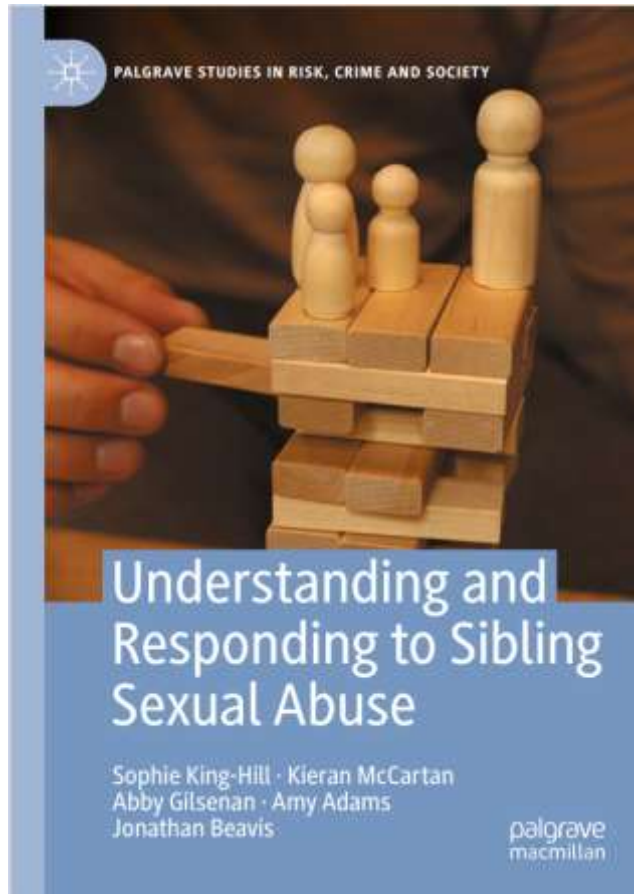


# Understanding how to best work with and respond to sibling sexual behaviour.

Dr Sophie King-Hill, David Russell & Prof Kieran McCartan



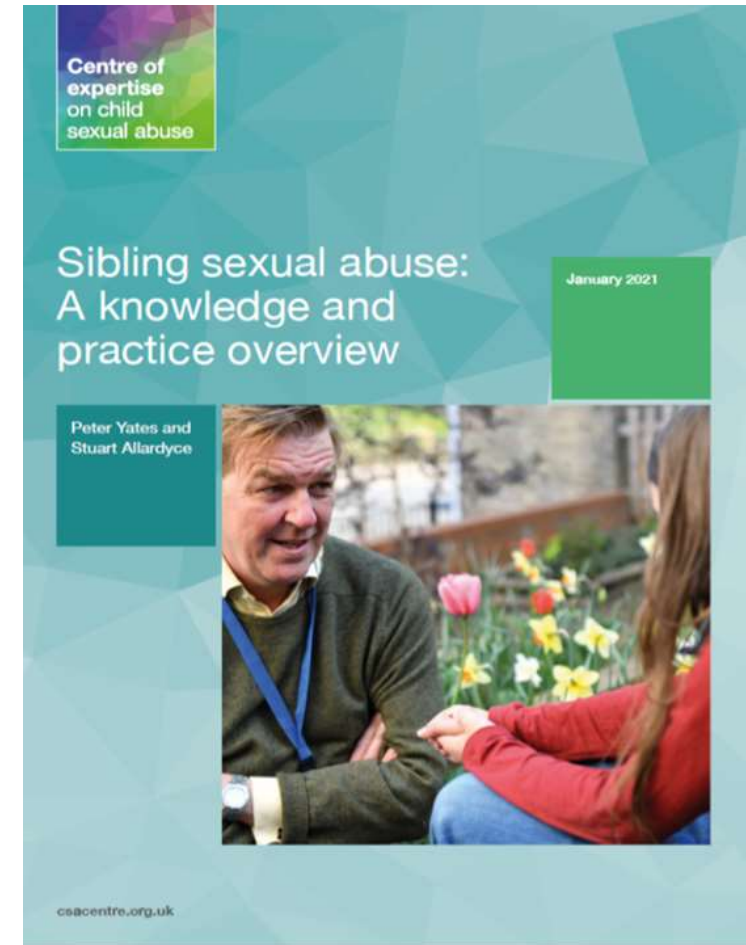
# Publications



- McCartan, K. F., Hill-King, S., Allardyce, S., & Yates, P. (2024). Sibling Sexual Abuse. *Current Psychiatric Reports*.
- McCartan, K F., King-Hill, S., & Gilsenan, A. (2023) Sibling Sexual Abuse as a form of family dysfunction. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*.
- King-Hill, S., Gilsenan, A., & McCartan, K. F. (2023). Professional responses to sibling sexual abuse . *Journal of Sexual Aggression*.
- King-Hill, S., McCartan, K. F., Gilsenan, A., Adams, A., & Beavis, J. (2022). *Understanding and Responding to Sibling Sexual Abuse*. Palgrave MacMillan.

- Recently there has been heightened research and practice interest in the field of Sibling Sexual Abuse (SSA).
- However, SSA is not a new phenomenon or social issue.
- The issue of sexual abuse within family systems has been discussed and examined for decades.
- The focus up until recently has been on parent child sexual abuse. Due to this, the literature on SSA/B is limited, especially in terms of empirical research.

