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# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

QUALITATIVE REPORT

JULY 2020

GAME CHANGERS



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# BACKGROUND

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# BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH GOALS

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## BACKGROUND

The Council of Europe is currently implementing a project to Support the implementation of Barnahus (Children's House), phase II in Slovenia. Barnahus is a leading European model for a child-friendly multidisciplinary and interagency response to child sexual exploitation and abuse. Among its expected results, the project aims to increase awareness of professionals and the wider public on the phenomenon of child sexual abuse in Slovenia. The project is implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Justice in Slovenia and co-financed by the European Union Structural Reform Support Services.

In this context, Ipsos carried out for the Client quantitative and qualitative research among adults and children in Slovenia. The Qualitative research was covering children and parents separately. The main aim was to get insights for: the communication tools and materials used to explain/encourage reporting as well as general awareness raising, the approach used by professionals to communicate with child victims, etc. The results of qualitative research is presented in a separate document.

# BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH GOALS

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## THE MAIN GOALS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- The main goal of the qualitative research (children and parents separately) is to get insights into the cultural aspect in understanding and awareness of child sexual abuse.
- The research will also help to inform: the communication tools and materials used to explain/encourage reporting, as well as general awareness raising, the approach used by professionals to communicate with child victims, etc.

The results of the qualitative research are presented below.

# RESEARCH APPROACH

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# RESEARCH APPROACH

## FOCUS GROUPS



### METHODOLOGY

- 4 focus groups in Ljubljana
- 6-8 participants per group
- LOI = 2 hours



### TARGET GROUP

- Children (boys and girls), 12-17 years old
- Parents with children under 18 living at home - not related to the children identified for the focus groups mentioned above



### FGD STRUCTURE - *the detailed structure is presented in the appendix*

- 1<sup>st</sup> FGD: girls in the age frame of 12-17 years old
- 2<sup>nd</sup> FGD: Boys in the age frame of 12-17 years old
- 3<sup>rd</sup> FGD: Parents with children under 18 years old
- 4<sup>th</sup> FGD: Parents with children under 18 years old

# How to read?

## SYMBOLS IN THE REPORT



**Children:** this symbol stands for content connected to children in general (not girls or boys separately)



**Boys:** this symbol stands for content connected to boys only



**Girls:** this symbol stands for content connected to girls only



**Parents:** this symbol stands for content connected to parents in general



# SUMMARY

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## AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

**Children understand the basics** of child sexual abuse but limit it to inappropriate touching and rape while parents define it broader, with all sexually related acts that are not consensual and are unpleasant to a child are considered sexual abuse, including verbal addressing, exposure to pornographic content etc.

It's clear to some degree that a **victim** of sexual abuse **can be any child** and that the **perpetrator can be anyone** (even other children or family members). Nevertheless, both target groups pointed out several risk factors ranging from **physical** (physically weaker – girls, younger children), to **physiological** (lower self-esteem, being uninformed), and **social** (dysfunctional family environment, weak social network) and **economical** (lower income). This indicates **significant stereotyping of the victim**. Consequently, such a mindset represents the **potential danger** that a child who doesn't identify with any of these potential risk factors may develop the attitude: "I am not weak. That cannot happen to me." and therefore ignore warning signs that might appear. The same goes for the stereotypes about perpetrators, which might result in conclusion: "He/she couldn't be the one."

**Perpetrators** are perceived as **mentally dysfunctional individuals** who are either born with this abnormality or, even more frequently, are raised in dysfunctional environment and even experienced the same abuse in their childhood. As claimed by all target groups, **being informed about abuse calls for immediate action**.

For **children**, this usually means **telling this information to a trusted adult, most probably their parents**, less so to teachers (not considered the most reliable/actionable, especially among girls) or other social workers. **Parents**, however, would rather first **gather additional information, take into account and analyse several factors**, in the first place the **identity of the perpetrator** (if it's someone a victim is in contact with) and the **source** of information before proceeding further. Rarely would they interact with a victim by themselves as they don't believe in their own competences to deal with it properly.

# Summary

## BARNAHUS

The concept of a safe house for child sexual abuse victims is not only understood as a place where the first phases of the indictment are done but also as a **place where the victim gets help and support until needed**.

As imagined by participants, this would **not be a classic institution** but rather an environment where victims would feel **safe but free, listened to** rather than questioned, **individually treated** (whenever and wherever they need) by a **highly experienced, coordinated and aligned team** with **one guardian** who would accompany the child/victim and their families throughout the process.

**The rational phase of the process should be quick and done involve non-uniformed specialists. The Interviewing** would take place **just once, be recorded and shared** with all parties involved, but the **child would interact** (especially at the beginning) with a **limited number of people**, preferably only one.

