

Mapping Therapy and Support Services After Barnahus in Ireland



We have been creating a map of places in Ireland that children and their caregivers can get therapy and support after sexual abuse. This is to make sure that everyone that needs to can get help; no matter how old they are, where they live or what type of help they need. 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience sexual abuse before they are 16 years old. In Ireland last year only 1 in 4 of those children were able to access child sexual abuse therapy and support services to help them make sense of what had happened and recover.

Over 120 professionals from Ireland and Europe shared research, told us about the types of therapy and support there should be, and where there are gaps in Ireland today. We thought about types of service, who they help, are they easy to get to and how long do children wait. We met with five young people from the Child Advisory Board in Cork and asked them what they thought might be helpful for children who need someone to talk to about how they are feeling after sexual abuse.

The research tells us that therapy and support services after sexual abuse should:



Make sure children's hopes and needs are heard.



Be holistic and think about all the parts of a child's life, including their caregivers.



Help children gain strength through finding a way to tell their story.



Find ways for children to leave something behind to make it better for the next children that come to Barnahus.

Professionals told us:

- From 2025, Barnahus West and South will offer early help and long-term therapy for up 300 children each year.
- Specialist support services like The Alders Units and CARL supported over 260 children and their families after sexual abuse last year - with psychoanalytic therapy, creative therapies and family therapy.
- Long travel times and few outreach spaces mean that specialist services are inaccessible for many children and families.
- Three of the Rape Crisis Centres are now supporting children as young as 12 years old with counselling psychotherapy, parent/caregiver support and play therapy.
- CAMHS expertise is in treating disorders, such as depression, suicide, anxiety, PTSD; and told us not everyone is skilled in the impact of trauma from child sexual abuse.
- Local Tulsa therapy hubs, family resource centres and independent counsellors told us they do not all have the specialist experience to support children after sexual abuse.
- There are no bespoke services for young people who have experienced sexual abuse and are neurodiverse or identify as LGBT, although all existing services reported being inclusive.

The Child Advisory Board told us:

Services should be less than an hour from home and easy to get to by bus.

Online sessions don't work well - therapists might miss important body language and rural Wi-Fi is too unreliable.

Local child sexual abuse support services should be a private, welcoming, safe space that feels normal and doesn't scream 'something bad happened'.

Therapy should help both the child and parent and cover more than just the abuse. It's good to talk about school, friendships, future jobs and life skills.

Creative therapies are great, even for teenagers.

Independent therapists working alone need support to know how to handle it when someone talks about abuse for the first time.

All therapists supporting children after sexual abuse should all be part of a national network so they can learn from each other.

Therapy should feel safe and local – somewhere you could be going for any reason, not somewhere that screams 'something bad happened'. It should help with your whole life, not just the abuse. And there should be a proper map so everyone knows where to go.

We thought about how young people, their families and professionals would know where to find out about services and decided to create a map, which you can find [HERE](#).

Recommendations:



Set up more specialist support services for children after sexual abuse like Barnahus, The Alders Units and CARL in satellite sites across all counties in Ireland.



Ask all Rape Crisis Centres to develop specialist support for children as young as 12 years old.



Ask Tusla to monitor and support independent practitioners working with children after sexual abuse.



Develop a programme of training, consultation and regular learning spaces for counsellors that do not often support children after sexual abuse.



Make sure that Barnahus provide therapy and support services that "help with your whole life, not just the abuse".



Make sure National Children's Therapy Services Map is available to all professionals in local and specialist services, and available to the public on the Barnahus website.