



# The victim and survivor conversation guide

A communication toolkit for working  
with survivors on CSAE investigations

**Child Sexual  
Exploitation  
Taskforce**

 **NAPAC**  
The National Association for  
People Abused in Childhood

# What is this guide for?

This is a companion piece to the victim and survivor engagement guide, it acts as a quick reference guide for police officers communicating with a victim or survivor at any stage of a CSAE investigation.

Pages 11, 12, 13, and 14 provide advice specifically tailored to supporting child victims or survivors.

Each section offers helpful language prompts, so you can communicate confidently and clearly with whoever you are supporting.

## The core principles of support and communication

These principles should be present in every interaction you have with a victim or survivor. They are non-negotiables that will help build appropriate, productive relationships and safeguard both parties.

### Begin with belief

For many survivors, feeling believed by the police is as important as a formal criminal justice outcome. If you can convey belief in an appropriate, empathetic manner, that is a hugely positive outcome in of itself.

### Offer information and choice.

As a victim or survivor of childhood abuse, choice and agency was taken away from them.

You can help them regain some of that agency and make empowered, informed choices as they proceed through the investigation.



## Build trust through transparency

Trust and transparency are integral to fostering an appropriate relationship that prioritises the outcomes that victims and survivors want to achieve. Being empathetic, honest and consistent in your actions and communication will help the victim or survivor to feel safer and create the right conditions for trust.

## Ensuring Accessibility

For professionals working within justice contexts, accessibility determines whether victims and survivors can meaningfully participate in processes that directly affect their preferred outcomes and access to justice

Victims and survivors bring a wide range of experiences and needs. These may include physical disability, chronic illness, sensory sensitivities, neurodivergence, literacy considerations or language differences.

When accessibility is built in from the outset engagement becomes possible rather than conditional. It also strengthens trust and reinforces the legitimacy of institutional processes.

Conversations about access should begin early and be framed as routine professional practice rather than a special request.

# The nine stages of contact

Based on consultation with colleagues from across policing, this booklet provides conversation prompts related to the nine stages of contact with a victim/survivor detailed below.



## First contact

The initial interaction between the police and the victim or survivor.

"Thank you for trusting me with this, you are not alone. I'm here to support you and to listen. You're in control of what you share today, and we can go at your pace, and take a break whenever you might need. Does that sound okay to you?"

"Thank you for telling me this, I know it can't be easy. I am here to listen and to support you, so just let me know if there's anything you need, or if you'd like to take a break."



## Initial safeguarding, crime recording and risk-based response

The assessment of immediate risks to the victim or others, recording of the offence and implementation of victim or survivor safeguarding measures.

"I'm going to ask some questions to make sure you're safe and to understand what support might help right now. Some of these questions may feel personal, but you can tell me if you'd rather not answer something yet".

"I'll explain why I'm asking, and we'll take it slowly. I understand this can be a lot to process, so if you need to take a break, or you want me to explain anything again, please do ask."



## Handover of case to a specialist officer or another force

Passing the case along to a different investigative team or individual.

"I need to let you know that, because of where this happened another police force will need to take this case forward. I understand that may feel unsettling, especially having already started to speak about what happened".

"I will explain what this means, what will happen next, and who will be in contact. We will do this as clearly and carefully as possible, and you can ask questions at any point. If you need me to pause or go over anything again, please do say."

## ABE planning and interview

Planning and conducting an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview to obtain the victim or survivor's account in a trauma-informed and legally compliant way.

"Do you feel you have everything you need to begin the formal statement? It's okay if you don't remember everything, or if things feel unclear, that's very common after trauma".

"There's no 'right' way to do this, just relay things in your own words as far as you feel comfortable. We can pause at any time and take a break or review this together, and I'm here if you need me for anything."



## Suspect/Offender Management

Suspect identification, assessment and management.

"There are some steps we now need to take to further the investigation. These can take time, and I will keep you updated as much or as little as you'd like".

"We can't predict how things will develop or what the outcome will be at this stage, but what you've told us is important and will be taken seriously. None of this is a reflection on whether you're believed."



## Post interview updates

Ongoing communication with the victim or survivor following the ABE interview.

"Between updates the work of the investigation will be ongoing. I'll stay in contact and let you know when there are developments. If you're feeling unsure or need to check in, you can contact me/xxxx and I/ they will be happy to chat things through."



## Investigative actions and CPS early advice

The progression of investigative activities, gathering evidence and arrests or voluntary interviews.

"There are some steps we now need to take to investigate further. These take time. We can't predict the outcome, but what you've told us is important and has been taken seriously. Do you have any questions at this time?"



## Digital and third-party material requests

The collection and review of digital evidence and relevant third-party records such as social care, medical, education or counselling records.

"We need to review some personal records and digital information as part of the investigation. I understand this can feel invasive. I'll explain exactly what we're asking for and why, and we'll only request what is necessary. I'll do my best to answer any questions - do you have any at the moment?"

"I know this can feel intrusive, but we are only requesting what is necessary to help strengthen the case. We aren't investigating you or looking to trip you up."



## File build and CPS referral

Preparation of the evidential case file and submission to the CPS.

"We're now preparing the information to have the case reviewed by the Crown Prosecution Service. Is there anything you'd like me to explain? Or is there any information you'd like to add? If there's anything you remember later, you can still tell us. Sometimes it can take time for memories to resurface."

"We'll be passing the case to the Crown Prosecution Service on [date]. I want you to know that I am still here for you if you need anything, or you have any questions. It's normal to feel apprehensive and if you need more information or additional support, please ask."