**The recovery phase** is more **emotional** and should therefore **take more time**.

Although they believe all phases of the process are important (medical check-up, interview with police etc.), both target groups see **psychological help** as **crucial** besides **physical safety** and **isolation** from the perpetrator.

**All activities and processes** would need to be **adapted to children, explained and done in child-friendly manner**, bearing in mind not just the legal aspect but also the **physical and psychological wellbeing** of the victim. Besides that, the social aspect has to be covered as well – providing **confidentiality** with **inclusion in society and everyday life**.

## COMMUNICATION TOOLS

The **main source** of information about child sexual abuse is **primarily school**, but currently, it's **not executed in the most efficient way possible**.

Children believe that it should be **more engaging and interactive** to draw attention and **make an impact**. Parents agree that school is the best place for both target groups, children and parents, because it's a **formal environment** where everybody is more **attentive and responsive**. A general recommendation from the participants was that this topic has to be **discussed continuously and repeatedly**.

The **first information** regarding CSA can be **institutionalized (in schools)**, since schools are the rational pillar, **but the parent is usually a first authority** and **emotional pillar**, so the communication **should also be based on their talks with children**. Parents should be aware that **listening to the children** (especially in case of CSA) **can in many cases be enough, and they can't do anything wrong when talking to them**.

When it comes to other communication channels, **social networks** could also be used (they are important to and have a high impact on children) but here **execution is crucial** because they are primarily used for entertainment and communication purposes.

Regardless of the media channel, the content has to **attract attention** at the beginning, **engage** throughout the story and give **clear and impactful messages** that such abuse **must be reported**, that it **will be dealt** with in a proper way and, most importantly, that **help will be provided**.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on everything heard, **we can be positive that being aware** of the occurrence of child sexual abuse (regardless of whether the informer is a child or a parent) **will result in some kind of action** aimed at protecting and helping the victim.

Even though participants are **quite aware** of the **incidence**, they are still **surprised by the rate of occurrence**. Therefore, the message that **every 5th child ... has to be repeated** whenever this topic is presented and discussed.

Despite the fact that they generally **know that the abuse can appear in different forms, younger children don't have the capacity to recognize all of them**. For a start, we have to assure that such abuse will be detected in the first place. In this regard, a **systematic approach** in informing the youngest members of our society **has to be established** and some „**blind spots**“ in the process covered. As **parents don't completely identify with the role of an educator** in this matter (many don't feel comfortable, initiate the topic only in case of urgency, don't know when and how to initiate the topic, and suggest that this topic is addressed by school), **educational institutions** seems to be a **more suitable option** but only **under few conditions**:

- **children have to feel that** they are perceived as **trustworthy** and **equal** debaters – what they say will be taken seriously,
- explanation has to be **adjusted to different age groups**,
- content has to **catch their attention** and **engage** them (**dialog** – not one-way communication)
- **the main messages should be frequently repeated**: it can happen to **anyone**, a **perpetrator** can be **anybody**, if you know such abuse happened, **you have to report it to** (exact instructions have to be given here) and **everything will be ok**.

However, since **parents** are probably the **first touch points to report to**, they are **one of the most important target groups** in communicating **how exactly they should act** in such a case: **what shouldn't and what has to be done, where and how?**

## CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the **implementation of the Barnahus concept** in Slovenia, several suggestions should be taken into consideration:

- **avoiding an „institutionalized“ approach** – less formal, more individualized and flexible
- **prioritizing psychological support** – only after being accepted by a trustee who makes contact, gaining their trust and explaining the whole process that follows, should the victim proceed with the further process accompanied by this person
- **adjusting to a victim** – regarding the speed and the duration of the process, the sequence of phases and the form of execution
- **grounding** the whole process on a **pull (not push) approach** – waiting for a child to initiate the conversation
- **preventing the reliving** of the experience – the victim describes the experience **only once** in the inner circle of the team and all other parties deal with the event separately based on this first and only testimony
- **prolonging** the treatment and support for **as long as needed**. not just for the victims but **also their family members**
- **assuring safety** (physical and psychological) and **confidentiality**.

# MAIN FINDINGS

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A photograph of two young children standing outdoors. On the left is a young boy with curly hair wearing a green button-down shirt and blue pants. On the right is a young girl with long brown hair wearing a red coat with a white collar and dark pants. They are standing on a paved path next to a stone wall. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the stone wall and some greenery.

# Children's rights and perception of child sexual abuse

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# Awareness and understanding of CSA

## THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



### DEFINITION

**Children** define their rights as **things all children are entitled to - things they are allowed to do** and things **others are not allowed to do to them**. The list is short, starting with **basics** needs and rights – the right to **live**, be provided with **home, food, family, health, education** but also **freedom of choice, socializing, doing things they want** and **expressing own opinion**.

