

DETAILED CONCEPT NOTE

on sexual abuse
of children in
their circle of trust

including recommendations
by the Lanzarote Committee
as well as promising practices
which can be easily replicated

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Building a Europe
for and with children



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Council of Europe commitment to fight sexual violence against children

The **Council of Europe** upholds human rights across its 47 member states. In its work, the Council of Europe addresses the various forms of violence against children, including sexual violence, by setting standards, monitoring the implementation of those standards, and helping states through capacity building and awareness-raising activities.

The Council of Europe started its crusade against child sexual violence in the early 2000s. In 2007, it adopted the [Convention for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#), also known as “**the Lanzarote Convention**”, which has now been ratified by all member states of the Council of Europe, as well as by Tunisia. The Lanzarote Convention is the most ambitious and comprehensive international (potentially universal) legal instrument on the protection of children against sexual violence. It covers all possible kinds of sexual offences against children (including sexual abuse of a child, exploitation of children through prostitution, grooming and corruption of children through exposure to sexual content and activities and offences related to child abuse material). The Convention covers sexual abuse within the child’s family or “circle of trust” as well as acts carried

out for commercial or profit-making purposes. It sets forth that States in Europe and beyond shall establish specific legislation to criminalise such behaviour and take measures with an emphasis on keeping the best interest of children at the forefront, to prevent sexual violence but also to protect child victims and prosecute perpetrators. It also promotes international cooperation to achieve the same objectives. The implementation of the Lanzarote Convention is assessed by the Committee of the parties to the Convention (the Lanzarote Committee), which accompanies the work in state Parties to adopt legislation and policies for the prevention and protection of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children in all settings. This work enables member states and other stakeholders to identify and learn about important trends, but also to adopt and disseminate promising practices related to different aspects of sexual abuse against children.

Did you know...

When a country ratifies a convention, it becomes a party to the convention and it then has the obligation to implement the provisions and rights protected under that same convention. Protecting children from sexual abuse is not optional.

Did you know...

Child sexual abuse refers to sexual activities of an adult with a child. Even if a child has reached the age of sexual majority established in national laws, it is still sexual abuse if the adult uses coercion, force or threats, or if the adult abuses a position of trust, authority or influence, or takes advantage of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child. The Lanzarote Committee has invited Parties to address all serious harm to the sexual integrity of children by not limiting their criminal offences to sexual intercourse or equivalent acts (Recommendation 9, 1st Implementation report).

The Council of Europe has a long tradition of developing **awareness-raising** activities. These are aimed at informing or educating different groups of people (i.e., children, parents, professionals or the general public). For example, the Council of Europe organised the **ONE in FIVE Campaign (2010-2015)** with its well-known “underwear rule”.



Kiko and the Hand, and the Underwear Rule

Kiko and the Hand teaches the **Underwear Rule**, a simple guide to help parents explain to children where others should not try to touch them, how to react in case of abuse and where to seek help. What is The Underwear Rule? It’s simple: a child should not be touched by others on the body parts usually covered by their underwear. And they should not touch others in those areas. This material destined for children aged 3 to 7 helps parents and caregivers explain to children that their bodies belong to them, that there are good and bad secrets and good and bad touches.



Kiko and the Hand materials contain a short [video](#), a [booklet](#) and [guidelines for parents](#).



A variety of awareness-raising materials are produced together with partners, which may include videos, leaflets, booklets or other. Each material, of different formats and languages, ensures that the different groups understand the messages and information that is being disseminated. For example, drawings or fairy tale-type stories may be used to explain the risks and protection measures to young children. For the adolescent group, it may be more effective to disseminate messages through social media or in regular sexuality education or other appropriate classes in school.

European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November)

The European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November) (hereafter **the European Day**) is the continuation of the ONE in FIVE Campaign.

Did you know...

Many countries have in place so-called awareness-raising activities. Often, countries in the same region and beyond face similar concerns of sexual abuse against children. For this reason, materials developed by one organisation or country can and should serve as inspiration and/or be replicated across countries. The Council of Europe makes available, free of charge, materials in different [languages and formats](#).

The first edition of the European Day was celebrated in 2015. More than 40 initiatives and actions were undertaken by both governments and civil society. These were met with considerable success and made the European Day truly unique and special.

Each year, to mark the European Day, the Council of Europe invites its partners to focus on a specific topic. We also encourage activities and initiatives to raise awareness among children and adults of the risks and the steps that they can take to protect victims and prevent child sexual abuse. Exchanges and debates on each selected issue, in particular between children and parents, among parliamentarians, educators and other professionals are also highly encouraged. All materials from previous editions of the European Day are available on the European Day [website](#).