# Understanding Sibling Sexual Behaviour





# Prevalence of SSB

SSB/A is believed to be the most common and long-lasting form of all intra-familial abuse

Estimates being that it is five times more prevalent than parent-child sexual abuse

One of the reasons for the underreported nature of SSB/A, is that disclosures are particularly challenging.

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# Understanding Sibling Sexual behaviour

- Current research on SSB/A does indicate a link between family systems, trauma, and sexual abuse, but this has not been formally researched or discussed in respect to SSB/A.
- Currently, in sexual abuse policy, practice, and research there is a focus on the role of adverse experiences and trauma in offending behaviour.
- The importance of, developmental/life-course criminology in preventing as well as responding to offending, and its links to of the bio-psycho-social approach to risk assessment and management.
- Research into dysfunctional and abusive families highlights the potentially traumatising nature of these family systems on child development and social inclusion.
- Research on young people and adults that sexually harm has indicated a number of traumatic risk factors, or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the family histories that have contributed to their asexually abusive behaviours.

# Complex Issues



Professional confidence is key to effective interventions.

This is sporadic and there is widespread professional anxiety surrounding SSB/A.



Professional confidence often comes from experience in the field, as opposed to training. Which is indicative of a sporadic approach to SSB/A support.



Access to SSB/A support is irregular and depends on effective multi-agency working and specialist services in the demographical area.



There is a significant need for holistic, strengths based, restorative work that takes account of the whole family context due to the multi-faceted nature of SSB/A.

# The National Sibling Sexual Abuse Project

- Funded by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice



SIBLING SEXUAL  
ABUSE PROJECT



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# Definition of sibling sexual behaviour/abuse

SSB/A: the physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse of one sibling by another in the context of sexual behaviour.

Sibling: refers to children who grow up in the same family whether they are stepchildren, foster children, adopted children or birth children

Definition: not just penetrative sexual abuse, it can be forcing a sibling to watch pornography, making a sibling engage in sexual acts with another child, or watching a sibling dress/use the toilet

More likely to be a series of sexual abuse encounters that occur over a prolonged period rather than a one-off incident.



# Sibling sexual behaviour

Clear, concise and detailed information is required from the start of referral.  
Considering the risk of re-traumatisation.

Effective multi-agency working requires awareness of all agencies involved.  
Mapping agencies currently involved within the assessment process is helpful.

Awareness of the wider family context is needed at the assessment stage to ascertain family co-operation and to tailor interventions to the CYP and the wider familial context into which they are situated.

The professional setting where interventions take place needs consideration before a CYP and their family are seen.

# Victim/survivors experiences of SSB/A

**UWE  
Bristol**

University  
of the  
West of  
England

- Empirical research in SSA is relatively underdeveloped.

- We need to develop an in depth understanding of the issue (or lived experience), and the most effective way of doing this is through qualitative research.

- Data was collected via emi-structured interviews

# Method

*Table 1: Victim/survivor sample*

PPT	AGE	GENDER	SEXUALITY	DISABILITY	ETHNICITY	RELIGION
1	55-59	Female	Heterosexual	No	Asian, British	Buddhist
2	30-34	Female	Heterosexual	No	White, English	Spiritual
3	40-44	Female	Heterosexual	No	Black, Caribbean	Christian
4	30-34	Female	Bi-sexual	No	White, British	Agnostic
5	20-24	Female	Bi-sexual	No	White, British	None
6	40-44	Female	Queer	No	White, British	spiritual
7	30-34	Female	lesbian	no	Mixed ethnicity	Pagan
8	20-24	Female	Lesbian	No	White, British	Agnostic
9	30-34	Female	Lesbian	No	White, British	None
10	35-39	Female	Heterosexual	No	White, English	None
11	30-34	Female	Heterosexual	No	White, English	None
12	35-39	Female	Lesbian	No	White, British	Atheist
13	25-29	Female	Heterosexual	No	White, English	None
14	35-39	Female	Bi/pansexual	No	White, British	None
15	25-29	Female	Heterosexual	Not sure	White, English	Atheist
16	40-45	Female	Lesbian	Yes, Mental health	white	Spiritual
17	Data missing	Female	Data missing	Data missing	Data missing	Data missing
18	Data missing	Male	Data missing	Data missing	Data missing	Data missing

