic denial of their rights, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact;

- Black people and people of colour have been disproportionately impacted by both the virus itself and the measures taken to suppress it.⁷ Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales (EYST) has highlighted barriers some children from minoritised communities have faced in accessing culturally sensitive services.⁸
- Wales has seen an increase in babies and infants subject to care proceedings since 2011. The number of cases of newborns subject to proceeding almost doubled from 43 births in every 10,000 to 83 in every 10,000 by 2018.⁹ We are concerned that the heightened pressure on families' due to Covid could lead to more children finding themselves on the edge of care or even placed into care, creating additional pressures on already stretched support for care experienced children.

Solutions

The implications for children are worrying, given the existing and intensifying strain on services. While the planned expansion of Flying Start is welcome, we want to see an enhanced service for all parents of 0-4-year old across Wales, as well as a focus on the impact poverty can have on families, so practitioners can support them in a non-stigmatising way.

Providing timely support is vital. Addressing a child or family's needs early on can reduce risk factors and increase protective factors in a child's life.¹⁰ Early intervention and prevention is recognised by Welsh Government as an important step in preventing harm to children before problems escalate. We must see a continued commitment to this in the next term.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Extend Flying Start across Wales.** This should include a **a focus on identifying need related to poverty as a key aspect of the support provided.**
- **Ensure training for practitioners on the impact of poverty on families** and how to support them in a non-stigmatizing way.
- **Continue to invest in 'edge of care' services to help keep families together.**

2 <https://senedd.wales/laid-documents/gen-ld12921/gen-ld12921-e.pdf>

3 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

4 [Download.aspx \(wlg.wales\)](https://www.welsh.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61111/download.aspx)

5 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmwelaf/90/9004.htm>

6 <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/COVID-19-Protecting-children-from-violence-abuse-and-neglect-in-home-2020.pdf>

7 <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/commentary/all-in-it-together-the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-bame-people-in-wales/>

8 Murray, Karl, The Impact of Covid on BAME community and voluntary sector organisations in Wales: Innovation, Resilience and Sustainability, page 11.

9 [https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/app/nuffield/files-module/local/documents/Born into Care_Final Report_10 Oct 2018.pdf](https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/app/nuffield/files-module/local/documents/Born%20into%20Care_Final%20Report_10%20Oct%202018.pdf)

10 <https://www.eif.org.uk/why-it-matters/what-is-early-intervention>

Perinatal Mental Health

The Problem

Up to 1 in 5 mums and 1 in 10 dads experience mental health needs during pregnancy and within the year after birth (the perinatal period).¹¹ If undetected and left untreated, perinatal mental health needs can have a devastating impact on women, their partners and children.

Poor perinatal mental health can cause debilitating suffering for women. It can negatively impact on their self-esteem, and upon partner and family relationships. Perinatal mental health needs can also be life-threatening, with suicide being one of the leading causes of death for women in the UK during the perinatal period.¹² For parents, poor mental health in the perinatal period can make it difficult to provide sensitive and attuned care that babies vitally need for healthy social and emotional development.

However, this can be prevented by supporting mums and dads/partners and intervening early. But we know that help isn't always available for mums and their families when they need it the most. In some places parents get the specialist help they need, in others they don't.

Solutions

We welcome the commitment to providing and improving access to quality perinatal mental health care in Wales over the last Senedd term.¹³ We are particularly pleased to note the increased investment in specialist perinatal mental health services, and the commitment to opening an interim Mother and Baby Unit in Spring 2021.¹⁴

While this progress is positive, we are concerned that significant gaps remain in vital perinatal mental health services and many parents are not receiving the support they need to give their babies the best

possible start in life.¹⁵ Only two out of the seven health boards in Wales meet CCQI perinatal quality network standards,¹⁶ and women experiencing the most severe perinatal mental health needs are still currently unable to access a mother and baby unit in Wales. This means that too often, the area in which a woman and her family lives in Wales determines the type of specialist perinatal mental health care that can be accessed when needed.

NSPCC's [Fight for a Fair Start](#) campaign was launched in July 2019 to address some of these gaps, aiming to ensure parents across the UK can access the mental health support they need during pregnancy and after birth, in order to give their baby, the best start in life.