18 NOVEMBER

European Day on the Protection of Children
against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

www.coe.int/EndChildSexAbuseDay



2021 Edition: Making the circle of trust truly safe for children

This year's edition of the European Day focusses on one of the most common forms of sexual abuse against children: sexual abuse "in the circle of trust".

What is the circle of trust?

There is often the belief that danger comes from outside or the unknown, but many girls and boys experience violence, including sexual abuse, by people they most trust. As provided by the Lanzarote Convention, these relationships are usually based on "trust", "authority" or "influence". For these reasons, this type of violence is described as happening **"in the circle of trust"**. These offenders can be their parents or carers, members of the extended family, caretakers, including teachers and other professionals in schools, childcare professionals, sports coaches or other professionals working in sports facilities, religious workers, healthcare professionals, adults in charge of extra-curricular activities, tutors and other persons with which the children have close relations, including their peers.

Indeed, children may also display harmful sexual behaviour towards other children close to them. These very delicate situations affect the entire family. While the child victim needs to receive the right access to services, the child that has harmed also needs support.

Why is it important to discuss sexual abuse against children in the circle of trust?

Experiencing violence in childhood, in particular some of the worst forms of violence such as sexual abuse, has a considerable impact on children's health and well-being throughout their life. Sexual violence in the circle of trust is complex. Because of its nature,

many children never disclose what is happening and often live in the secrecy and trauma of their suffering. For this reason, it is important, in particular, to discuss ways through which parents may talk to children about sexual abuse; to inform adults and children alike about how they can disclose or report abuse.

Secondly, it is important to discuss sexual abuse against children in the circle of trust because, as above, it is a very common form of sexual abuse. The more people are aware, the better children may be protected. In recent decades, adults who were victims of sexual abuse as children have started to speak out about these terrible experiences. These stories have shed light on the extent of the problem. As a result, reforms have been carried out in Council of Europe member states to stop abuse in these different settings, but much, still, remains to be done.

Making the circle of trust truly safe for children

The title of this year's edition of the European Day speaks to the importance of further protecting children and ensuring that they are truly safe around the people they most trust. In this respect, the European Day, through the initiatives of the Council of Europe, its partners and member states aims to:

- ▶ Raise awareness among children and adults of sexual abuse committed against children in the circle of trust, as one of the most common forms of sexual abuse against children;
- ▶ Discuss sub-issues and specifics under the general topic of the circle of trust;
- ▶ Recall the [1st Monitoring Round](#) of the Lanzarote Committee dedicated to this very topic and disseminate some of the promising practices identified at the time.

What we know about sexual violence against children

Evidence or statistics on the extent of sexual abuse against children is extremely difficult to obtain. The Council of Europe estimates that one in five children will become a victim of some form of sexual violence before reaching 18 years of age. Each number represents a girl or a boy who can be protected from violence and abuse. This can be achieved through better protection, effective reporting systems and greater awareness by children, parents, professionals and the general public.

Getting to know the number of children who suffer from sexual abuse and the stories told by children, is very sad. But, at the same time, being aware of the scope of the violence enables the general public and policymakers to help prevent it and to put in place or improve existing services for children.

A word on... risks, prevention and protection

Every single child, girl or boy, has the right to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, no matter where they are from or where they live. A child's environment may present a threat or **risk** to the enjoyment of that right and therefore children of all ages and backgrounds may be vulnerable to sexual abuse. For these reasons, it is important to understand the risks faced by children

in their daily lives, in particular in their circle of trust where adults close to children use their position of influence to attract and abuse children. Often, this happens because perpetrators of sexual abuse have been able to "get away with it", going unpunished and perpetrating sexual abuse against different children, sometimes over many years. In some situations, other adults have become aware of the abuse but have not disclosed or stopped it, even in the child's family, sometimes because of mere shame.

There are ways to improve children's environments (home, school, sports facilities and other) in order to make them safer for all. Actions which address the risks associated with children's exposure to violence, are known as prevention actions. These are crucial in order to prevent violence and to help children. Prevention actions may include:

- ▶ Background checks of people working directly with children, be they professionals or volunteers;
- ▶ Informing children about sexual abuse, in an age appropriate and child friendly language;
- ▶ Training professionals and volunteers working directly with children on how to identify and report sexual abuse; or
- ▶ Raising awareness of parents and the general public.