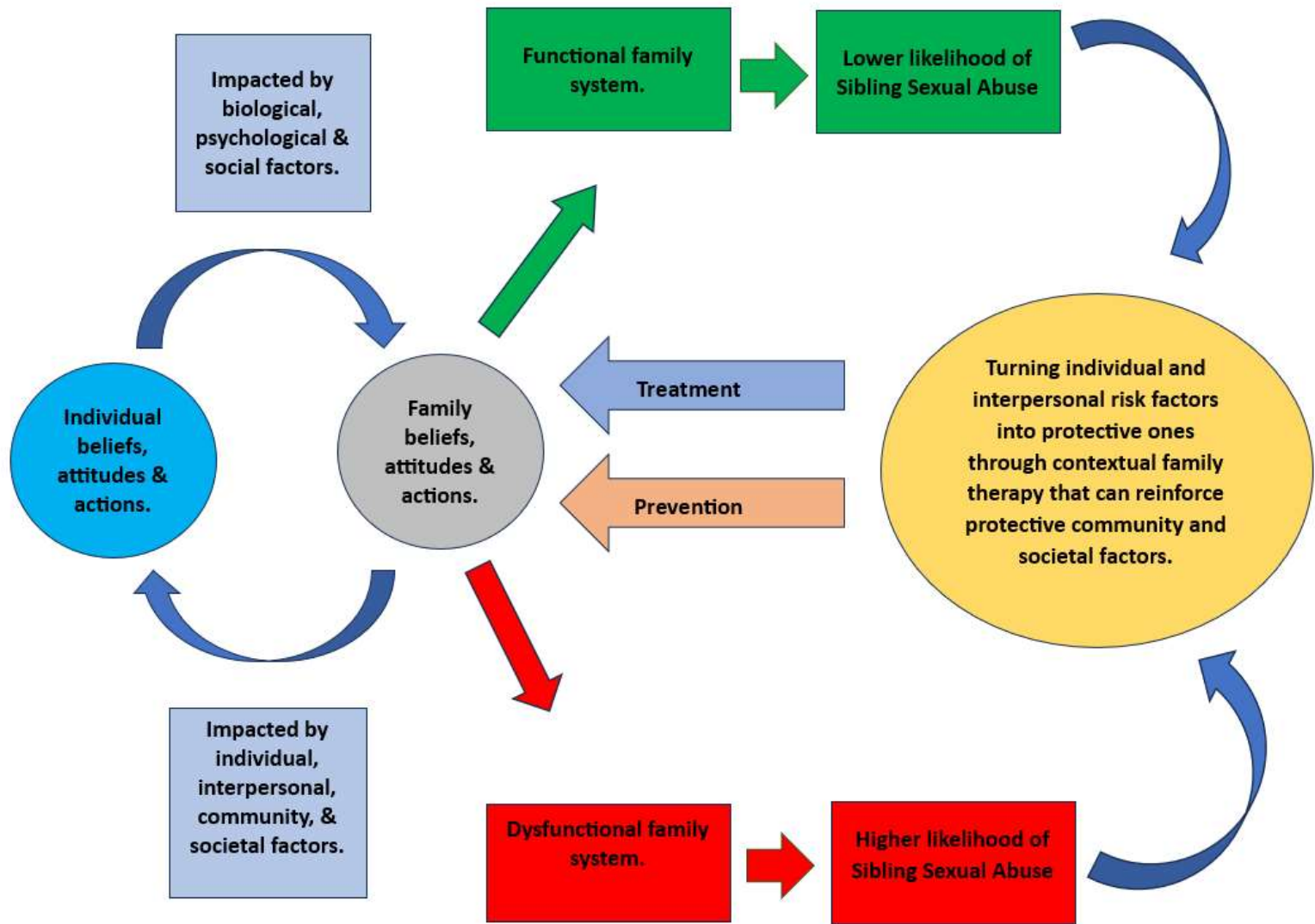
**Key SSA markers (or  
identifiers) tied to family  
systems, practices, and  
dynamics**

**While these behaviour markers do not suggest a typology or set of formation criteria for casework, they do prove a helpful starting point for considering how the family environment contributes to SSB/A.**

1. Abuse & dysfunction as a central component of broader family systems
2. Abuse & dysfunction being commonplace in the nuclear/immediate family.
3. Dual status of sexually harmful children.
4. Conflicted, paradoxical feelings towards the abusive sibling.
5. Poor parental engagement and communication: absent/disengaged parents.
6. Poor parental boundaries and inconsistent parenting
7. Denial of abuse and downplaying child's voice
8. Normalisation of dysfunction & acceptance of the abuse
9. The clarity brought about by distance and space from the family.
10. No two SSB/A or family experiences are the same.

# Family as the third component in Sibling Sexual Abuse





The role of dysfunctional families in Sibling Sexual Abuse

# SSB: Mapping Resource and Pilot



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Professional  
issues:  
sibling  
sexual  
abuse