We want to see every mum and dad/partner receive the perinatal mental health support they need in every area in Wales, so that every baby and every family gets a fair start in life.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Adequately resource specialist perinatal mental health services in every health board** so they can meet national quality standards, as set out as a priority in the Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-2021.
- **Deliver on commitments to establish a permanent Mother and Baby Unit in Wales** that meets national standards with enough capacity to match need.
- **Ensure that there is a dedicated perinatal mental health midwife and health visitor in each health board**, to help identify and support women and their families affected by poor maternal mental health.
- **Improved identification and provision of support for dads/partners** experiencing poor perinatal mental health.

11 Bauer, A, et al (2016) The costs of perinatal mental health problems (PDF). London: Centre for Mental Health. Howard, L.M., Molyneux, E., Dennis, C.L., Rochat, T., Stein, A., and Milgrom, J (2014) Perinatal mental health 1 Nonpsychotic mental disorders in the perinatal period. *Lancet*, 384: 1775–1788; Jones, I., Chandra, P. S., Dazzan, P., and Howard, L. M (2014) Perinatal mental health 2 Bipolar disorder, affective psychosis, and schizophrenia in pregnancy and the post-partum period. *Lancet*, 384: 1789–99; NHS England (2018) Partners of new mums with mental illness set to get targeted support on the NHS.

12 Knight M, Bunch K, Tuffnell D, Shakespeare J, Kotnis R, Kenyon S, Kurinczuk JJ (Eds.) on behalf of MBRRACE-UK. *Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care - Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2015-17*. Oxford: National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford 2019.

13 See Welsh Government (2018) *Together for Mental Health: Delivery Plan: 2016-19*; Welsh Government (2020) *Review of the Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-2022 in response to Covid-19*.

14 See: Maternal Mental Health Alliance (2020) *Map of Specialist Community Perinatal Mental Health Teams (Wales) 2020*.

15 See Witcombe-Hayes, S with Jones, I., Gauci, P., Burns, J., Jones, S and O'Leary, S (2018) *From bumps to babies: perinatal mental health care Wales*. Cardiff: NSPCC, National Centre for Mental Health, Mind Cymru, Mental Health Foundation, Maternal Mental Health Everyone's Business.

16 Maternal Mental Health Alliance (2020) *Map of Specialist Community Perinatal Mental Health Teams (Wales) 2020*.

Domestic Abuse

The Problem

1 in 5 children are affected by domestic abuse.

Estimates for Wales place the figure at almost 167,000 children and young people.¹⁷ The true number is likely to be much higher as these are often hidden, unreported and inaccurately recorded crimes.

Children who live in families with domestic abuse are direct victims, whether they are physically abused or not. Children living in a home with an abusive parent are controlled, isolated and have their 'space for action' reduced.¹⁸ The impact of this can have long-lasting implications into adulthood, acknowledged by Public Health Wales as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) leading to health harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population.



Despite the ground-breaking Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse (VAWDASV) Wales Act, slow implementation has seen a gap between the policy intent of the Act and the reality on the ground. Support for children and young people across Wales is inconsistent and mapping of services¹⁹ have demonstrated the urgent need for better funding and resources to meet need. Provision of services for children and young people in Wales is '*limited, patchy and hugely varied due in large part to unsustainable, inconsistent and in some cases total non-existence of funding towards specialist dedicated services for children and young people*'.²⁰

The pandemic highlighted the prevalence of this human rights violation and the lack of provision as calls to Childline and the NSPCC Helpline increased during lockdown. The NSPCC Helpline saw 1500 contacts from adults during the national UK lockdown, while Childline delivered over 500 sessions to children worried about domestic abuse.²¹

Meanwhile specialist services in Wales reported increased pressure on already stretched provision.²² The needs of children and young people exposed to violence and abuse during lockdown will likely manifest in the months and years to come, services must be fully resourced to meet this demand.

