

ALLEGATIONS OF HISTORICAL ABUSE

It is often the case that victims of abuse are not able to disclose the abuse at the time it is happening, but may do so at some later stage either in childhood or in later life as an adult.

The term 'historical abuse' is commonly used to refer to disclosures of abuse that was perpetrated in the past. It is normally used when the victim is no longer in circumstances where they consider themselves at risk of the perpetrator and more commonly used when adults disclose abuse experienced during childhood.

The manner with which disclosure is made and to whom it is made may vary and may be made in a variety of situations e.g. during counselling, to a Doctor, to a third sector support group, in the case of a child to a foster carer or school.

The wishes of the victim and what outcomes the victim seeks must be taken into consideration in how that disclosure is handled. It is recognised that the victim may not want the matter referred to the Police or to the Social Services for investigation. However, the law requires agencies to share information necessary to safeguard a child.

The term 'historical' abuse is not defined and is not a formally recognised definition. The use of this term can lead to complacency in the recognition or identification of the existence of current risk to [other] children.

The professional receiving the disclosure, or the victim, may not be aware of the perpetrators present circumstances and therefore are not able to assess whether they pose a current risk to a child, children or other vulnerable person.

It is therefore imperative that following disclosure of 'historic' abuse, consideration is given to whether the alleged perpetrator presents as a current risk through their having contact with children or vulnerable people through for instance a familial setting, as a professional or by their behaviour and habitual conduct.

Agencies and organisations will have their own policies and procedures in respect of child and adult protection. However, professionals should, unless they have credible and definitive information to indicate otherwise, adopt the position that the perpetrator presents a risk to children and should share the information with a statutory agency so that appropriate enquiries can be made.

If the outcome of initial enquiries indicates an existing risk, a strategy meeting/discussion will take place in accordance with child protection procedures.

If the disclosure is made by a child, a referral should always be made to Childrens Social Care for the area in which the child is living and Child Protection procedures will then follow.