Minimise

Catastrophise

Exaggerate

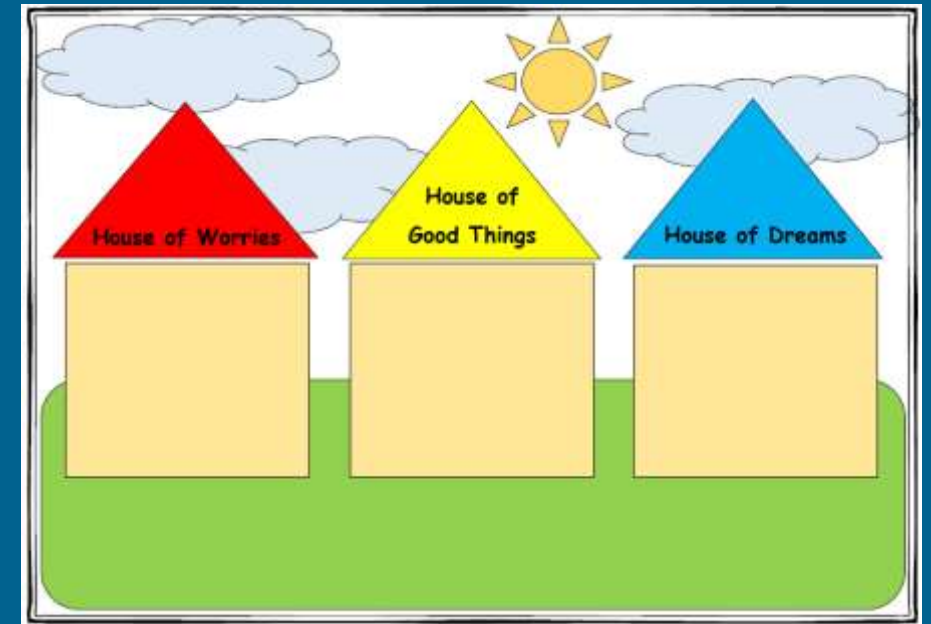
# Introduction to the Resource

- Designed to support detailed information recording, holistic thinking and overall planning in cases involving SSA.
- Loosely based on the [‘Signs of Safety’](#) framework (sometimes known as the Three Houses).
- Divided into six different ‘domains’ in order to fully consider whole family context.

Signs of Safety® Assessment and Planning Framework		
What are we worried about?	What's working well?	What needs to happen?

On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection workforce to open the case and 10 means things are so bad for the children that they can't look at home, where do we see this situation? Leave a green priority judgement, especially on the easy way arrow.

0 ← → 10





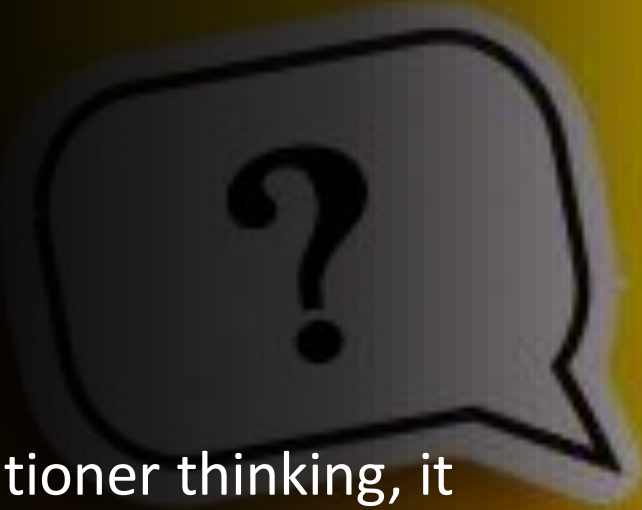
## Who is it for?

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This is a tool to support practitioner thinking, it should NOT be used with children and families themselves.

It is designed for frontline, children's services social workers and managers.

It can be used individually to help thinking, with colleagues, or in supervision, to help illustrate thoughts and planning.



# Resource Structure

- Example guidance given at start.
- Each domain contains suggested thinking prompts of things to consider. These are not exhaustive.

Sibling Sexual Behaviour

Family Dynamics and Parenting

Home circumstances and Housing

Education

Health and Development

Social Context

- Covers concerns, strengths, impact, support required and action points for each domain.
- Summary and outcomes section at the end.

REMINDER: This is a resource to support professional thinking and planning, it is not designed to be used with children and young people.

**1. Sibling Sexual Behaviour** *What happened? Who was involved? What are the Ages/Dynamic between those involved? Where did it happen? How was the behaviour discovered? Has it happened more than once? How many times has it happened? How long has it been happening? What is the nature of the behaviour (inappropriate, problematic, abusive? See guidance)*

Concerns	Strengths and Current Support	Impact	Support/Intervention Required	Action Points

Sibling Sexual Behaviour: Professional Mapping Resource  
Gilsenan and King-Hill (2022)



# Using the resource

Theme	Concerns	Strengths and Current Support	Impact	Support/Intervention Required	Action Points
<b>GUIDANCE EXAMPLE</b>	<p><i>What concern was presented in the referral? Provide as much detail as possible from the information given.</i></p> <p><i>Be as specific as possible when describing what has occurred and the context in which they occurred.</i></p> <p><i>Reflect on your initial response and feelings about the information provided.</i></p>	<p><i>What is currently working well in this area? What other agencies are already involved (if any)?</i></p> <p><i>What supportive networks are available – to the YP and/or the family?</i></p>	<p><i>What has the impact of this concern been?</i></p> <p><i>If there is no current apparent impact, consider what the likely impact of this concern might be on the young person and their family members– physical or emotional?</i></p>	<p><i>What needs to change?</i></p> <p><i>How can this change be supported?</i></p> <p><i>Are you/your agency able to provide this internally?</i></p> <p><i>Who/What agency can provide this support in the local area?</i></p> <p><i>Consider scope for engagement with family, availability and access.</i></p>	<p><i>What needs to happen now to ensure support is actioned?</i></p> <p><i>Who needs to be contacted?</i></p> <p><i>What can you do now to ensure necessary interventions happen?</i></p>



SSB/A  
mapping tool  
& links to  
prevention  
(McCartan &  
King-Hill,  
under review)

Domain	Mapping tool	Extended socio-ecological model
1	Sibling Sexual Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual: child who has harmed,</li> <li>- individual: child at risk of being harmed.</li> <li>- interpersonal: sibling dynamics</li> </ul>
2	Family Dynamics and Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interpersonal: sibling dynamics,</li> <li>- interpersonal: family dynamics.</li> <li>- community: the boarder family system</li> </ul>
3	Home circumstances and housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interpersonal: sibling dynamics,</li> <li>- interpersonal: family dynamics.</li> <li>- community: the wider communities.</li> <li>- Societal</li> </ul>
4	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- community: the wider communities.</li> <li>- Societal</li> </ul>
5	Health and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual: child who has harmed,</li> <li>- individual: child at risk of being harmed.</li> </ul>
6	Social context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- community: the wider communities.</li> </ul>