The prevention of sexual abuse against children in sports

Sexual violence against children happens in sports too. Imbalanced power relations, authoritarian leadership and rewards structures create relationships based on fear and dependence and hence vulnerability to the abuse of power. The loss of "natural barriers" because of the physical contact required and the sharing of showers, changing rooms and confined spaces with adults also expose children to several forms of sexual violence. And of course, there is the scandal avoidance by organisations and individuals who prefer to hide the abuse, thus sacrificing the victim and giving the abuser a licence to harm.

It is just as important to understand the reasons why children cannot talk. Fear, shame and guilt are paralysing feelings. Very young children may not recognise the abuse, while teenagers may believe they are in a "relationship". Love for the sport they practise, peer pressure, taboos around sexuality and admiration for their coach, trap children in a very painful silence. If nothing is done about it, abusers can keep preying on children for years, sometimes resulting in hundreds of victims...



“Start to Talk” is a Council of Europe call for action to public authorities and the sport movement to stop child sexual abuse. By joining this call, governments, sports clubs, associations and federations, as well as athletes and coaches, pledge to take concrete measures to prevent and respond to abuse. “Start to talk” is about adults breaking the silence and lending children a voice. Several Council of Europe member states embarked on this and supported this call at national level.

“Start to Talk” initiative was launched by the Council of Europe as a follow-up to the two successful [Pro Safe Sport projects](#) (in 2014 and 2017) co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. These projects aimed at increasing the commitment of both governmental and non-governmental organisations towards combating sexual violence against children in sport through awareness-raising tools and capacity building resources.



Preventing sexual violence against children in out-of-home care

International research has demonstrated that residential care and institutional settings place children in a vulnerable situation, increasing the risk of those children being sexually abused by the professionals or volunteers taking care of them or by other children residing in these settings. Once victimised, these children face additional difficulties in disclosing their experiences and thus bear long-lasting psycho-social implications throughout their childhood and adult life.

The Lanzarote Committee therefore reaffirmed the need to promote safe and appropriate out-of-home care settings for children in a [Declaration](#) adopted in October 2019 and called upon the states Parties to the Lanzarote Convention, in particular, to ensure that in all types of out-of-home care settings there are:

- ▶ comprehensive screening procedures for all persons taking care of children;
- ▶ specific measures to prevent abuse of children’s increased vulnerability and dependence;
- ▶ adequate mechanisms for supporting children to disclose any sexual violence;
- ▶ protocols to ensure that, in the event of disclosure, effective follow-up is given in terms of assistance to the alleged victims and investigation of the alleged offences by the appropriate authorities;
- ▶ clear procedures to allow for the possibility of removing the alleged perpetrator from the out of home care setting from the onset of the investigation;
- ▶ effective monitoring of the practices and standards, to prevent/combat child sexual abuse.

When abuse was not prevented and did occur, children have the right to receive **protection**. Over the years, member states have learned to design better protection services for children. Some of these services have adopted child-friendly measures which

try to look at the needs and characteristics of children. These include their age, level of maturity and understanding, the nature of the trauma, as well as other issues, and try to adapt their response to child victims appropriately.

The Barnahus Initiative to help child victims of sexual violence under one roof

Barnahus (Children's House) is the leading European response model for child sexual abuse. It was first developed in Iceland in 1998 and is being implemented all over Europe now. Its unique interagency approach brings together all relevant services under one roof for the purposes of providing the child a coordinated and effective response and for preventing re-traumatisation during investigation and court proceedings. The central goal is to coordinate the parallel criminal and child welfare investigations. A key role of the service is to help produce valid evidence for judicial proceedings by eliciting the child's disclosure. The child also receives support and assistance, including medical evaluation and treatment, and therapeutic evaluation and treatment.

Key common criteria of Barnahus include:

- ▶ Forensic interviews are carried out according to an evidence-based protocol;
- ▶ The evidentiary validity of the child's statement is ensured by appropriate arrangements in line with the principles of "due process";
- ▶ Medical evaluation for forensic investigative purposes, as well as to ensure the child's physical well-being and recovery, is available;
- ▶ Psychological support and short and long-term therapeutic services for trauma to the child and non-offending family members and caretakers are available;
- ▶ Assessment of the protection needs of the victim and potential siblings in the family is made.

The Lanzarote Committee identified the Icelandic Barnahus model as a good practice example of response to child sexual violence in its 2015 implementation report. As a follow up to this report, the Council of Europe has supported numerous states in setting up a Barnahus and indeed this model is today becoming one of the key success factors of states committed to supporting child victims of violence. More information on the current co-operation projects on supporting member states with the implementation of Barnahus model can be found on the [website of the Children's Rights Division](#).