## CPS charging decision

If charged:

"A decision has been made to move forward with charges. I know this may bring a mix of feelings. Is there anything you need now? We'll explain what happens next and make sure you have the right support as things progress."

If no charges are brought:

"I'm sorry to tell you that the CPS have not issued a charge. I want to explain that a decision not to charge is about legal thresholds and evidence requirements, please know that this does not mean you are not believed. What you shared was taken seriously. Support is still available to you, and we can help you access it."

"Firstly, I want to say thank you for your courage in coming forward and supporting this investigation. I'm sorry to tell you that the CPS have not issued a charge. The decision not to charge is about legal thresholds and evidence requirements and does not mean you are not believed. There is still support available if you need. Is there

| anything I can do for you now?"

"I know this is likely disappointing news to hear, but the CPS have not issued a charge. What you shared was taken seriously, but unfortunately, the legal and evidentiary thresholds required to issue a charge were not met. Please know that this does not mean you are not believed. Is there anything I can do or explain for you now? If you'd prefer, we can set a date to go over things in the coming days and weeks."

## Disengagement from the justice process

The victim or survivor has decided that they no longer wish to continue supporting the investigation.

"I understand that it can be difficult to talk about what happened to you as a child and that this process is demanding too. I completely respect your decision not to continue to support the investigation, but I wanted to let you know that if you change your mind in the future, or think of anything you would like us to know, we are here."

"Thank you for your courage in disclosing what happened. I understand your decision not to continue but I also wanted to say that if anything changes in the future, we are here if you need, and you can reach out to us."

"You've shown so much strength in coming forward, and I hope you have felt believed and supported. I respect your decision not to continue. If anything changes in the future, I want you to know that you can get in touch with us. We are here for you."

"I completely respect your decision not to continue, and I know this process can be difficult and demanding. Now, I'll give a brief explanation on what will happen next with the case, and we can agree if and how you would like to be contacted, is that okay with you?"



## What are the key differences when supporting a child victim or survivor?

Where there is a child victim or survivor at the centre of a case there are additional considerations, even if the process for investigation can be similar between recent and non-recent investigations.

This section highlights these differences and what to consider when supporting a child as a victim or survivor or witness. It can and should be used in conjunction with the appropriate language guide, which gives in-depth advice on eradicating victim-blaming language when communicating to and about victims and survivors of CSAE.

It is also to be used in addition to College of Policing guidance on investigating child abuse and safeguarding children. Ideally, officers or staff supporting child victims or survivors of CSAE will be SCAIDP accredited.

## Overall communication principles

- Speak directly to the child, as well as caregivers/parents.
- Check understanding repeatedly and in different ways.
- Ensure communications are tailored to consider age, neurodiverse needs and cultural sensitivity.
- Use the right person for communication, chosen by the child where possible and appropriate. This may be an advocate or safeguarding agency partner.
- Use the right type of contact - young people may be more receptive to contact via text instead of a phone call, for example. Ask, and give choices where possible.
- Address unconscious bias, for example, prioritising or giving too much weight to a parent's narrative may obscure what a child is trying to communicate.
- Be aware of adultification versus infantilisation. Adultification disproportionately affects young black boys and girls, and infantilisation is especially common for young people with disabilities.
- Recognise trauma responses as normal and understandable.
- Understand the weight of small interactions, and the positive difference small kindnesses can make.
- Be mindful of non-verbal behaviours that indicate the child's situation. Some examples include sexualised behaviour, being very loud or very quiet, as well as the language they use (such as if they use a swear words or slang term for body parts).



## Multi-agency working, S47 strategy discussions and safeguarding decisions

Police, children's services, health and other safeguarding partners work together to assess risk, share information and decide how best to protect the child.

"I understand that this might feel confusing or frustrating. My role is to help keep you safe, and that means I may need to share information and speak with your parents or other professionals as part of this process. I will keep you updated about what is happening. If you have any questions, or if there's anything I can do to make things easier, please let me know. I will check in with you later today/after these discussions, so you have another opportunity to talk."

## SARC Attendance

Policing staff accompany the child to a Sexual Assault Referral Centre for medical care, specialist support and forensic examination.

"If it is okay with you, we'd like to take you to see a doctor who is specially trained to look after children and make sure you're okay. They are at [location, name of hospital or centre, and town]. I'll be in a waiting room the whole time you are there, and I will meet you after and we will talk about what happens next. Is there anyone else you'd like to be there for you?"

"I understand you may feel nervous about this, that's completely normal. The doctor is here to help and to make sure you are okay, and can get any medicine you need. How do you feel?"

"If you feel ready, we're going to attend a centre where a doctor will help make sure you're okay. You're not in any trouble, and the doctor will explain everything, step by step. Is there someone you trust you would like to be with you? I will be in waiting room to meet you after. You can ask me anything, and if I don't know we can ask the doctor together."

## Why this matters

Effective communication is one of the most important investigative tools available to policing staff working on CSAE investigations.

The way victims and survivors are spoken to, updated and supported throughout the process can significantly affect trust, engagement and confidence in the investigation. Small changes in language, consistency and approach can make a meaningful difference to both survivor wellbeing and investigative outcomes.

By using this guide, officers can bring care and consistency where they have influence and help reduce trauma, improve engagement, strengthen trust, and create a more positive experience for victims and survivors navigating the criminal justice system.

**Because how survivors experience the process matters, just as much as the outcome.**



