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## CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION: WORKING WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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This paper is designed for practitioners who are sharing the [Pathfinder webinar for parents](#). Parents are often the first line of defence when their children are at risk of or are experiencing criminal exploitation. On occasions, the parent or caregiver can be overlooked - both in terms of their role as a safeguarding partner and their own needs / wellbeing.

As part of the Pathfinder learning, we have spoken to professionals and volunteers who have experience of working with this group of parents / caregivers. We have also spoken with parents and caregivers with lived experience. Despite parents and caregivers coming from very different backgrounds, in different parts of the country, there were some common themes that came through from their accounts of their journey's.

This short paper collates some of our findings and is suitable for those who are new to this area of practice or a helpful refresher to those with more experience and knowledge. We have also included some guidance for sharing the link to the webinar with parents / caregivers.

## OUR LEARNING / PRACTICE POINTS

### Knowledge

- Having a child in a household experiencing exploitation is likely to affect all members of the family.
- Parents may have seen and heard things that they suspect or know are wrong. Often, they will be scared and unsure what to do with this information.
- Parents could be living with uncertainty and feeling powerless to do anything about the exploitation of their child.
- Parents may feel blamed and could be hypersensitive to anything that may feel blaming or shaming. Their child could have a high profile in the local community, due to the exploitation. This can increase their sense of being judged / talked about.
- Professionals need to be aware of how different parents will cope with things. Some may appear like they do not want to engage. Sometimes, parents may not understand what is going on and may struggle to put their feelings into words. We need to look at this as a survival response. They may have been managing their child's exploitation for a long time, so it may make sense for them to withdraw and to feel like they need to protect themselves emotionally. Every parent will have their own way to cope.
- We need to be thinking about and asking what the pressures on parents are.
  - o How is the parent coping?
  - o How do they cope with having services in their life?
  - o How do they hold a job down or their other responsibilities?
  - o What impact could it have when professionals arrange meetings for when they are not free, and how can this be perceived?
  - o Can they afford to take time off work for meetings?
  - o How do they look after the other family members?
  - o Is their accommodation at risk if the police are frequently at the home?
  - o How do they look after themselves?
  - o What is the impact of their child's exploitation on their friendships?
  - o How does their child being exploited affect their relationship with their neighbours / local community?
  - o Is the parent sleeping and eating well?
- We should hold the experience of trauma in mind when working with parents (see Appendix A). They may have their own experiences of trauma, in addition, having a child who is experiencing exploitation is also highly traumatic for parents. Witnessing the impact of trauma on your child could create secondary trauma for the parent.

## Skills

- It is important to be sensitive in your approach to parents. It will be deeply upsetting for this to be happening to their child.
- Many parents report feeling isolated. Although some will have a network of support around them, they don't always feel understood or that others can relate to them. It is important to listen to the parent and to not assume anything.
- Parents could be living with a whole range of emotions. On the surface we may see anger / frustration and other emotions that may be hard to deal with. But we need to understand what is going on underneath for them. We need to step back and ask what is going on here? We need to make good use of supervision, so we don't take things personally.
- Agencies will sometimes struggle to engage a parent in a helpful way. If you do have a positive relationship, you may be able to support facilitating the building of trust between a family and other services. Joint visits, vouching for a professional, explaining how other services work, are a few ways this could be done.
- Parents are not always aware of what [they may need to share](#). Talk with them about what could be helpful to share and why.
- Remember that families can feel overwhelmed (and confused) by the number of services involved and the number of appointments / meetings held. It is important for professionals to keep each other in the loop so we don't keep asking parents the same thing. Parents reported that they didn't understand why services didn't speak more. They also spoke of how hard it is to keep going over the same information – some reported that they found it traumatic. If you get told something, let the parent know who you will share that information with and why.
- Explore with a parent when things go well as evidence suggests that we need to support boosting protective factors. Try and get them to pick out:
  - o What was different?
  - o What protective factors were kicking in?
  - o What strengths helped to manage the concerns?
- Explain to parents what [reachable, teachable moments](#) are and how this could be a key moment to try and connect with their child.
- Parents have their own set of needs and need to be supported. Working to support parents / caregiver should be included in the intervention plan.