# Conclusions

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- SSB/A is complex
  - More research needs to be undertaken to fully understand its causes, how to better support victims/survivors and how to prevent it.
  - SSB/A is caught up in the complexity of family dynamics and that this can make it challenging for victims/survivors to report the abuse.
  - Greater public and professional understanding is needed and the difference from CSA
  - Understanding is needed how to better engage, support and work with victims/survivors in a way that recognizes the additionally and multi-layered trauma that they are also experiencing.
- 







# Restorative Processes

## Sibling Sexual Behaviour & Abuse

David Russell

Development Lead and Service Manager



@Survive2Thrive1



[www.thrivingsurvivors.co.uk](http://www.thrivingsurvivors.co.uk)

# Defining a Sibling

“

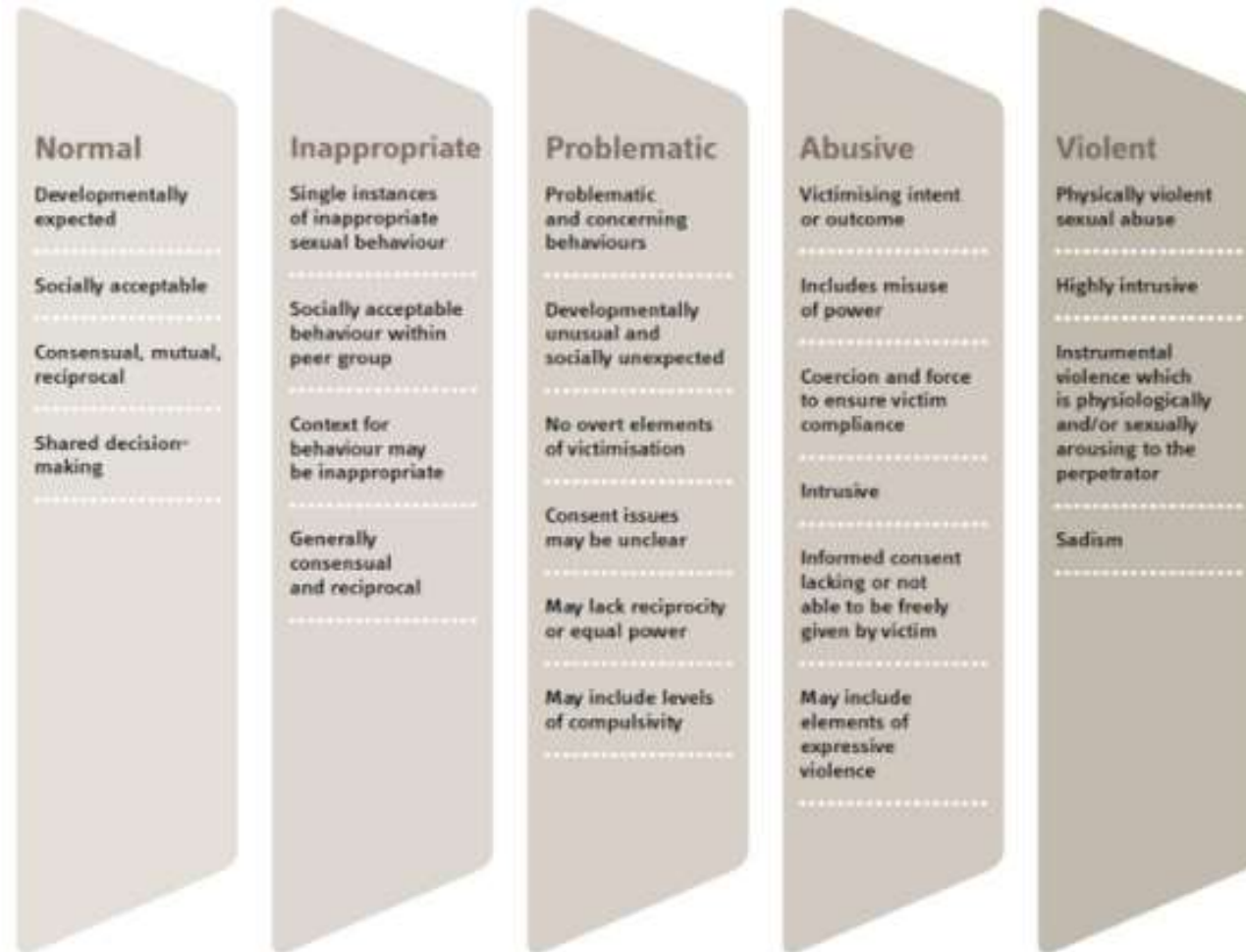
“We recognise that terms like ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘sibling’ and ‘family’ can have different meanings in various families, contexts and cultures. It is always important to ask children themselves about their preferred terms and what they mean by them, but in this guide we generally use ‘sibling’ as a gender-non-specific term. We further recognise that there are many different kinds of sibling relationships, and some children considered siblings may not be biologically or legally related”.  
(Allardyce & Yates, 2023)

