Unprotected, Overprotected: Meeting the Needs of Young People with Learning Disabilities who Experience, or are at Risk of, Child Sexual Exploitation
Factors contributing to increased vulnerability to CSE

- Over-protection and infantilisation = unprotected
- Social isolation
- Lack of empowerment and voice
- A lack of access to information and education on sex and relationships
- False perceptions around sexuality and disability
- Lack of knowledge and awareness of the sexual exploitation of young people with learning disabilities amongst professionals and general public
- General absence of CSE and learning disability training for professionals
- Invisibility of young people with learning disabilities within services.

Young people with learning disabilities are a perpetrator’s dream ... they’re often lonely and isolated. Many of them have not had a boyfriend or girlfriend but would like one. Many spend a lot of time online. They are less likely to understand that sexual exploitation is wrong and are so easy to groom.’ CSE specialist practitioner
Challenges to meeting need

Only 31% of local authorities stated that figures were recorded for CSE and young people with learning disabilities [Local authority survey]

- Challenges to identifying young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE
- Gaps in national policy and local implementation.
- Ineffective multi-agency responses and ‘working in silos’ between child protection and learning disability professionals.
- Low levels of activity to raise awareness of CSE of young people with learning disabilities across different audiences.
- Lack of professional understanding of learning disabilities and CSE.
- Lack of professional understanding of capacity to consent to sex.
- Lack of diagnosis of learning disabilities and challenges to gaining assessment.
- Diversity – need for further consideration of gender, Black and Minority Ethnic communities, sexual orientation and sexual identity.
Supporting disclosures of CSE

- Research provides further evidence of barriers faced by young people with learning disabilities to disclosing abuse and professionals’ identification of their abuse.
- Adults, including professionals, not proactively identifying potential signs of CSE.
- Young people with learning disabilities are not always asked about their relationships and risk.
- A burden is placed on young people with learning disabilities to recognise and disclose CSE.
- Young people may not recognise that they are being abused.
- Young people may fear getting into trouble if they disclose.
- When a disclosure is made, young people with learning disabilities are not always believed.
- Crucial importance of appropriate responses to disclosure of CSE.
Direct practice that works well to support young people with learning disabilities

- Recognising the needs of individual young people with learning disabilities.
- Ensuring professionals have a good understanding of CSE and working with young people with learning disabilities.
- Meeting communication and learning needs.
- Building good relationships based on trust.
- Planning sessions with young people.
- Preventative work that includes a focus on sex and relationships, exploitation, using the internet, delivered in an accessible way.
Direct practice that works well to support young people with learning disabilities

- Supporting young people to understand they have been sexually exploited and address its impact.
- Increasing understanding of CSE and risk.
- Working with young people to increase consequences of actions.
- Supporting young people through the criminal justice system.
- Supporting young people with learning disabilities through the transition from children’s services to adults’ services.
- Providing support once the young person reaches the age of 18.
Working with parents and carers

- Supporting parents and carers to:
  - recognise that their child is experiencing/at risk of CSE.
  - meet their child’s needs
  - meet their own needs.

- Working with parents and carers to:
  - understand their child’s disability
  - understand the impact of their child’s CSE.
Challenges in supporting young people with learning disabilities

- Young people may not recognise that they are being groomed or exploited.
- Challenges to achieve a balance between child protection and children’s rights.
- Lack of pre-assessment of a young person’s disability or impairment.
- Young people’s disability or impairment may prevent them from transferring experience and/or learning.
- Some young people will remain at risk of CSE despite intensive and effective support to meet their needs.
Use of resources to support practice

- Research revealed a lack of specific CSE resources for use with young people with learning disabilities.
- Evidence of existing CSE resources being used effectively with young people with learning disabilities through adapting them to meet individual’s communication and learning style.
- Use of basic resources to create a comfortable atmosphere.
- Avoid of a reliance on written information.
- Ensure the ‘right’ resources are used.
THANK YOU

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