In order to make the circle of trust truly safe for children it is essential to address the risks of sexual abuse, prevention and protection of children, as described

briefly above. To do so, the Council of Europe, its member states and partners adopt legal standards and different strategies.

Legal framework and strategies

There are various ways to ensure that children are protected from sexual abuse in the circle of trust. The comprehensive and multi-level measures that are set up should lead to an **enabling environment for the protection of children**. Standards and specific legislation should be adopted at international and national levels. Following this, policies and programmes should be set in place, to ensure

that legislation is known and applied in practice. This may include programmes aiming at the prevention of sexual abuse, including the training of professionals, as described above; or protection, such as services for reporting sexual abuse or specialised services for assisting child victims. This is described in Figure 1, below.

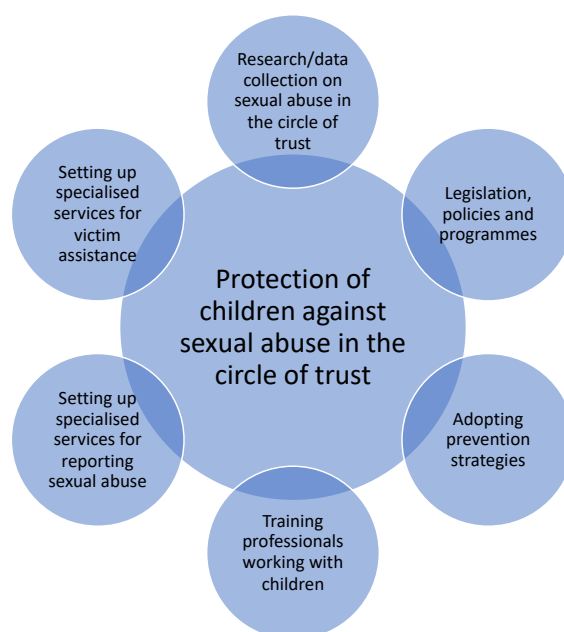


Figure 1: Enabling environment for the protection of children

What do national legislations say and what they should say

In 2015, the Lanzarote Committee examined the legislation of 26 state Parties, which had ratified the Lanzarote Convention at that time. In its [1st implementation report: Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust](#): The framework, the Lanzarote Committee found that none of the criminal code provisions of these Parties contained a definition of "circle of trust". However, in some cases, legislation referred, in full or in part, to the wording included in the text of the Lanzarote Convention. In **Spain**, Article 192 of the Criminal Code provides that "whoever, by deceit or abuse of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence on the victim, engages in acts of sexual nature with a person over the age of sixteen and under the age of eighteen, shall be punished (...)." Other states, such as **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Finland, Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia** generally refer to "abuse of a position, status or relationship." In **France**,

reference is made to abuse of authority "in fact and in law". Some other states refer to abuse of a position of trust, others to a position of authority and still others to a position of influence.

Did you know...

Article 18 of the Lanzarote Convention requires Parties (i.e. countries which are bound by this treaty) to criminalise the fact to engage in sexual activities with a child, regardless of the age of the child, in specific circumstances (i.e. where use is made of coercion, force or threats, or where abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family, or where abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child).

In order to protect children from sexual abuse in the circle of trust, the Lanzarote Committee recommends that all legislation be fully inclusive, avoiding any list of actual situations which runs the risk of excluding some. This means that the legal frameworks adopted by Parties should cover all instances of abuse of a **position of trust, authority or influence**. The Lanzarote Committee also invites Parties to review their legislation to include a reference to the notion of “circle of trust” which would comprise members of the extended family (including new partners), persons having care-taking functions (including trainers of any kind) or exercising control over the child professionally or on a voluntary basis (including persons who look after children in their leisure-time) and any other person trusted by the child (including other children) (Lanzarote Committee, [1st implementation report, Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The framework](#), adopted by the Lanzarote Committee on 4 December 2015, pages 10-12, Recommendation R4).

Strategies for the prevention and protection of children

The work of the Lanzarote Committee enables the identification and dissemination of ongoing and new practices concerning the protection of children from sexual abuse in the circle of trust. Some of these practices are truly promising and provide better and more sustainable benefits to children. These are known as **promising practices**. Learning about promising practices that are implemented elsewhere, helps governments, professionals, adults and children alike, to become aware of what can be done to tackle the challenges they face. Some of these promising practices can be easily replicated or used as inspiration to adapt and improve existing services or practices, while others may need more time or reflection.