17 <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf>

18 [https://hira.hope.ac.uk/id/eprint/1228/1/Katz, Emma 2015 How Children Living with Domestic Violence are Harmed by and Resist Regimes of Coercive Control.pdf](https://hira.hope.ac.uk/id/eprint/1228/1/Katz,Emma%202015%20How%20Children%20Living%20with%20Domestic%20Violence%20are%20Harmed%20by%20and%20Resist%20Regimes%20of%20Coercive%20Control.pdf)

19 *ibid.*

20 *ibid.*

21 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2020/coronavirus-insight-briefing-domestic-abuse>

22 <https://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/State-of-the-sector-2020-PDFdesign.pdf>

Solutions

NSPCC Cymru/Wales has long campaigned on the need for sustainable funding of specialist VAWDASV services for children and young people in Wales.

Key to the response to domestic abuse in Wales is the VAWDASV Act, which aims to ‘*promote awareness of, and to prevent, protect and support victims of violence against women, gender based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence*’.²³ Objective two and four within the National Strategy on VAWDASV²⁴ are concerned with ensuring children and young people are educated on healthy relationships and that abuse is always wrong, while objective four places the importance of prevention and early intervention at the core of work to tackle VAWDASV. The Guidance for the commissioning of VAWDASV services in Wales states; ‘*The commissioned services should ensure victims and survivors – whether adults or children – receive the protection and support they need*’.²⁵

The VAWDASV Act was ground-breaking for Wales and placed a commitment to eradicating violence and abuse on a legislative footing but we want this to go further with the inclusion of:

- **Prevention work.** This should include: mandatory RSE; interventions for young people who demonstrate harmful behaviours; by-stander interventions²⁶ to support young people to challenge abusive behaviour, and; community interventions where FGM and other forms of so called honour based abuse are practiced.
- **Protection work.** This should include: dedicated children’s crisis workers in refuge accommodation and the community as well as fully resourced specialist support for by and for black and minoritised children. However, *all* VAWDASV services, which are not specialist ‘by and for’ services, should undertake training which equip them to understand the nuances of so-called ‘honour-based’ abuse including FGM and forced marriage.
- **Support work.** This should include therapeutic recovery support for children and young people across Wales, for as long as they need it.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Address the shortfall in service provision for children and young people.** Realise the promise of secure and sustainable funding for specialist services in Wales.
- **Commit to the rights of children in the context of domestic abuse.** The child’s voice, wishes and needs must be a central when working to support them. We want to see an expectation that when developing strategies, designing services and evaluating the success of interventions, children and young people are consulted.
- **Ring-fence an element of commissioning for services who can deliver intervention work.** Central to this prevention work must consider how children and young people can be meaningfully engaged in the work.

²³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/3/section/1/enacted>

²⁴ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/national-strategy-2016-to-2021.pdf>

²⁵ [https://senedd.wales/laid documents/sub-ld12217/sub-ld12217-e.pdf](https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/sub-ld12217/sub-ld12217-e.pdf)

²⁶ The Bystander Initiative is a training course intends to teach students of all backgrounds and genders about sexual violence and domestic abuse, and how students themselves can intervene in situations where someone may be in danger, or to challenge negative comments.

Child Sexual Abuse

The problem

Child sexual abuse is devastating and can have both short and long-term effects. The impact of sexual abuse can last a lifetime and affect psychological and physical well-being, family and intimate relationships.²⁷

Almost 9% of adults in Wales experienced a form of sexual abuse before the age of 16.²⁸ Any statistics on child sexual abuse are likely to be a conservative estimate, as it is a hidden crime. Some studies suggest it can take almost eight years to disclose abuse and some children never feel able to tell anybody about it.²⁹

Solutions

A public health approach to child sexual abuse places the responsibility for tackling it with everybody. We need policies and procedures which both disrupt potential perpetrators and enable disclosure from children and young people in all the places children access.

Also crucial are readily available, integrated, child-centred, specialist sexual abuse services. Currently, children who experience sexual abuse do not always receive the support they need³⁰ in a timely manner. The Lighthouse in London is an example of an innovative approach to supporting children to recover after abuse. The Child House model is child-centred, interdisciplinary, brings together a multi-agency response and provides a safe-place for children and young people to recover.³¹

Young people also need a model of support which considers the spaces and peers they interact with and the collective role of the whole community in keeping young people safe. Too often safeguarding focuses on the individual child and the family and what the parents/carers can or should do to safeguard a young person, but preventative approaches should also consider the contextual and community factors, outside of the family setting, which could put a young person at risk.