### VIOLATION

When asked about the **consequences of violation, they focus on those related to the perpetrator** (indictment, court hearing, punishment) but they are **not sure if the violation of all rights is treated as an offence** that is prosecuted by state authorities.

*„That something belongs to you. That it's taken for granted.” (girls)*

*“What every child is entitled to.” (boys)*

*“What he can do and what others cannot do to him.” (boys)*

*“He is punished. He is punished by the state and by the court of law.” (girls)*

*“It depends on what that is.” (girls)*

*“If it comes out (it's punished).” (boys)*

# Awareness and understanding of CSA

## THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



### DEFINITION

In the definition provided by parents, the list is **upgraded with safety, respect, expression and sexual integrity**. Respecting these rights is understood as a foundation to be brought up into a **“normal human being”**.

### VIOLATION

Parents focus primarily on the consequences for children - psychological and behavioural that can “ruin their future”. When it comes to those **related to perpetrators**, they point out that **only if the violation is reported and proved**. Some participants mentioned that sometimes violence takes place in the family and in that case, it can even happen that such behaviour is not disclosed and the pattern can even be repeated by victims.

*“To give them everything needed to grow up as a normal being.” (parents)*

*“If these rights are violated, it influences every part of your being.” (parents)*

*“There are no consequences because nobody talks about it.” (parents)*

*“Social isolation.” (parents)*

## THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD VIOLENCE



Children differentiate several layers of violence: **physical**, **psychological**, **verbal** (e.g. insult, slander), **cyberbullying** and **sexual**.

*"If parents insult you." (girls)*

*"It can be also done by the teachers." (girls)*

*"Physical, mental, internet, sexual violence, which is the most sick." (boys)*

*"When any right is violated, that is already violence." (boys)*

*"If someone insults or beats you." (boys)*



Parents just added to the list **manipulation** and **intimidation** and pointed out **peer to peer violence** as one of the forms.

*„Neglect." (parents)*



# Awareness and understanding of CSA

## DEFINING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE



Sexual abuse is a **sexual act that is not consensual**. In the first place, children mentioned **inappropriate touching** and **rape** - and individually also "blackmail for private / naked images". Child sexual abuse is also **defined by the victims' age** (up to 18 years old) but **can be committed either by child or an adult**.



For parents, sexual abuse **doesn't even require a physical act** – addressing a child with **sexually offensive** and inappropriate **words** (e.g. commenting on body parts), **exposure to pornography**, photography and/or the distribution of photos and even **observation** of a child's body.

*"Touching intimate parts. Not just intimate." (parents)*

*"Something a child finds uncomfortable." (parents)*

*"Family environment. If you are lost. Suitable target. If you don't stand up for yourself." (parents)*

*"That someone abuses you without your consent." (girls)*  
*"Immediately when there is no consent. If you do not agree." (girls)*  
*"If someone grabs you. That is already enough." (girls)*  
*"If you are not comfortable." (girls)*  
*"Is there a nicer name for a paedophile?" (boys)*  
*"To do something sexual with them without their consent." (boys)*



## RISK FACTORS TO BECOME A VICTIM *"Girls are an easier target. There are not that many cases where girls rape a boy." (girls)*



There are many factors children believe can make a child **"easier victims"**:

- **gender** - girls more than boys because they are physically weaker
- **age** - younger children are **weaker** and they **don't necessary understand** the situation
- **self-confidence** - less confident children who don't stand up for themselves)
- **clothes** - even the choices they make when it comes to the way they dress because seductive clothes makes them more noticeable, can be an excuse for perpetrators to claim they were showing availability and willingness for sexual intercourse and
- **social status** (there is a belief that children coming from more affluent families are more knowledgeable).

*"You have to know how to defend yourself." (girls)*

*"Sometimes boys take a short skirt as an excuse. They say that was the reason for the rape. They say that is what you wanted anyways." (girls)*

*"Those that are dressed more appealingly as they look more attractive to others." (boys)*

*"Older (adults) will know better what is going on." (boys)*

*"If you come from a nice family, you are more conscious." (boys)*

*"If something stands out on you. I have a cousin with autism and he is being teased all the time." (girls)*



## RISK FACTORS FOR BECOMING A PERPETRATOR



For children, **perpetrators are, in two words, “not normal”**. Individually, they mention the word paedophile but in the majority they rather focus on mental health, describing them as **mentally disturbed, psychopaths, insane, weird, damaged, miserable** individuals who are **either attracted to children** or choose them because they are **“easier targets**. They pointed out that some of the perpetrators lived in dysfunctional families and an unhealthy environment, so they were **traumatized** or **sexually abused** as well. Even though they think that sometimes it's hard to figure out their intentions, some of them can be **suspicious** at first sight. The age of the perpetrator is not a clear differentiating factor for them. They understand that a child can commit the act of sexual abuse as well and it can also **happen at home**.

