



18 NOVEMBER

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

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

The vast majority of child sexual abuse occurs in the child's circle of trust. When the harm is done by a person they know, admire, trust and even love, children find it particularly difficult to disclose and overcome the abuse. During the lockdowns imposed to contain the spread of the Covid-19, children closed in with their abusers had even less chances to seek help. When abuse in the child's circle of trust is reported, the victim and the family often go through an ordeal because of ill-coordinated and poorly prepared justice and social services.

■ But this is not a fatality:
There are many measures that can be taken to prevent abuse in the circle of trust and many other that have proved efficient in protecting its victims. The 2021 edition of the European Day focuses on promoting such measures.

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■ The Council of Europe has provided clear guidance and identified many promising practices to prevent abuse in the circle of trust and protect its victims. Many of these practices have been highlighted by the Lanzarote Committee when monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Lanzarote Convention). Its first monitoring round was precisely dedicated to the protection of children against sexual abuse in the circle of trust. Over the past years, the Council of Europe has:

- ▶ promoted the importance of preventive measures among all groups of stakeholders, in particular in pre-schools, schools and in sports
- ▶ promoted promising practices such as the setting up of the *Barnahus* model – Children's houses supporting child victims and/or witnesses of violence, including sexual abuse
- ▶ developed materials to raise children's awareness and encourage them to speak up
- ▶ identified training protocols and techniques to detect child sexual abuse and listen to children when they report
- ▶ called for an increased screening of persons in close contact with children
- ▶ singled out promising intervention programmes for potential child sex offenders
- ▶ underlined the need to strengthen sex and relationship education for children and young people
- ▶ drawn attention to the urgent need to support children who display harmful sexual behaviour
- ▶ developed training materials for law enforcement, judges and prosecutors to improve their operational capacities in tackling online child sexual exploitation and abuse, which also starts in the circle of trust

■ To mark the European Day, the Council of Europe encourages activities and initiatives to raise awareness of both children and adults on the risks and on the steps that they can take to prevent sexual abuse in the circle of trust and to protect its victims. Exchanges and debates on this issue, in particular between children and parents, among parliamentarians, educators and other professionals are also warmly welcome.

■ Check regularly the Council of Europe website for more information, in particular a 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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