Involving children when dealing with sexual violence in the circle of trust

Many stakeholders can be responsible for designing and implementing strategies for the prevention and the protection of children, including children themselves. Article 9 of the Lanzarote Convention provides that **children’s participation shall be encouraged**, according to their evolving capacity, in the development and implementation of state policies, programmes and other initiatives concerning the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

Involving children in processes concerning issues that affect them directly is important because it benefits both the children and the planning processes. For example, in relation to sexual abuse in the circle of trust, children may be consulted in the development of awareness-raising materials or activities, including identifying important topics for discussion, but also in other manners. In some member states, for example, children having suffered abuse in the past have worked with service providers to improve existing services.

The participation of children may take different forms. For example, they may participate through formal mechanisms, such as **Children’s Councils, Parliaments or Committees** set up at local, regional or national level. Children may also participate in specific and time-bound projects initiated by professionals or by children themselves.

In its [2nd implementation report, Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The strategies](#) (adopted on 31 January 2018), the Lanzarote Committee highlighted different **initiatives with and by children** across member states and considered that states should further encourage the participation of children in the fight against sexual abuse in the circle of trust.

Promising practices in member states with the participation of children

In **Austria**, the National Youth Council provides young people with a strong collective voice towards policy and decision making at all levels and actively advocates for their interests. In co-operation with partner institutions such as [ECPAT](#) (a worldwide network of organisations working to end sexual exploitation of children) and the Austrian Centres for Child Protection, it is involved in the drafting of state policies, programmes or other initiatives also concerning the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children. In October 2012, the Austrian National Youth Council issued an expert opinion drawing attention to the specific needs of children who have suffered from sexual abuse in the circle of trust.

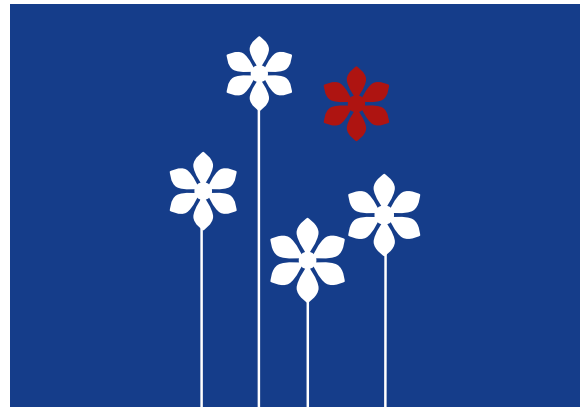
In **Belgium**, since 2011, the Flemish government has been subsidising CACHET, which is a youth organisation run by young people, including vulnerable youth to give them a specific voice. Representatives of the organisation were involved in the drafting of policy recommendations on sexual abuse.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, a Network of Young Advisors counsels the Ombudsman for Children of Republika Srpska on all issues of concern to children. Similarly, in **Croatia**, a Network of Young Advisors provides advice to the Croatian Ombudsman for children.

In **Iceland**, at the initiative and within the framework of UNICEF Iceland, a Focus Group of child victims of sexual abuse, identified and supported by the *Barnahús*, was established in 2012. The Focus Group was consulted by the ad hoc Working Group that prepared the Action Plan to fight child sexual abuse and strengthen services for child victims in 2013. The Focus Group was also invited to share its experience with the respective Ministers in the Government (Welfare, Interior and Education) and with the Prime Minister when the proposals of the Working Group were discussed.

Involvement of other actors for the prevention and response to sexual abuse against children in the circle of trust

In addition to governments, organisations from the civil society and the private sector have had a fundamental role in improving the rights of children, including in the implementation of strategies for the prevention and protection of sexual abuse in the circle of trust, for example through awareness raising and the provision of victim assistance and support.



Promising practice in Finland with the participation of civil society

In **Finland**, the national central organisation for sports (The Finnish Sports Confederation (VALO)) has outlined in its decision making that one of the ethical aspects that need to be taken into consideration in the field of sport is that sexual relationships between adults and children under the age of 16 are fully prohibited. VALO has also produced material for the adults in sport clubs and organisations with information on sexual offences, how to prevent sexual abuse and harassment and how to deal with situations where abuse or harassment might occur.