Central to the response to CSA in Wales is the first Action Plan on Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (2019), which places a number of new responsibilities on safeguarding children boards. Aligned to this is the introduction of mandatory relationship and sexuality education in schools which is another key tool in embedding a preventative public health approach to CSA in Wales. However, there is more to be done. We want the next Welsh Government to ensure a continued public health approach to CSA, extending the Wales National Action Plan for the life of the next Senedd term.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Adequate availability of specialist sexual violence services for children impacted by CSA, which is truly child-centred and multidisciplinary.**
- **Enable the roll-out of the Child House model in Wales.** This should bring together funding streams from national and local stakeholders so that children can receive the support they need.
- **Widen the Welsh Government CSA Action Plan focus on perpetrators to include adults as well as young people who display harmful sexual behaviour, in order to echo calls from survivors.**
- **Implement a multi-agency and localised contextual safeguarding approach** to address the risks to young people experiencing extra-familial sexual abuse, which includes funded training of key professionals.

27 [The impacts of child sexual abuse: a rapid evidence assessment](#) Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2017).

28 [Estimated number and proportion of adults aged 18 to 74 in Wales who experienced abuse before the age of 16, year ending March 2019 CSEW - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

29 Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse. London: NSPCC.

30 <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/responding-to-csa-childrens-services-wales/>

31 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/services-children-families/the-lighthouse>

2. Every child is safe online

Our Vision: Every child in Wales is aware of and supported to realise their right to be safe online

The internet is an extremely valuable tool to help children learn about and explore the world. During the pandemic, social networks have allowed children to stay in touch with their family and friends - and many of these platforms are a lifeline for children and young people. Today, social media is a ubiquitous part of childhood, and an inescapable utility. Around half of UK children aged 12 have at least one social media account, despite the minimum age requirements for most sites being 13. By age 13, that figure rises to almost two-thirds.³² Covid underlined the central role technology plays in children's lives.

After a decade of insufficient action on online abuse, the challenge is significant, but not insurmountable. Rapidly developing technology creates new opportunities to initiate, maintain and escalate online child abuse. The scale and complexity of the online threat is growing.

For too long, social networks have been allowed to treat child safeguarding as an optional extra.³³ Despite a wide range of potential harms, many platforms have considered online safety as peripheral to their business models and they haven't invested in or prioritised keeping children safe. As a result, we don't have the same protections in place online as offline, and children are left exposed to unacceptable but avoidable risks.

NSPCC's Wild West Web campaign calls on UK Government to make good on its promise of holding tech companies responsible for abuse that happens on their platforms. **We ask the next Welsh Government to join us in urging that Online Harms legislation delivers robust regulation and appropriate sanctions.**³⁴



The Problem

There are estimated to be 101 online sexual offences against children a day recorded by police forces **in England and Wales**.³⁵ In Wales, there have been more than **2,600 online sexual offences against children** since it became mandatory for forces to record a 'cyber flag' in 2015.³⁶ Across the UK, one in five internet users face online abuse that continues to increase in both scale and complexity.³⁷ With so many children using social networks, gaming and messaging sites, young people are increasingly exposed to the threat of abuse, from both adults and their peers.

³² Ofcom (2020) Children and parents: media use and attitudes report. London: Ofcom.

³³ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/wild-west-web/>

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/how-to-win-the-wild-west-web-report.pdf>

³⁶ Freedom of Information Request by NSPCC to Welsh Police Forces.

³⁷ Data from the Information Commissioner's office cited in NSPCC (2020). How To Win the Wild West Web: Six tests for delivering the Online Harms Bill. Available here.