*“Psychics.” (girls)*

*“Older, weird men.” (girls)*

*“What kind of woman says let’s abduct a boy?” (girls)*

*“There are also perfectly normal men. In appearance.” (girls)*

*“It is apparent in some and not so much in others.” (girls)*

*“They survived dramatic experiences and something shifted in their head.”*

*“Some of them like it. They are attracted to children.” (boys)*

*“They were exposed to such behaviour in their childhood.” (boys)*

*“Those who cannot attract women of their own age.” (boys)*



## RISK FACTORS TO BECOME A VICTIM



In terms of **risk factors**, parents mostly agree with all those mentioned by children. **Girls, younger children**, children with **special needs**, children that are in any way “**different than others**” (e.g. overweight) and those with a **lack of self-esteem** are considered to be **easier targets**.

A very important factor is also the **knowledge** children have about sexual abuse and **social networks** (those who have strong social networks are less at risk).

Parents also believe that there is a **higher risk** in families with a **lower social standard**, especially if combined with a lack of information provided to children about sexual, abuse but they all agree that **this is not always the case**.

**Trustworthy family relationship** (between parents, between parents and children and also other family members), as well as the **educational principles and beliefs** of parents (what is considered a sexual act) can also add to a risk level and **general violent behaviour correlates with sexual violent behaviour**. The same as among children, **seductive dress style was mentioned among the risk factors**.

*“Open conversation is important.” (parents)*

*“Even the physical characteristics of a child.” (parents)*

*“If girls’ bodies look more mature.” (parents)*

*“A child that has many friends and knows how to make contact.” (parents)*



# Awareness and understanding of CSA

## RISK FACTORS FOR BECOMING A PERPETRATOR



When it comes to **perpetrators**, parents share the opinion with children: perpetrators are **more frequently men** (physical strength enables them to subordinate a victim easier), coming from an **inappropriate family environment** and many times also the **victims** of such abuse **themselves**.

Their **explanation** is however **wider**. They pointed out that perpetrators are very often **people that are close to the child** (trusted by them), either family members, friends or those working with minors (e.g. priests, teachers).

Sometimes it's a „**deformity**“ they were born with.

In addition to that, they are **good manipulators** who know how to hide their actions.



*“Mostly men. From a family environment.” (parents)*

*“A child trusts them.” (parents)*

*“It's easier for men to subordinate.” (parents)*

*“I never heard of woman raping someone.”*

*(parents)*

*“They also have some kind of problems from their childhood.” (parents)*



## HOW TO ACT?



If they are entrusted with information about child sexual abuse, children would be **focused on immediately reporting it**. For start, they claim they **would try to convince the victim** to report it him/herself but they wouldn't wait. They understand that some victims don't report the abuse because they are **ashamed** and/or **afraid**. **Most** of the girls **would confide in their parents** because they know their parents would know what and how to proceed while **boys mentioned teachers** and social workers in the first place. A girl who experienced peer to peer violence stressed that the **teachers are not always the best** to go to because they might not believe the child, don't know how to help or even don't care – and some other participants agreed with her observation

For children, the **right person** to confide to is someone they **trust**, who would treat this information as **confidential** (would not share it with others), would **take the matter seriously** and **believe** the child, someone who would react but **not panic** or **“make a drama out of that”**.

*“You have to tell.” (girls)*

*“First, I would convince her to tell. If she would not, I would tell someone, no matter what she would say.”*

*“Definitely not to the teachers. Arrange it yourself or stop making it up.” (girls)*

*“It is rare that you can really confide in a teacher. They just don't care or they don't know how to solve it.” (girls)*

*“First to mine (my family) so we could think through how to seek help.” (girls)*

*“I would tell my mum, to help me. If it happened to me, I could not tell. I would tell a psychologist.” (girls)*

*“Someone that you can trust.” (girls)*

*“To my parents as well, so they know in what I got myself into.” (girls)*

*“She/he should not make too much drama, because then the child would feel even worse.” (boys)*

*“To someone who will take you seriously.” (boys)*

# Awareness and understanding of CSA

## HOW TO ACT?



In the same situation, the **majority of parents would be more careful**. They all claim that they would react but their approaches would depend on two main factors: the **source** of information and the **suspect**.

**Many** of them **don't feel competent to interact with the victim** (interaction has to be established by a child psychologist) but if they knew the child, they might start with conversation with the goal of preparing a proper plan of how to proceed – who to go to first. The **main turning point** would be if the abuse **happened in the family**. This is the first thing they would try to explore.

Possible **touch points** for reporting would be the **police**, a **centre for social work**, or **school** (social worker, teacher or psychologist) - in few cases, also the parents of the victim. Some parents explained that the social service doesn't have a good reputation; others pointed out the police in the same context.

**The majority** of parents **believe** that if their children would be entrusted with such information, **they or their partners would be their first go-to address**.