## Values

- Coming from a place of compassion should always be our starting point with a parent. Appreciating that a parent will have done their best.
- Parents are the experts of their experiences. We can come with ideas, but it's about listening to parents and creating a safe space to understand how things look and feel for them.
- Coming from a place of curiosity where we recognise that we don't know everything, all the time. Agencies / professionals may only have a fraction of all the information. We need to ask:
  - o How much of the situation are we not aware of?
  - o What do we not know?
  - o What do we not have a full grasp of?
- It is our job to engage parents, we need to make the relationship work. Parents are unique, so you will need to develop a bespoke approach that will work for them. Just because you have worked successfully with one parent in one way, doesn't mean that approach will be suitable for all parents. It is our professional responsibility to find ways to engage the parents and families we are worried about.
- Show kindness in how you work with a parent. For example, send a care package, make time to listen to them, express empathy.
- Parents are the sustainable, long-term change for their children. By wrapping support around parents, they may be in a better position to support their child, long after services have closed. We need to value parents and recognise that we need to upskill them. Our work should never undermine the parent / child relationship.
- If a parent is unhappy with how things are going, encourage them to talk with you about it. We should be open to challenge.

## THE WEBINAR

This webinar contains information parents with lived experience told us they would have found helpful. There may be other pieces of information that could be helpful to other parents / caregivers. We would strongly recommend that prior to sharing the webinar with a parent / caregiver you review the other resources developed by the Pathfinder. These include:

- Identifying elements of cultural competence
- Emerging and promising practice approaches
- Safe and effective exit

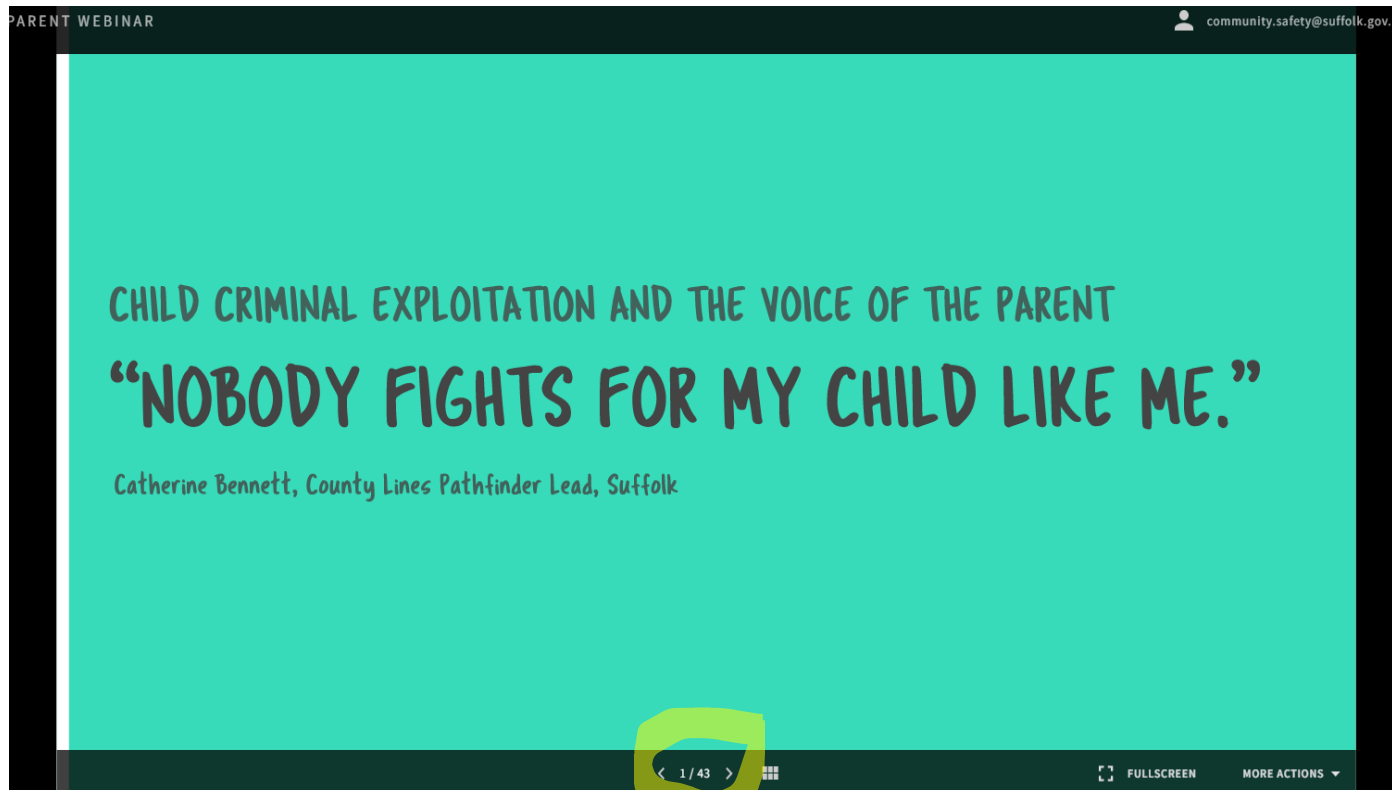
## INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO VIEW THE PARENT WEBINAR

The webinar lasts for about an hour. It is recommended that regular breaks are taken throughout.