Children face a range of online risks, from the production and distribution of child abuse images, to the harmful effects of exposure to inappropriate content and the growing scale of grooming facilitated by social networks. Platforms provide new opportunities for groomers to initiate, maintain and escalate their abuse. Groomers can target significant numbers of children, and move them from well-known open platforms to encrypted apps and sometimes unscrupulous messaging sites.³⁸ New types of technology, notably livestreaming and video-chat sites, have provided new opportunities for abusers to control and coerce children. Furthermore, a spike in technology-facilitated child abuse observed during the pandemic indicates the problem has been intensified by Covid.³⁹ But this can change, harm is preventable.

Solutions

If Governments across the UK act with urgency and ambition, we can deliver a concerted approach to **disrupt** and **prevent** online abuse. The UK Government can disrupt abuse by delivering Online Harms legislation that establishes a world-leading model for protecting children through tough regulation and proportional sanctions to hold tech companies to account. We are currently scrutinising proposed legislation against our 'six tests' for success⁴⁰ set out in 2020 and we will closely monitor the legislation as it makes its way through Parliament.

Ensuring parity of protection for children online and offline requires UK-wide regulation and National prevention efforts to work in tandem.

UK Devolved Governments must prioritise **prevention** efforts, through strong National Child Safety Online Action Plans that complement each other and the Online Harms legislation. National approaches should bring together education, child safeguarding and law enforcement to foster a preventive and protective environment and keep children safe online. Plans must include specific actions to respond to the impacts of Covid and keep pace with the intensifying online threat facing our children. Action plans must also complement and be responsive to anticipated changes to how the online space is regulated. Devolved Governments play a crucial role in providing all children, their families and key professionals with education and training about risks and potential harms online, how to be safe online as well as providing information about where and how to access help and support.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Retain a commitment to an annually updated National Child Safety Online Action Plan with a sole focus on children and young people.**
- **Deliver a strong Child Safety Online Action Plan that leads a pan-Wales protection and prevention approach with a focus on education, training and information about online risks and harms.** This should include practical ways to stay safe online as well as ensuring children receive help and support if they need it. Resources and information must be equally available in English and Welsh.
- **Explore the potential to broaden the reach of HWB as a national portal and 'one-stop-shop' promote and educate on children's online safety.**
- **Fund research to scope the consideration of risks and adequacy of responses relating to online communication through the Welsh language.** Exploring children's needs and experiences in this space would make sure that all children are receiving equality of protection.
- **Ensure a strong Wales and Welsh language presence of the new Independent Regulator and promote their role** to ensure children are informed about their rights and the protections they are entitled to online. Ensuring every child and carer knows how and where to seek help, support and advice.
- **Consider Welsh Government investment and support to develop a safety tech sector in Wales.** Scope the potential role for Wales in an emergent market for the tech safety innovation and solutions⁴¹ needed to support industry compliance with forthcoming UK Online Harms legislation.

38 National Crime Agency (2019) National Strategic Assessment: working together to end the sexual exploitation of children online. London: National Crime Agency.

39 Europol (2020) Catching the virus: cybercrime, disinformation and the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyon: Europol.

40 <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/how-to-win-the-wild-west-web-report.pdf>

41 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887349/Safer_technology_safer_users- The_UK_as_a_world-leader_in_Safety_Tech.pdf

3. Children get the support they need to recover from abuse

Our vision: More children get the mental health support and help they need so abuse doesn't shape their future

Wales was the first UK nation to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The convention is clear that children and young people have the right to express their views (Article 12) use their voice (Article 13), be protected from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19) and have the right to recover (Article 39). Wales must have due regard for these articles when considering how children access the support they need.

Abuse is never the fault or responsibility of the child but children who have experienced abuse may feel guilt, confusion or shame. They may not understand what has happened to them or recognise it as abuse. It is vital that adults are able to spot the signs of child abuse and know what to do if they have concerns. When children are able to speak out and seek support they must be listened to and provided with the right support, in a timely manner. This section considers our asks in relation to children getting the support they need and includes;

- **Support to speak out** – Children can face barriers to speaking out, we need to ensure children are provided with the opportunities to seek support, in a way that is comfortable for them.
- **Ensuring adults feel equipped with the knowledge to support disclosures from children** – we need to ensure adults know what to do and where to turn when they are concerned about a child.
- **Mental health support** – mental health remains the top concern for children contacting Childline and the pandemic only intensified that.⁴² Of concern is access to support for care experienced children and long waiting times for CAMHs.