When asked about possible reasons why such abuse wouldn't be reported, parents mentioned the same reasons as children (shame and fear) but also add **disbelief, guilt, not understanding** the situation (younger children might think such behaviour is normal) and honour.

*"I would call the police."  
"If I know the information is verified."  
"You definitely have to report."  
"I have zero tolerance."  
"I would talk with the child."  
"I think we are not qualified to do that."  
"Such a thing has to be handled properly."  
"If you know a child, you can talk to them."*

A young child with light brown hair is focused on playing with wooden blocks. In the background, there is a white toy house with a wooden roof and two heart-shaped cutouts. The scene is set in a bright, indoor environment, likely a playroom or nursery, with a window visible on the right side.

# Concept of Barnahus – house for children

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS



After seeing the presentation video for Barnahus, **girls** associated it with **safe houses**, which they had already heard about, **boys** with **hospital**.

*„Adjusted school in nature.“ (boys)*



**Parents** remembered the **incidence rate** (1 out of 5 children), **recalled** some negative examples of addressing such abuse that they had encountered (victim was disclosed, different institutions were not cooperating, the perpetrator set free after a very short period etc.) and an **interdisciplinary team** (closely connected, cooperating each from their speciality) working with victims.

*“I like the team of experts. They are more efficient.” (parents)*

Both target groups imagine that after such an experience, **victims should have the possibility to decide** whether they want to stay for a longer period, return when they need someone to talk to or just report the abuse and go back to their environment.

*“To be able to visit this house for a longer period. For check-ups, examinations and therapy.”*



## IDEAL ENVIRONMENT *"Colourful. Kind and happy." (girls)*

The majority of participants, children and parents, **imagine Barnahus wouldn't be a typical "institution-like"** building but rather a building that has a **similar architecture to kindergartens or schools** (unusual, in vivid colours with plenty of pictures), **pleasant, cosy, relaxed and homely** (with music they like, objects that reminds them of home), located in **nature** or surrounded by it, **safe** but at the same time **feeling complete freedom** to move and do whatever you want.



Bearing in mind the **possibility of a longer stay**, girls imagine **everyone would have their own spacious room** (with a high ceiling).

*"We would like to have our own room." (girls)*



Boys mentioned **toys, games and cartoons** suitable for different age groups as children has to do other things to forget.



Many parents think that it could be great if children would be surrounded by **animals**, maybe even be entitled to **therapy with animals**. Only some parents think the location and exterior has to be **as neutral as possible** to prevent the disclosure of the victims.

*"It shouldn't be different from other buildings from the outside." (parents)*

*"That there are no high fences." (girls)*  
*"So you do not feel as though you are in a cage." (girls)*

*"I would not like it to resemble a prison." (girls)*  
*"A big house with many rooms and children's pictures. To prevent children from thinking about it." (boys)*

*"In a way, a child would feel safe like home." (boys)*

*"Equipped like home." (boys)*

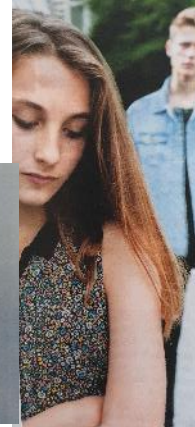
*"Isolation rooms – to be able to be alone." (boys)*

*"Sofas instead of chairs." (boys)*



A picture that one of the boys drew in the collage

## MOOD BOARD



*Dlje kot včeraj?*  
**SEVEDA  
ZMOREŠ!**



↑  
**ENG: A step further than yesterday?  
Of course you can!**

## IDEAL PROCESS

Both target groups recommend that **interactions would be initiated by victims and see pull rather than push as the best approach, waiting for victim to decide where, when and with whom** they would like to talk about their experience, **not questioning but listening**. This means **time pressure would be minimized** - the whole procedure is **not conducted in one day** (it's too stressful and the information might not be reliable – details would be forgotten) but rather **over a longer period** (a few days, even weeks if necessary).



For parents, it would be ideal if for every child, **one guardian would be assigned the moment the victim enters the house** and this person **would accompany him/her throughout the process** of indictment and recovery. It's very important to them that the whole process from reception to therapy and **from indictment to indictment** is done **as quickly as possible** but the **process of recovery has to be adjusted to each individual** (in terms of place, time and also team).