”

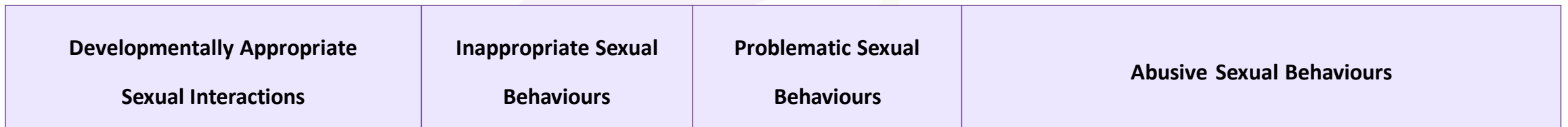
What would you consider to be a sibling relationship?

“Problematic definitions of SSA One of the elements that emerged from the data was the issues professionals had when defining SSA and the term sibling. This highlights the issues of complexity when working within SSA. It was found that professionals, from the outset struggled to define what constituted a sibling”.  
(King-Hill et al, 2023)

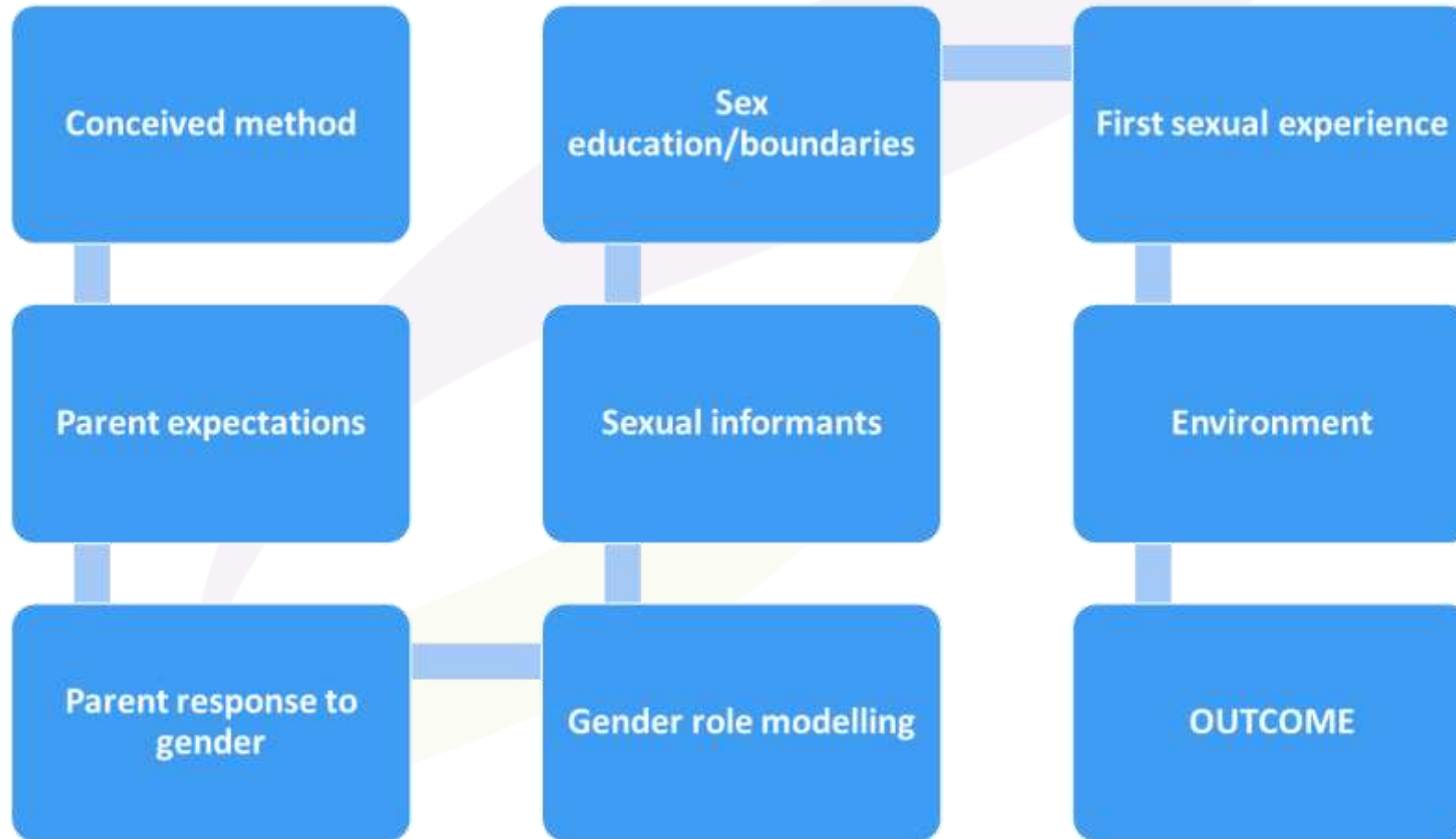
# Sexual Behaviour Continuum (Hackett, 2010)