⁴² <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2195/what-children-are-saying-childline-about-coronavirus.pdf>

Support children to speak out

The Problem

As many as one in five children in the UK has experienced some form of severe maltreatment and abuse – at home, in school, in the community, from adults and from their peers.⁴³ In Wales, we have seen a continuing rise in police recorded offences relating to child cruelty and neglect – increasing by 80% in the last three years.⁴⁴

We also know that children and young people who have experienced abuse and neglect are more likely to experience mental health problems;⁴⁵ and many find it very hard to tell someone what has happened to them.⁴⁶ Research shows that children's disclosures of abuse and neglect can often be complicated, fragmented⁴⁷ and not always direct or verbal.⁴⁸ Children often describe the fear of not being listened to or taken seriously, as a key barrier to speaking out about their experiences.⁴⁹ When young people do attempt to disclose abuse and neglect, it can often go unrecognised, unheard or ignored, meaning that no action is taken to protect or support that young person.⁵⁰

Solutions

Childline plays a crucial role in supporting children and young people who have suffered abuse and neglect by listening to them and empowering them. During Covid, Childline has often given young people the opportunity to speak out about abuse for the first time.⁵¹ It is crucial that Childline is recognised as part of the network of support around children and families and can rely on long term sustainable funding to continue to meet need.

Mandatory relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in schools has a key role to play in enhancing

the health, well-being, and safety of all children and young people. To protect children and young people from harm, it is vital that all children are equipped with the information and the language they need to understand that they have a right to safety, to recognise all forms of unhealthy or abusive behaviour and to build their confidence to speak out and get support at the earliest opportunity if they are worried or concerned. This becomes even more urgent in a Covid recovery context.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Ensure that Childline can rely on long-term, sustainable funding to allow the vital service to meet need.**
- **Every child in Wales receives an annual assembly from our Speak Out Stay Safe service** about child abuse and how they can speak out, which includes Childline and other support for children and young people.
- **Every child in Wales to receive mandatory high-quality and inclusive RSE**, that is developmentally appropriate, trauma informed and contains a clear commitment to keeping children safe from harm.
- **Ring-fenced investment to ensure professional learning for all teachers so they feel confident in delivering RSE.** This must include comprehensive training for all school staff to ensure they are equipped with the tools to help spot signs and symptoms of abuse. As well as having a clear understanding of how to deliver this support in a trauma-informed way.
- **Provision for a designated lead practitioner with protected hours in every school to help guide and develop the RSE curriculum and help embed it within a whole school approach.**

43 Office for National Statistics (2020) [Child Abuse in England and Wales: March 2020](#); Radford, L. et al. (2011) [Child abuse and neglect in the UK today](#). London: NSPCC.

44 Figures obtained by a FOI request to police forces in Wales for recorded child cruelty and neglect offences.

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48 Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) [No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse](#). London: NSPCC; Ungar, M., Bartner, K., McConnel, S. M., Tutty, L. M., and Fairholm, J. (2009) Patterns of Abuse Disclosure among Youth. *Qualitative Social Work*, 8(3), 341-356.

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50 Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) [No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse](#). London: NSPCC.

51 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2390/impact-of-coronavirus-pandemic-on-child-welfare-online-abuse.pdf>

Ensure more adults take action

The Problem

Everyone in children's lives can play their part and keep them safe from abuse and neglect. We want all children to understand abuse, so that if they ever experience it, they can ask the adults they trust for help. Welsh legislation already requires professionals who work with children to report any child at risk of harm to the local authority.⁵² However, evidence shows that professionals in Wales often feel they need additional help to know what to do when interacting with a child who is disclosing abuse or neglect.⁵³

Solutions

Welsh Government ensures all those employed in public service, especially those working directly with children and the Welsh public, are trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma and abuse and respond appropriately. It is also vital that adults know how to interact sensitively with a child who is disclosing to [let the child know they are listening](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1664/let-children-know-listening-briefing-english.pdf).