*"It shouldn't be too similar to an interview. That it would be like a conversation." (girls)*

*"That you have many psychologists to pick from and you choose one." (girls)*

*"That you have a few days to get to know these people. To talk about other things." (girls)*

*"I would not like to be poked all the time." (girls)*

*"To tell what you want, when you want. When you are ready." (girls)*

*"To leave you alone. When you would be willing to talk." (girls)*

*"It should be more times, definitely." (girls)*

*"He would first talk with a psychologist who would explain what kind of examinations will take place." (boys)*

*"(one day) That would be too fast." (boys)*

*"He would get one psychologist who would always be with him." (boys)*

*"They shouldn't give the impression that they are questioning him." (boys)*

*"Someone who knows how to talk with such a child has to be the first one in the process." (parents)*

*"This act has to be treated as a priority." (parents)*

*"A child is really in focus and feels he is important" (parents)*

## IDEAL PROCESS

In terms of reporting the abuse, participants mentioned that the **hardest thing is to entrust the experience** to someone.

They imagine the **interview with police staff** would be done **even before coming** to the Barnahus. Here, they suggest being less formal and strict to avoid intimidating the child. All agree that the **interview** has to be **conducted just once and with one person only** – recording the conversation for further usage and procedure.

**Psychologists** are crucial but only if he/she **is not intrusive** but **patient and offering useful advice**.

**A medical check-up is urgent and inevitable** but they warn that it has to be **gentle and with careful explanation**. Participants also think that in such a place, victims would **have the possibility to talk with someone who had experienced such abuse** themselves and who would be able to comfort them that everything is going to be ok.

*“That they tell her what they will do.”*  
*“It shouldn’t be too similar to an interview. That it would be like a conversation.”*  
*“The police immediately when you can remember the most.”*  
*“Police officers shouldn’t be dressed in uniforms.”*  
*“That there are few people. Not with everybody looking at you.”*  
*“I would not like to be poked all the time.”*  
*“That the checkups are not immediate. That they leave you alone for some time.”*  
*“It is ok for an abortion to be allowed for cases like these.”*  
*“To allow visits.” (girls)*  
*“A child probably goes through this experience only once. The focus has to be on treatment. Not on repeating the thing over and over again.” (parents)*  
*“Maybe you can talk with him while playing a game. It doesn’t have to be formal.” (parents)*  
*“It has to be adjusted to the child.” (parents)*



## IDEAL PROCESS



Children think **psychological help is crucial**, so an experienced psychologist or psychiatrist would have to be the first person the child would meet there. Victims have to be **free from fear, feel safe, trusted, respected and important, believe in a good end and in good in people** and understand that they didn't do anything wrong.



**Parents** pointed out that the **safety and isolation** of the victim from the environment and perpetrator are the first step in the whole process. They also added that **psychological help would have to be provided to the family as well** and the importance of **protecting the privacy of the victim**.

This **most important support** has to be **provided as long as necessary** and **in a form that is suitable for the child and the family**, either only in the safe house, ad hoc whenever needed or even at home and in other premises.

*„First something else. They shouldn't start with the conversation on that experience.“ (boys)*  
*“Everything should change slowly.“ (boys)*  
*“They have to take you seriously.“ (boys)*  
*“They would have to be patient, calm.“ (boys)*

*„The family has to be educated as well – to help the child.“ (parents)*  
*„If a person is the same, the place doesn't have to be.“ (parents)*

## ACTIVITIES

Both target groups pointed out the **importance of the child's social network** and the fear of being **excluded from society and everyday life**.

This is the reason why they think the victims must have to be provided the possibility of **doing different things that they like** or not doing anything at all, as well as **visits** from their significant others.

## PEOPLE

For all participants, the **people** working at Barnahus **are crucial**. Girls imagine **younger adults** who victims could relate to and identify with but children of both genders pointed out the importance of being **warm and friendly** empathis with a **positive attitude to life**.

*„I would like to talk to someone who has already experienced that. And she (he) tells you that it is ok in the end.“ (girls)*

*„That he/she know how to joke.“ (girls)*

*„You have to cry, smile and hug with him.“ (parents)*

*To allow visits.“ (girls)*

*“Some relax by doing sports and forget about it for a while.“ (girls)*



## KEY MESSAGES



When it comes to presenting such a house to the general public, **children** think that the **main messages** have to be:

- **“there are people there that understand you and will help you and**
- **it’s a safe place where you can confide your experience and nobody will blame you or think you did something wrong”.**



In communication, **parents** would focus on:

- **safety**
- **immediate help,**
- **expertize**
- **trust** and
- **confidentiality.**

*“They said that you should tell someone.”  
(girls)*

*“That it is not your fault.”*

*„That no one will judge you.”*





# Communication

## CURRENT APPROACH



Currently, the **main source of information** about child sexual abuse is **primary school** but it seems this topic is **not systematically included in the school schedule** so many children **don't remember the exact occasion** when they heard an explanation – sometimes it's discussed during biology class with the teacher, sometimes presented by external lecturers (e.g. visiting doctor) etc.

The topic is **usually presented in the form of a lecture** (which are sometimes uninteresting and not engaging enough) while children think it **would have a greater impact** if some kind of **interaction** with them could be established (e.g. discussion, workshop, role-playing and the testimonial of someone who has experienced sexual abuse).