Awareness-raising activities

Getting to know a problem is a fundamental step towards understanding how to tackle it. Therefore, learning and disseminating targeted knowledge about the risks that children face concerning sexual abuse in the circle of trust (especially within the family) is essential to prevent and protect children from such abuse. Awareness raising may focus on different prevention and protection aspects, for example:

- ▶ **Promoting research** to understand the extent and dynamics of sexual abuse against children in the circle of trust;
- ▶ **Advocating** with governments to adopt relevant legislation, policies or programmes;

- ▶ **Raising awareness** of the general public about what sexual abuse in the circle of trust is, or where they can seek help for child victims or are at risk of becoming victims of abuse;
- ▶ **Enhancing professionals' attitudes, knowledge and practices** in order to identify signs of abuse, report cases and support children in need;
- ▶ **Informing children** about their right to protection and how to seek help, including confidential counselling, support and victim assistance.

Promising practices on awareness raising

In **Albania**, a study on child sexual abuse in the circle of trust shed light on the cultural and systemic barriers which undermine the reporting of these cases and the need for adequate treatment and support to children and their families. The results of the study were discussed in a conference with government representatives, professionals and children.

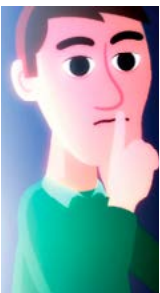
Austria included the issue of sexual abuse in the circle of trust in all its efforts to raise awareness on child sexual abuse, which targeted the general public, as well as children, educators, social and health workers, judges and prosecutors through different information and education materials, websites, seminars, trainings.

Belgium organised awareness-raising activities in schools as well as with regard to the sports sector, involving sports related institutions addressing the issues of child sexual abuse by sports trainers.

Croatia carried out a campaign called “Two little girls” focusing on the trafficking of women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation. The story of the “Two little girls” included the element of trust as the girls were exploited and trafficked by people they thought they could trust.

Iceland incorporated the issue of abuse in the circle of trust in training material to professionals in education and staff working with children, as well as in a series of educational conferences on the issue of child sexual abuse, including in sports activities.

Help children understand and seek help



Children of all ages can be victims of sexual abuse in the circle of trust. Whilst infant victims are fully reliant on the help of adults around them, as children grow up, they become more autonomous and are able to understand what is happening to them. They are also able to seek help, when services are available and adapted

to their age and maturity. Importantly, in addition to setting up relevant services, children must learn how to access them. They should be encouraged to **speak out** and **not remain silent** which is what their abuser expects from them.

Awareness-raising materials for children should be prepared in **different formats** and may be **disseminated** in schools, at home, in healthcare and other settings accessed by children. In some countries, children, including child victims, are involved in the development and dissemination of resources for the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Awareness-raising activities targeting children

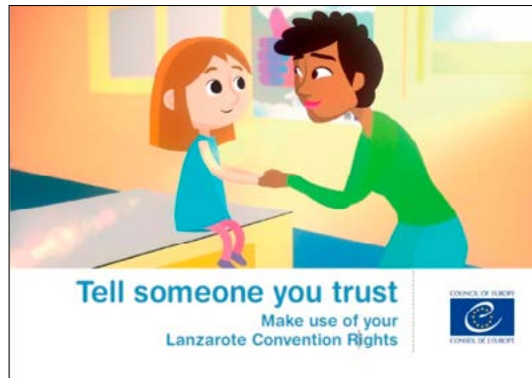
The Department for the Protection of the Rights of a Child of the Human Rights Ombudsman of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** undertook a number of activities, supported by Save the Children, to promote child rights and raise awareness on protection against violence. One of these activities was the “Ombudsman in Your School”, which consisted in organising educational workshops in schools to inform children about their rights, and particularly about protection from violence, including sexual violence in a trusted environment.

In **Denmark**, Save the Children developed the “Strong together” campaign and education material in cooperation with teachers and school children to raise awareness about the importance of setting physical and emotional boundaries, and to increase children’s knowledge on the right to be protected against abuse. The material targets school children in different age groups.

In **Iceland**, several programmes aim at educating children about child sexual abuse. These are age appropriate as they target different age groups through different programmes and make use of interactive methods and different media.

Tell someone you trust

The Council of Europe prepared an awareness-raising video and booklet for children aged 9-13 on the occasion of the 1st edition of the European Day, in 2015: “[Tell someone you trust](#)”. The aim is to inform them on the phenomenon of sexual abuse in the circle of trust and of ways to seek help and to report these abuses. The video exists in 17 languages (**Albanian, Catalan, Croatian, English, Estonian, French, Greek, Icelandic, Italian, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Ukrainian**).



The Lake

[The Lake](#) is a video targeting teenagers (14 and above). The video illustrates the psychological pressure that family abusers can apply on their victims, and it aims at encouraging victims of sexual abuse to break the silence and speak out. The video exists in 8 languages (**English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian**).