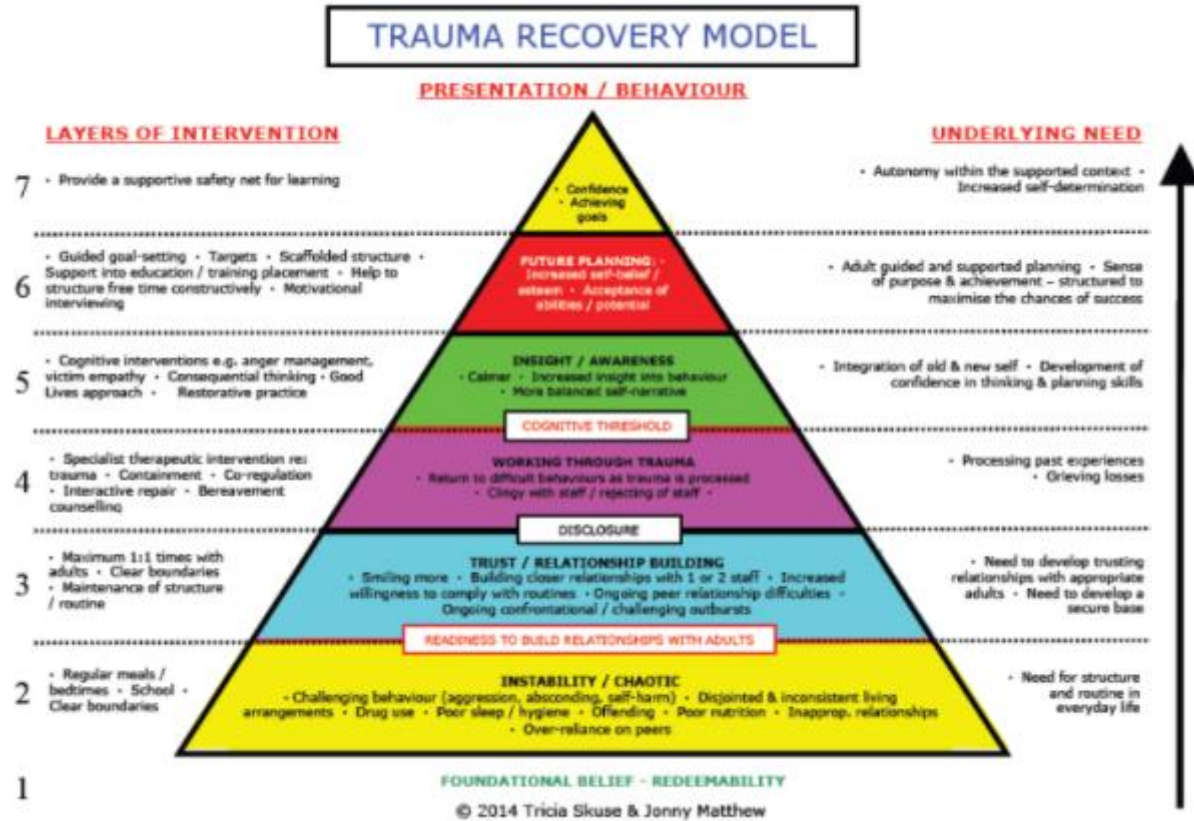
The parent webinar can be shared by giving the [link](#). Ideally, you would watch the webinar with the parent / caregiver. This is so you can discuss any points that may come up.

If you share the link, you will need to make sure that the parent / caregiver has internet access and a suitable device that can play audio.

The page will take a few seconds to load. You can move through the slides by clicking the arrows at the bottom of the screen. The audio will start to play within a few seconds.



Appendix A



Source: [Trauma Recovery Model – aspiring psychologist \(wordpress.com\)](http://www.aspiringpsychologist.com)