Boys suggested that a special day for the whole school could be organized where all the activities would be devoted to this topic alone.

*"So long ago that I cannot recall. In the kindergarten or in the 1st and 2nd grade." (girls)*

*"Probably some biography. Because we had a really cool teacher and we talked with her a lot." (girls)*

*"A woman came from Ljubljana in third grade." (boys)*

*"Someone asked something and our teacher explained." (boys)*

*"I don't remember." (boys)*

*"They presented it in a really uninteresting way." (girls)*

*"Many classmates believe it to be a waste of time." (girls)*

*(girls)*

*"To also speak with the children. Not only talk." (girls)*

*"The whole school should be gathered together." (boys)*

*"That can be done much better." (boys)*

*"Some of them are sleeping, some of them don't listen and some of them don't care." (boys)*

## SUGGESTED APPROACH



When asked about **suitable media**, children think about the **social networks** they use most often – Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube, Tiktok, Facebook, Twitter.

Although they did comment that such serious topics are not something they would search for there, **it would be most accessible** to children **if presented in an attractive and noticeable way**.

**Elements** that could **improve efficiency** are **shorter, eye catching, impactful videos** or even a video game, using **celebrities and influencers, emojis** and/or a **story template** that is **sharable** or even viral.

*"On these kinds of (social) networks, you do not look for that kind of thing." (girls)*

*"If there was a good promotion, I would." (girls)*

*"If famous people would post / publish it." (girls)*

*"Really short sentences. Mostly pictures. As colourful as possible." (girls)*

*„Some emojis." (girls)*

*„If you cannot skip it." (girls)*

*"Most young people are on Instagram and YouTube." (boys)*

*"It should be an influencer." (boys)*

*"Or to be able to add it to a story." (boys)*

## CURRENT APPROACH



When asked about **their role in informing** their children about the topic, **many of the participating parents admitted that the precise topic of child sexual abuse wasn't discussed in the family** – maybe just in the context of violence in general, as a warning not to agree to any contact with people they don't know personally or just being reported that sexual abuse was explained in school. They think the **topic is extremely important** and it **has to be shared** and **discussed** not just with children **but also a wider audience.**

*"We discussed it because a van was circling around the school and I had to warn them what can happen." (parents)*

*"We just touched on the topic." (parents)*

*"We had a meeting in our school. So we talked with children afterwards." (parents)*

*"They heard in school." (parents)*

*"I did." (parents)*

*"Maybe because my children are still too young." (parents)*

*"I am not very comfortable about it but I had to do it regardless." (parents)*

## SUGGESTED APPROACH



**Parents** think **schools** should remain the **primary source** of information for them, as well as for their **children**. Everything that comes from this source is **treated by parents as highly important** so if they are engaged in any form of communication with the school, they are **attentive and thorough**.

They suggest that this topic is presented and discussed at **parent meetings, in leaflets** that would be distributed at the beginning of school, and at systematic medical examination. They also see **social media** as an important source of information for their children but they would like to be sure this topic is **systematically addressed by school and on TV as well**. Above all, parents think that informing about child sexual abuse has to be **continuously done, at least few times a year**.

*„Through school. If something is told at parents meeting, we would all hear it.” (parents)*

*“I agree with school.” (parents)*

*“To make one of those serious talk shows on TV.” (parents)*

*“A video on how to properly wash your hands was made recently. It was a good one.” (parents)*

*“To be repeated frequently. It stays in your mind.” (parents)*





## FEEDBACK ON PRESENTED EXAMPLES

### TELL SOMEONE YOU TRUST *"I wonder how. Biology." (girls)*



The presented **video attracted the attention** of children and was commented on afterwards as a suitable way to explain child sexual abuse – it's **clear and comprehensive**. They see it as content that **would be appropriate** for informing younger school aged children about the topic as well. However, although **they know bisexual people exist, some younger** participants **didn't understand or cannot imagine** sexual intercourse between two males.



Parents **commented on the promises** that were given at the end but at the same time also the fact that many times, such abuse doesn't end in a positive way as presented.

*"The most important message is: it's not your fault." (parents)*

*"To trust a child. That they can tell us and that we will believe them."  
(parents)*

*"It would be right if children from an early age would hear this." (parents)*

*"We talk too little about it." (parents)*

*„How he raped his brother. It is a bit weird, don't you think?" (girls)*

*"It is weird that the same person is both." (girls)*

*"(Surprising?) That adult man raped a boy." (boys)*

*"Powerful." (boys)*

*"I would watch it." (boys)*



## FEEDBACK ON PRESENTED EXAMPLES

### KIKO AND THE HAND *"For kids." (girls)*



Most children commented that the **"Kiko and the hand"** video has a **clear message** if you see it from beginning to end. They believe that it **would probably be understood** even by younger school aged children but **not necessarily noticed** - it's not catchy at the beginning despite attractive presentation (nice music, colours and animation). Their suggestion would be using it **as an ad that cannot be skipped**. They believe that such video could be used by parents to discuss the topic with their children.