NSPCC's adult helpline can play an invaluable role to support the work of child protection authorities and help adults protect children from harm. It is staffed by trained professionals who can provide expert advice to adults who are concerned about a child, and identify if a case meets the threshold for intervention and refer those on to statutory authorities. In Wales, the number of referrals being made by our NSPCC helpline each month to external agencies, such as the police and local authorities, about the abuse of children has, on average, risen by almost 80% since lockdown.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Ensure that every professional in Wales who works with children receives evidence-based safeguarding training during their induction and regularly thereafter.** This should include how to interact with children in the moment of a disclosure.
- **Recognise the value of the NSPCC Helpline as a source of advice and support for adults** and boost awareness across all sectors and amongst the Welsh public.
- **Ensure that the NSPCC Helpline can rely on long-term, sustainable funding to allow the service to meet need.**



⁵² Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/section/130/enacted>

⁵³ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1664/let-children-know-listening-briefing-english.pdf>

Children's Mental Health

The Problem

Childline⁵⁴ statistics indicate the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns impacted children and young people's mental wellbeing.

A UNICEF⁵⁵ survey of teachers during the UK wide lockdown in Spring 2020, found the mental health of pupils was a key priority for more than 80% of teachers, as 57% of parents said their child had experienced mental health challenges during the lockdown.⁵⁶

The mental health needs of children and young people were already a concern for NSPCC Cymru/Wales prior to lockdown, with one in eight children living with a diagnosable mental health need.⁵⁷ The impact of abuse and neglect, bullying from peers or too long waiting times for CAMHs remains a concern and is likely to have been further exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.⁵⁸

NSPCC Cymru/Wales and Voices from Care Cymru's Listen, Act, Thrive consultation found young people spoke of long waiting times to access CAMHs. This is particularly problematic for care experienced children whose access to the service can be disrupted by moves due to placement failings. Additionally, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act mandates that all children receive a physical and mental health assessment on entry into care, but our research suggests these needs are not being adequately assessed with inconsistency in the tools used to assess need.

Solutions

Children and young people living with poor mental health need both immediate responses and long-term recovery support. We need to ensure children and young people's needs are recognised and addressed sooner.

Schools, as an almost universal access point for children and young people, offer an ideal setting for early mental health support. We therefore welcomed Welsh Government's increased mental health funding for schools and their recognition of the increased impact of Covid on mental health. However, consideration should be given to how best to meet the mental health needs of younger children through alternative therapies to counselling (which is not always appropriate for young children).

Despite the devastating impact of Covid, it provides an opportunity to consider how we best meet children's mental health needs going forward, particularly ensuring needs are recognised and addressed sooner through a more holistic and universal approach.

As we move into the next Senedd term, tackling the existing challenges in children and young people's mental health support and planning for the long-term impact of Covid on mental health must be a priority area.

Action needed in the next Senedd term

- **Ensure CAMHs are better resourced to ensure all children and young people can access support when needed and children have access to long-term recovery after initial interventions.**
- **Ensure care experienced children receive the consistent mental health assessments and support they need.**
- **Extend the statutory requirement for school-based therapy settings to encompass all children.**

54 <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/2195/what-children-are-saying-childline-about-coronavirus.pdf>

55 <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/childrens-mental-health-major-priority-for-teachers-when-schools-reopen/>

56 <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/childrens-mental-health-major-priority-for-teachers-when-schools-reopen/>

57 <https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/our-open-letter-to-government-on-young-peoples-mental-health-during-lockdown/>

58 <https://senedd.wales/laid-documents/cr-ld13568/cr-ld13568-e.pdf>

Everyone who comes into contact with children and young people has a responsibility to keep them safe. At the NSPCC, we help individuals and organisations to do this.

We provide a range of online and face-to-face training courses. We keep you up-to-date with the latest child protection policy, practice and research and help you to understand and respond to your safeguarding challenges. And we share our knowledge of what works to help you deliver services for children and families.

It means together we can help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives. Together we can protect children at risk. And, together, we can find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening.

But it's only with your support, working together, that we can be here to make children safer right across the UK.

nspcc.org.uk