Help adults, help children

Everyone has a responsibility to report suspected cases of abuse and help children in other ways. However, it is up to governments to ensure that all groups of adults have the tools they need at their disposal. For example, governments can develop programmes to sensitise parents and help them communicate with children about difficult subjects. The different categories of professionals working with and for children must also be aware of the extent of sexual abuse

in the circle of trust, to identify risks, access reporting mechanisms and provide assistance to victims. Categories of professionals include teachers, sports coaches, child protection and healthcare professionals, as well as others working directly with children. Capacity building initiatives targeting professionals may focus on the enhancement of specific skills, i.e., identifying abuse, techniques on interviewing child victims, or other issues, depending on their professional capacity.

Awareness-raising activities targeting parents

In **Finland**, the Family Federation (*Väestöliitto*) published a poster, “Safety skills and your body” for parents of small children, which aims to provide safety education to children in their own language and to guide children to respect their own bodies and the bodies of others. The poster has been published in 7 languages.

In **Iceland**, a postcard was sent out to every household and company, soon after the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention, to inform about the duty to report cases of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Another initiative is the Educational Puppets theatre “The Kids on the Block” which is designed to educate elementary school children about personal safety, sexual abuse, the importance of telling someone they trust about it and the services available. Following the show (where a school counsellor, a social worker, a nurse or a psychologist are present), a letter is sent to parents or guardians of all the children in the audience to indicate where and how further preventive material and information may be obtained. The objective is to support the adults to answer any further query of their children or to help them in case their children/ they have anything to report. The letter was translated into the six foreign languages that are most common in Iceland. In addition, a short education film “Get a Yes” targeting secondary schools students addresses the line between healthy sex and sexual violence as well as the harmful effects of child abuse material. Based on the film, a teacher’s Guide was developed to set out instructions for teachers (but also for guardians and adults in general) on how to discuss these issues with young people.

Protective measures

As presented in Figure 1 above, there are several types of measures that can be put in place to create an enabling environment for the protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust. The previous sections have demonstrated how some of these can look, for example, in terms of national legislation and awareness-raising activities; and what actions Council of Europe member states have adopted. The Lanzarote Committee’s [2nd implementation report. Protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust: The strategies](#), addressed other types of protective measures included in the Lanzarote Convention and how these are being carried out in state Parties. Some of these additional measures include:

- ▶ **Specialised training packages targeting different categories of professionals** (i.e. teachers, healthcare professionals, police officers, sports coaches or other). For example, in **Lithuania**, the School for Police developed a seminar on “Protection from abuse in the circle of trust”
- ▶ **Mechanisms for reporting of sexual abuse against children**. For example, in the **Netherlands**, a specific body for advice and reporting of situations of child abuse, neglect and domestic violence has been created, called “Safe at home organisation”

- ▶ **Encouraging the media to provide appropriate information** concerning sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust and respecting the right to privacy of the child victim. For example, in **Croatia**, it is not permitted to publish information which reveals the identity of a child until he/she is eighteen years old, if that child is involved in a case of violence, regardless of whether the child is a witness, victim or a perpetrator of criminal offences or the child attempted or committed suicide. It is also not allowed to publish details about the family relations or private life of a child
- ▶ **Screening of professionals in contact with children during their recruitment**, which is being carried out in at least 17 member states of the Council of Europe, including Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, the Republic of North Macedonia and Turkey)
- ▶ **Assisting persons who fear they might commit sexual offences against children**. Some promising practices identified in this area include the [Dunkelfeld Prevention Project](#), set up by the Institute of Sexology and Sexual Medicine at the Charité University Clinic in Berlin, **Germany**, and [PedoHelp](#), run by the Association Une Vie, in **France**.

Key messages for adults

Children matter!

- ▶ Every child is a human being, with dreams, characteristics and needs of their own. Suffering sexual abuse is a great impediment to children's optimal development, even more so when committed by someone they trust.
- ▶ Children's well-being and protection depends on everyone. All adults close to children, including their parents or carers, teachers, sports coaches, educators in extra-curricular activities or other persons within the circle of trust have a responsibility to protect children and help them.

Helping children:

- ▶ Upholding children's rights can be done every day by small actions: learning how to communicate with children about sensitive issues, listening to them and enabling them to speak out; but also telling children about their rights or informing them about the people that can help them in times of need.
- ▶ There are many services, including hotlines, which any adult can use in anonymity and confidentiality, to discuss relevant issues and to denounce cases when they are suspicious of sexual abuse against children.