**Parents**, however, perceive this video as **short, clear, concise and nice** but **doubt** that such content **would be easily understood by younger school aged children** (the inappropriate act or intent is not obvious enough), while for **older children**, it **wouldn't be interesting enough** to engage them to watch it thoroughly. They also see it as a good starting point for discussing the topic with children.

*"I would not pay attention." (girls)*  
*"It is not clear enough in the beginning." (girls)*  
*"It's shorter. So I would more likely watch it." (boys)*  
*"Parents could explain to children while watching this video." (boys)*  
*"It's for elementary school. First three grades." (boys)*



*"It's nice. For younger children. 6 years old and older. (parents)*  
*"Maybe she will ask few additional questions." (parents)*  
*"Maybe it could be clearer (underwear)." (parents)*

## FEEDBACK ON PRESENTED EXAMPLES

### LAKE *"Did she want to kill herself?" (boys)*



This **video attracts attention** at the beginning (e.g. the deep breathing reminds them of a horror movie), is described as **realistic, depressing** but also as **too long and slow**. The **content is not clearly understood**. The purpose of **diving** at the end is not completely logical – is it an attempt at suicide? What exactly happened? Boys warn that a victim could reach the wrong conclusion that the only way to solve the problem is suicide. Some children were surprised by the scene where the perpetrator is nice to the victim after the abuse and they don't really understand the roles and relationships between the actors - who is the older woman and who is the man to the child. For children, the way the topic is presented is **not very straightforward**.

*"A paedophile can be anyone." (boys)*

*"At the beginning, there should be something important to catch the attention."  
(boys)*

*"It's depressing." (boys)*

*"If we hadn't talked about this today, I would think he beat her." (boys)*

*"I don't get the ending." (girls)*

*"I would watch it because of the interesting part at the beginning." (girls)*

*"More realistic / it is realistic. It is played." (girls)*

*I don't know why she went out." (girls)*

*"He raped her and then he was nice." (girls)*

*"Wasn't that woman her mother?" (girls)*

*"She shouldn't swim back to the surface in the end. It should just shut down." (girls)*



## FEEDBACK ON PRESENTED EXAMPLES

### LAKE



**Parents** think that such video **could catch the attention** of teenagers but they were not very convinced by the approach. It presents some aspects clearly and in a very realistic way – the guilt the victim feels, the fact that it can happen anywhere and the perpetrator could be anyone, family included, children can hide the abuse etc. but their main **concern** was the way a victim could understand the **message** – it's reasonable to consider suicide. They would **suggest** using a **more positive approach** with the **encouraging message that such abuse has to be reported** (not hidden) and that it can be solved differently – give hope and solution. As a conclusion, parents see this ad as an **appropriate approach when addressing adults** and warning them about possible outcome but not for children who might get the wrong message.

*"It happens in the family." (parents)*

*"Children don't tell." (parents)*

*"It's not suitable for children. Doesn't tell them anything. There is no way out. It even suggests suicide as an option." (parents)*

*"Teenagers would understand what happened. But how to solve it is missing." (parents)*

# Appendix

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# SAMPLE

1st FGD - GIRLS		2nd FGD - BOYS	
ID	AGE	ID	AGE
1	14 y.o.	1	12 y.o.
2	15 y.o.	2	16 y.o.
3	14 y.o.	3	12 y.o.
4	13 y.o.	4	15 y.o.
5	15 y.o.	5	12 y.o.
6	13 y.o.	6	16 y.o.
7	14 y.o.	7	14 y.o.
8	14 y.o.	8	12 y.o.

3rd FGD - PARENTS			
ID	AGE	GENDER	CHILD
1	39 y.o.	male	daughter, 16 y.o.
2	48 y.o.	male	daughter, 13 y.o.
3	48 y.o.	male	son, 15 y.o.
4	44 y.o.	male	son, 13 y.o.
5	42 y.o.	female	daughter, 12 y.o.
6	44 y.o.	female	daughter, 13 y.o.
7	50 y.o.	female	daughter, 15 y.o.
8	46 y.o.	female	daughter, 13 y.o.

4th FGD - PARENTS			
ID	AGE	GENDER	CHILD
1	46 y.o.	male	daughter, 13 y.o.
2	54 y.o.	female	daughter, 12 y.o.
3	46 y.o.	female	daughter, 15 y.o.
4	32 y.o.	female	son, 13 y.o.
5	41 y.o.	female	daughter, 12 y.o.
6	48 y.o.	female	daughter, 15 y.o.

# GUIDELINES

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## Guideline for FGDs

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