

# Keeping children safe from sex offenders

How sex offenders are managed




## Keeping children safe from sex offenders

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Keeping children and young people safe from harm is of the greatest importance to most people. However, there are some who seek to harm children.

Although serious abuse of children is rare, people do exist who seek to harm children. The Government has taken action in a number of ways to help keep children safe, for example by strengthening the systems that prevent unsuitable people gaining access to children through their work or voluntary activities. The recent Government Review of the Protection of Children from Sex Offenders will go further still in taking steps to increase child protection. The Government, the police, and the prison and probation services work hard alongside other agencies to protect children from potential sex offenders and the perpetrators of abuse. But one of the most difficult aspects of public protection for us all to accept is that there is no such thing as a risk-free society.



This leaflet aims to answer concerns you may have about child sex offenders living in your community.

It explains:

- common misconceptions about child sex offenders;
- how child sex offenders are managed in order to protect children;
- what information held about child sex offenders you do and don't have the right to access;
- how to report any concerns you may have; and
- how to find out more information about protecting children.

Keeping children safe from abuse, including sexual abuse, is the responsibility of us all. You can play your part by being vigilant, listening to children and taking appropriate action if you have concerns. For more information about how to take action, turn to page 14.

## **Who are child sex offenders and how do they operate?**

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When the term 'child sex offender' is used in this leaflet, it is referring to people who commit sex offences against children. People from a wide range of backgrounds and ages are known to commit sex offences. Most known child

sex offenders are men, though some are women and around one third are young people themselves. Strangers carry out around 20 per cent of child sex offences and these are the cases often focused on in the media. However, the vast majority (at least 75 per cent) of child sex offenders are known to their victims – they are often a member of the family, a friend of the victim or a friend of the victim’s family.

Offenders seek out young people who desire friendship, either through direct contact or online. They often use a number of ‘grooming’ techniques, including building trust with the child through lying or befriending a member of the child’s family. Child sex offenders may also use threats and guilt to manipulate a child.

Whether the offender is known to the child’s family or not, in all cases this crime is devastating for victims and their families. It is important that people harming children in this way are brought to justice and prevented from harming other children in the future. A significant number of sex offences against children go unreported to the police because victims or their families feel they are unable to talk about what has happened. Sex offenders can only be prosecuted, convicted and managed by the police, probation services and other agencies if their offences are reported.

**Therefore you also have a huge role to play in child protection – by listening to children and reporting any concerns you have.**

## How does the law control child sex offenders?

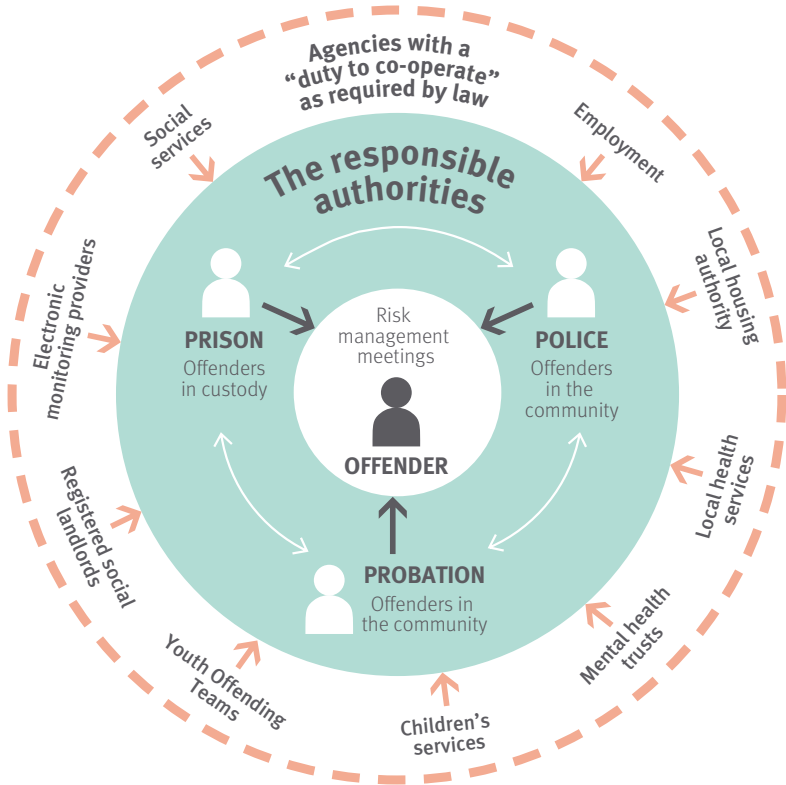
Britain has introduced strict measures to protect the public from known sex offenders. These include:

- court powers giving much longer sentences to dangerous offenders, including open-ended sentences with the possibility of life imprisonment;
- Sexual Offences Prevention Orders that ban sex offenders from certain behaviours and activities;
- forcing all sex offenders to comply with the Sex Offenders Register. Offenders must give their name and address to the police and failure to do so is a criminal offence punishable by up to five years in prison. In some cases, offenders must stay on the register for life; and
- robust legislation and strengthened systems to vet people applying to work with children.

## How are child sex offenders in the community managed?

By law, the police service, the prison service and the probation service have to work together, sharing information to manage known offenders. They are supported by various other agencies, including Local Safeguarding Children Boards and the NHS, who are also

required to provide information about these offenders.  
This is explained in the diagram below.



These teams that work together are known as MAPPA teams (MAPPA stands for ‘Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements’). You will have a local MAPPA team working in your area.

The MAPPA teams use a range of methods to monitor offenders and reduce the risk of them committing further offences. These include:

- police visits and interviews;
- regular multi-agency meetings to share information, take action and reduce the risk of harm;
- ongoing reviews of the level of risk each offender poses;
- surveillance of high-risk offenders;
- treatment to reduce re-offending;
- recalling offenders to prison for any serious breach of the conditions of their release;
- providing supervised accommodation where offenders can be closely watched, tagged and put under an appropriate curfew; and
- controlling how information about specific offenders is shared with the public or key community representatives.

It is hard to accept that there can be no such thing as a completely risk-free community. However, the MAPPA system is among the world's most developed offender management systems. It works well because it brings known sex offenders to the attention of a number of agencies who can all help in their management. Managed offenders are less of a risk to the public than those offenders who decide to 'go underground' and who therefore cannot be contacted by the authorities or appropriately monitored.



## Who checks it is all working?

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Senior police, probation and prison services staff, along with other agencies such as housing, health and social services, work together as a local MAPPA Management Board. The board monitors and reviews how public protection arrangements are working in each local area. Two members of the public sit on every local board to help improve links with the local communities. They act as lay advisers in the reviewing and monitoring of arrangements to protect the public.

## What general information about child sex offenders do I have rights to?

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Your local MAPPA team produces an annual report that explains:

- how sex offenders are being managed by the police, prisons and the probation service; and
- how many known sex offenders there are in your local area.

For further details about MAPPA annual reports, visit [www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk)

## What specific information about child sex offenders do I have rights to?

Effective management of child sex offenders in the community sometimes requires the police, the probation and prison services to share information with members of the public about specific offenders and their risk.

This way of sharing information works through a national system of 'controlled disclosure'. Leading child welfare organisations, such as the NSPCC and Barnardo's, support this way of sharing information.

Controlled disclosure means that, on a case-by-case basis, the police, probation and prison services make decisions to disclose such information as is relevant and necessary to protect children. Information on individual child sex offenders who may pose a serious risk of harm will be provided to people who have professional responsibility for the safety of children, or to people who have influence over the offender. Many meetings will take place to discuss each offender and the circumstances in which disclosure of detailed information would help to protect a child.

Key responsible people in your community, such as headteachers, leisure centre managers, employers and landlords, are often given details about child sex offenders in their area. Therefore these people are able to play an important part in keeping your local environment and community safe for children to live, learn and play in.

The Government is also currently looking at the best way of setting up a system to allow some parents and carers to check on a named individual, in specific circumstances.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre has developed a ‘most wanted’ website, which publishes details about certain non-compliant offenders that everyone can access. Turn to page 14 for more information about this.

If the police, probation and prison services are concerned about a direct risk to you or your child, either through their own investigations or because of a report you have made, they can decide to share any information with you that is necessary to keep you and your family safe. This can include identifying specific offenders and providing personal details, such as their home address or place of employment. This would be done through a face-to-face meeting.

