

### Child ME Multi-Agency Learning Review Practitioner Briefing

BSCB has recently completed a multi-agency learning review regarding a care leaver who sadly committed suicide. There is evidence that Child ME was sexually exploited by an older male as a child and in adulthood. The review recognised the considerable efforts that professionals made to work with Child ME and the difficulties of working with an older child who does not want to be in care. The following learning should therefore not be seen to be reflective of failing of professionals involved in this case. Multi-agency learning reviews are completed on cases that do not meet the SCR criteria, but where partners agree that there is likely to be learning from the case that will be applicable more widely. These reviews are not published and the details of the case included within the practitioner briefing are limited.

#### Enabling children to understand their identity

Child ME experienced a traumatic early childhood and concerns in respect of neglect and abuse remained until being taken into care at the age of 9. He did receive therapeutic interventions, however it was evident that past experiences continued to exert a significant influence on his wellbeing and he particularly struggled to understand his sexuality.

The review emphasises the need for early and persistent work with children who have experienced childhood traumas to enable them understand what has happened to them, their identity and place in the world. There can be no one size fits all approach and when and how to work with a child will need to be tailored to meet their needs, making use of specialist services.

#### Identifying CSE risks

By virtue of being looked after, young looking and having few friends, Child ME was vulnerable to exploitation by older males. Agencies rightly recognised this potential, however it was questioned indications of exploitation were then to readily attributed to substance misuse, instead of asking whether his having substances was an indication that he was being exploited.

The case raises the need not to make assumptions about who is likely to be a perpetrator and who is likely to be a victim especially when working with boys and in considering same-sex exploitation. Similarly just because a child attains adulthood does not stop them being vulnerable. The BSCB [CSE screening tool](#) should be used as a starting point for assessing the risk of CSE.

#### Responding to a child's wishes and feelings

There were many occasions when practitioners could not act in accordance with Child ME's stated wishes as to have done so would have placed him at an increased risk. However, the review identified examples of more subtle ways to respond to a child's wishes.

This can be as simple as the ways that meetings and services are offered. Child ME did not respond well to appointments in formal settings. However, practitioners who spent time with him and offered interventions more creatively were able to engage with him. When formal appointments are unavoidable, practitioners should consider how they can support children to attend and engage in them and not give up after one failed attempt.

#### Managing changes in staffing

As is probably inevitable when any child is open to services for a number of years, Child ME experienced a number of changes in the practitioners who were working with him. Those who were involved over the longer term reported having been uncomfortable with some of the decisions made by colleagues who had a less developed understanding of Child ME's needs.

Changes in staffing cannot be entirely avoided and it is in these situations that the importance of management oversight becomes more critical. Managers should be alert to children who are managed by staff who have had less involvement with the case and should ensure that decision making over the longer term is consistent.