# The continuum of sibling sexual behaviour (Allardyce & Yates, 2023)



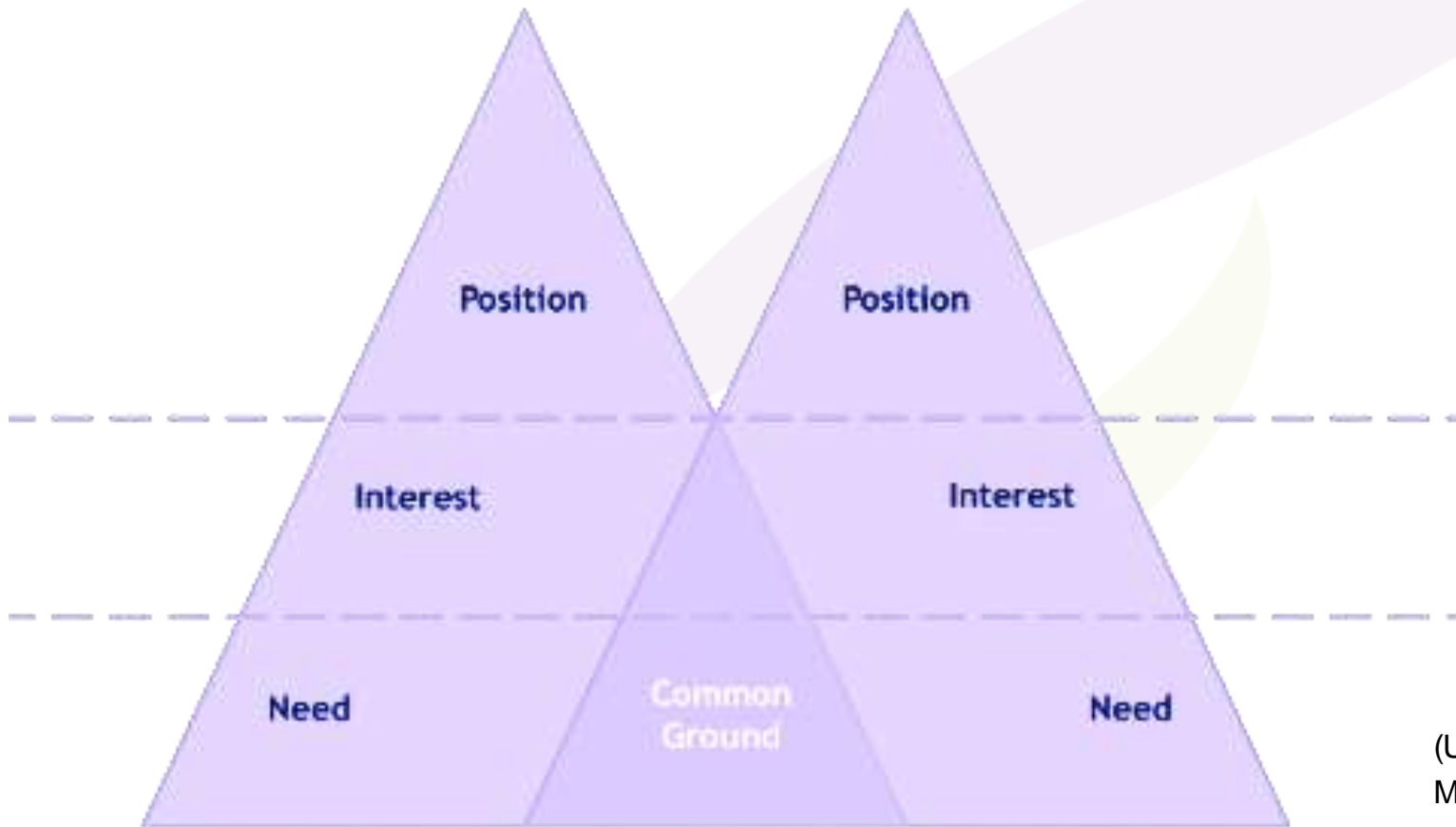
# Psychosexual Histories (Leonard & Donaghy, 2017)



# The Impact of Sibling Sexual Trauma

Child/YP harmed	Child/YP responsible for harm	Parents/Carers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of betrayal</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Conflicted between love &amp; harm</li> <li>• Shame/self-blame</li> <li>• Family breakdown</li> <li>• Fear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shame</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Feelings of responsibility of breaking down family</li> <li>• Embarrassment</li> <li>• Regret/guilt</li> <li>• Disgust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of failure</li> <li>• Guilt</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Conflicted feelings</li> <li>• Shame</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits of RJ:</b>	<b>Benefits of RJ:</b>	<b>Benefits of RJ:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A chance to be heard</li> <li>• An opportunity to set realistic and individualised goals/arrangements</li> <li>• A place to heal</li> <li>• The opportunity to support decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A chance to be heard</li> <li>• The opportunity to support and address the harm caused</li> <li>• A supportive process opposed to punitive</li> <li>• A chance to receive support for HSB and receive a child-centred intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A chance to be heard</li> <li>• The opportunity to support and address the harm caused</li> <li>• A facilitated process of support that gives whole families the space to be open, honest and support all children/YP</li> </ul>