The aim of giving these details is always to provide greater protection to children. The person receiving the information has a responsibility to ensure that it is used in this way. It should not be used to harass offenders. An offender who anticipates a community backlash through loss of anonymity is likely to ‘go underground’, away from the authorities. Offenders like this will then be a greater risk to children because the authorities are unable to monitor and supervise them.

For the same reason, automatically sharing offender details in Britain with anyone who asks about a particular individual, regardless of the risk they pose, will not help protect children. This is more likely to result in offenders ‘disappearing’ from the authorities monitoring them.

**Therefore, unless you or your family are at direct risk from a child sex offender, the police will not give you specific details about a child sex offender.**

## **I have serious concerns about the behaviour of a particular individual. What should I do?**

The information in this leaflet may not offer the support you need, if this issue is affecting you or your family. For more detailed information, turn to page 14 for addresses and telephone numbers of organisations that can help.

If you have any doubts or concerns about an individual, remember the following.

- It is important that child abuse is stopped – this is the first priority, no matter who the abuser is.
- Don't confront the suspected abuser yourself – you may put yourself or the child in danger.
- You may want to talk through your concerns with someone you trust, but in order to protect the child you must get professional help too. Contact the police, social services, a health visitor, school nurse or other health professional (such as your GP) or the NSPCC or Stop it Now!

## What should I do if a child tells me they have been sexually abused?

If a child tells you that they have been sexually abused, the NSPCC advises the following.

- The child probably feels very anxious and embarrassed. Although you will naturally feel very upset yourself, try not to react in a way that adds to their distress, for example with disbelief or blame.
- Try your best to keep calm and listen very carefully to what the child tells you. Make it clear that you believe what they are telling you. Allow the child to tell you as much as they want to about the abuse, but do not force them to talk about it. Tell the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Tell the child that they are not to blame for the abuse.
- Explain to the child what you are going to do with the information they have given you.
- Report the abuse to the police.

For more information, contact the NSPCC or visit **[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding)** for a copy of the leaflet *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused*.

## How can I find out more?

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Each MAPPA team publishes an annual report. This reviews what has happened locally and outlines the plans for the coming year. The annual report provides contact details for each agency involved in the management of offenders, if you wish to find out more information. A copy of the report can be found on your local police and probation services websites, or in the public protection section of the National Probation Service website at **[www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk)**

For details about what else the Government is doing to protect children, visit **[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/safeguarding)**

## Further information

**If you are concerned that a child is in immediate danger, call 999.**

Other people who can provide support include:

- your local police;
- your local social services; and
- your health visitor.

**If you are concerned about the welfare of a child**

Call the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline immediately on **0808 800 5000**. It offers advice and support to anyone concerned about the welfare of a child. The helpline is open

24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls are dealt with by counsellors, who are all trained child protection officers.

### **If you are concerned about online abuse**

Contact the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre at **[www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)** This is the national law enforcement centre for tackling child sex abuse. It offers advice to children and parents, as well as working to track offenders and bring them to account.

The CEOP Centre also runs a ‘most wanted’ service for local police forces where members of the public can work with the police to locate some of the UK’s most wanted child sex offenders. You can register to receive updates about these offenders by visiting **[www.ceop.gov.uk/wanted](http://www.ceop.gov.uk/wanted)**

Advice for parents and children about how to stay safe online can be found at **[www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)**

### **If you are a child or young person suffering abuse**

Call ChildLine free of charge on **0800 1111**. This is a charity which provides free, confidential counselling for any child with any problem.

### **If you suspect someone close to you is showing signs of abusive behaviour, or if you are worried about your own sexual thoughts and behaviour towards children**

Call the Stop it Now! freephone helpline on **0808 1000 900** or visit **[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)** Stop it Now! gives all adults confidential information, advice and support to prevent child sex abuse.

**If you want general information on how to keep your child safe, the organisations listed above can offer help and advice.**

This leaflet was produced in co-operation with:

**Barnardo's**

**NSPCC**

**The Lucy Faithfull Foundation**

**Stop it Now! UK & Ireland**

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**Home Office**

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