Remember:

- ▶ Sexual abuse in the circle of trust is one of the most common forms of sexual violence against children.
- ▶ Depending on your status – as parent, professional, policy maker or other – you may help children in different ways:
 - Policy and decision makers should promote and adopt effective legislation and programmes, based on updated evidence on sexual abuse;
 - Non-governmental organisations can advocate for improved services for children or set up specific prevention and protective activities;
 - Healthcare professionals, teachers, sports coaches, child protection and other professionals should report all cases of potential sexual abuse to the appropriate authorities;
 - All adults are obliged to report sexual abuse, even when the perpetrator is someone in the child's circle of trust.

Key messages for children

You are important!

- ▶ No one is allowed to touch the intimate parts of your body. No one should make comments or offers to you that make you feel uncomfortable or humiliated or embarrassed.
- ▶ If you have suffered sexual abuse and if you feel guilty in any way, know that it is not your fault. You do not need to suffer in silence. There are people who can help you, including others that have gone through the same experience as yourself. Tell someone you trust!

What information you need to know:

- ▶ Sexual abuse against children up to 18 years of age is a crime.
- ▶ If you have suffered sexual abuse, the person that has committed this act against you, should be brought to justice.
- ▶ You have the right to get help in any form you need. There are many services available and professionals who work directly with child victims.
- ▶ There are services available via telephone, text or social media, which are usually called “helplines” or “hotlines”. These are anonymous and confidential services, meaning that you can talk to a professional without having to say who you are. These professionals can also give you other information that you may need.
- ▶ There are specialised face-to-face services available too, including psychological and medical care, but also legal support.

Where you can get help:

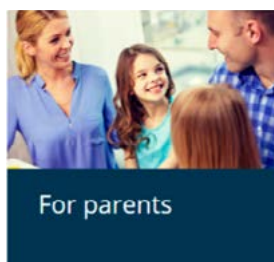
- ▶ There may be specialised services near your home, in local healthcare centres, hospitals or other services available for children. Sometimes, you can find this information on posters or leaflets around your school or your home. You will also be able to find information online.
- ▶ If you do not find the information or service you need, you may ask for help from your teachers, a school nurse, your parents, a friend, or someone else you trust.

How you can get involved:

- ▶ After experiencing abuse, many children and adults feel the need to help others in the same situation. There are many ways in which you can get involved and help.
- ▶ There may be local organisations where you live that have projects to help children who have suffered abuse.
- ▶ You may also participate in online advocacy campaigns to improve legislation or services available.

Available resources

The Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe has developed many different awareness-raising tools and resources which are available on its website and are classified according to the target audience:



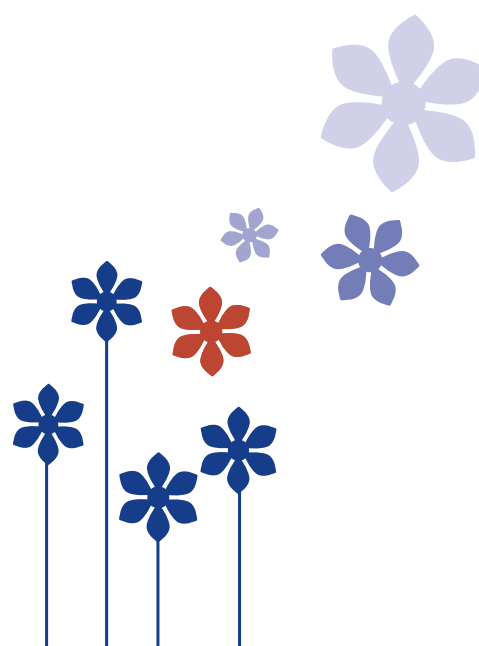
Check regularly the Council of Europe websites for more information.

Contact: EndChildSexAbuseDay@coe.int

Websites: www.coe.int/EndChildSexAbuseDay
www.coe.int/children

Twitter: [@coe_children](https://twitter.com/coe_children) / [#EndChildSexAbuseDay](https://twitter.com/EndChildSexAbuseDay)

Facebook: [Council of Europe One in Five Campaign](https://www.facebook.com/CouncilofEuropeOneinFiveCampaign)



This concept note, prepared in the context of the 2021 edition of the European Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (18 November), aims to explain to as many people as possible what sexual abuse against children in their circle of trust is, and what needs to be done to put an end to it. It refers to previous work by the Council of Europe, in particular recommendations and good practices highlighted by the Lanzarote Committee.

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.