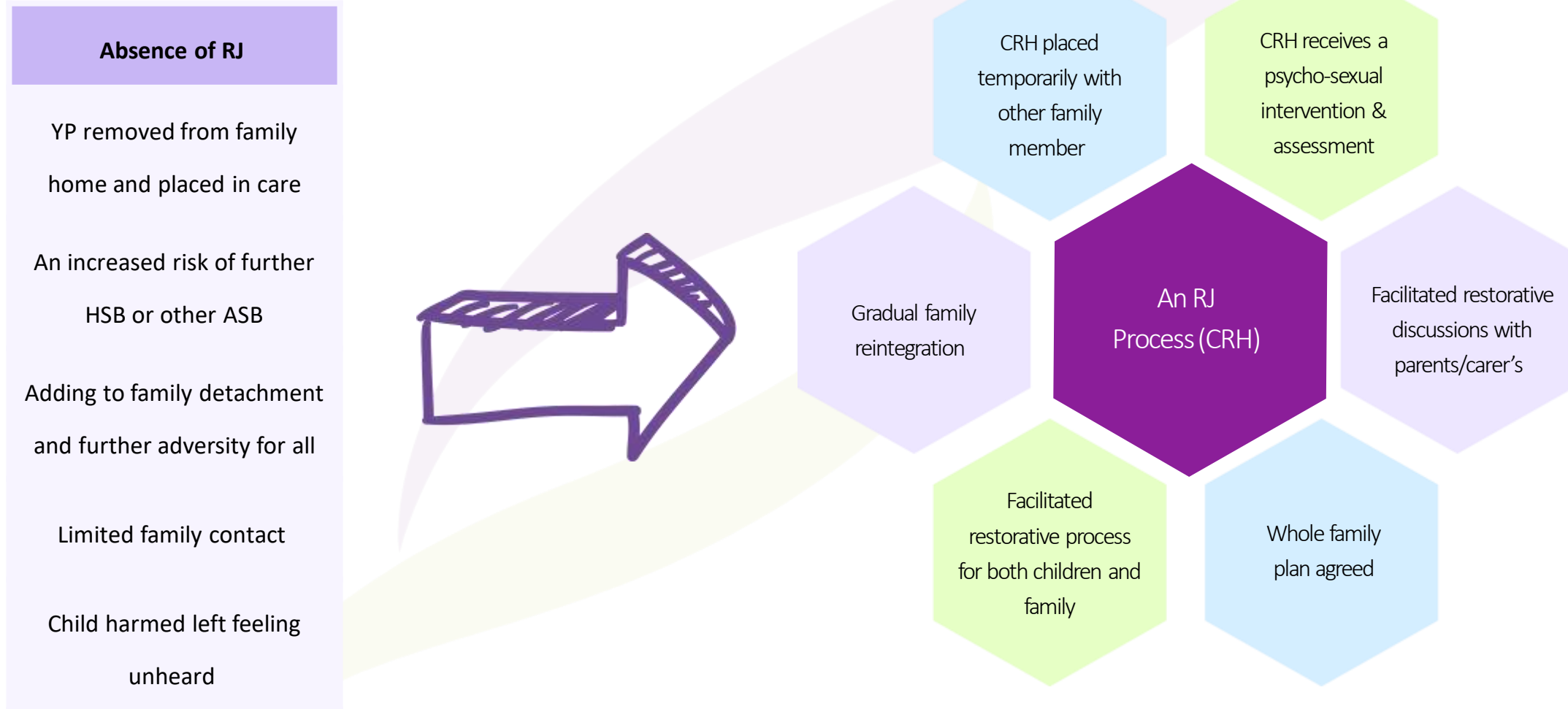
# Position, Interest & Need (PIN)



(Umbriet, 1995), Position, Interest and Need, PIN Model for conflict resolution



# Restorative Process for Child Responsible for Harm



# Factors to Consider in undertaking a Restorative Process with Sibling Sexual Behaviour & Abuse



Age of criminal responsibility



The impact on future behaviour



Accountability



Parent/carer engagement



Live Police investigations



The presence of coercion and/or violence



Age differences between children



The risk of not supporting a restorative process

# Approach

## Sibling Sexual Abuse Intervention Model

**CYP Harmed**

10x weeks 1:1 support  
intervention

6x week CYP &  
Parent/Carer Restorative  
Intervention

**CYP Responsible for the  
Harm**

10x weeks 1:1 support  
intervention & Assessment

6x week CYP &  
Parent/Carer Restorative  
Intervention

**CYP Harmed**

10x weeks 1:1 support  
intervention

6x week CYP &  
Parent/Carer Restorative  
Intervention

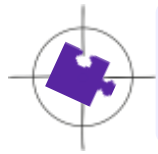
Whole family Restorative Intervention utilising a multi-modal approach

Outcome: Family reunification, family contact agreement: relationship repair, supported recovery/desistance

# Final Thoughts



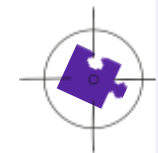
Multi-agency working



The use of language



The importance of supporting a whole family approach



'The Sibling Sexual Abuse Mapping Tool' (King-Hill & Gilsean, 2023)



Good practice and trauma informed



Being restorative



Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse –  
'Sibling sexual behaviour: A guide to responding to inappropriate, problematic and abusive behaviour' (Yates & Allardyce, 2023)

# Future contact




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Thank you for listening!

For further queries and information, please contact:

**David Russell**

-  Development Lead and Service Manager
-  Thriving Survivors
-  [David.Russell@Thrivingsurvivors.co.uk](mailto:David.Russell@Thrivingsurvivors.co.uk)



# Thank you !