

Information pack

Specialist Child Abuse
Investigation Skills Course
2017-18

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Background to current ABE foundation and Specialist Child Abuse Investigation Skills course

'Protecting children from harm and promoting their welfare depends on a shared responsibility and effective joint working between different agencies' (introduction: Working Together to safeguard children 2010)

'The Police have key role in safeguarding children. They recognise the fundamental importance of inter agency working in combating child abuse, as illustrated by the well-established arrangements for joint working with social work colleagues' (introduction: Working Together to Safeguard 2010)

There has been a steady increase in the commitment from Local Authorities to participate in joint training since the Metropolitan Police centralised their training unit. The feedback to the London Safeguarding Children's Board is that social workers believe it is an essential requirement for good working practices in safeguarding children in London. One of the challenges in London is that local LCSB each provide a varying degree of multi agency training to meet the needs of their population. The JI and ABE course has to date offered something unique to social workers which they would not be able to access locally.

'The Police have a duty to carry out thorough and professional investigations into allegations of crime and the obtaining of clear strong evidence is in the best interests of the child, since it makes it less likely that a child victim will have to give evidence in criminal court' (5.60 Working Together 2010)

Since the introduction of the memorandum of good practice and the subsequent ABE guidance, there has been a necessary shift for police to take the lead in the criminal investigations and it may therefore be appropriate for a police officer to take the lead in any forensic interview. However in doing this it is of equal importance to ensure that the child's welfare is paramount and that a joint working approach exists in all areas of child protection including the interview.

Joint Investigation training is essential for the two agencies that have responsibility for the investigation of child protection issues. There has to be a level of compromise as both agencies enters this training environment with previous training, experience and a differing culture of working. This training reflects the need to appreciate specific roles with the focus in working together to ensure that the child's welfare is paramount. Areas considered vital in this delivery would be:

- Agencies roles and responsibilities in Safeguarding children
- Thresholds of intervention
- How experiences and values impact on our work as well as our individual working culture
- The processes, policies, guidance and legislation that impacts on our work
- Professional dangerousness including judgments and prejudice, challenging others, issues around perceived compliance and over stepping boundaries

- Children's experiences within the abusive relationship using theories that assist us in appreciating the variety of differing behaviours in victims of child abuse.
- Agency priorities when conducting joint investigation and how to ensure that best practice is applied when working to ensure that child are protected from harm

Interviewing children

'Children are a key and sometimes the only source of information about what has happened to them especially in child sexual abuse cases but also physical and other forms of abuse. Accurate and complete information is essential for taking action to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child, as well as for any criminal proceedings that may be instigated concerning an alleged perpetrator of abuse. When children are first approached, the nature and extent of harm suffered by them may not be clear, nor whether a criminal offence has been committed. It is important that initial discussions with children are conducted in a way that minimises any distress caused to them and maximises the likelihood that they will have separate communication with a child. Learning or suggestive communication should always be avoided' (pg 5.66 Working Together 2010)

'Consideration should be given to who is best qualified to lead the interviewer. The lead interviewer should be the person who has established or is likely to establish rapport with the witness, who understands how to communicate effectively with witnesses who might become distressed, and who has a proper grasp of the rules of evidence and criminal offences' (2.178 - ABE March 2011)

The guidance goes on to state:

'Where it has been agreed by the police and children's social care, in a strategy discussion/meeting, that it is in the best interests of the child that a full criminal investigation be carried out, the police are responsible for that investigation, including any investigative interview (video-recorded or otherwise) with the victim (recommendation 99 of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report). Having responsibility for the criminal investigation does not mean that the police should always take the lead in the investigative interview. Provided both the police officer and social worker have been adequately trained to interview child witnesses in accordance with the guidance set out in this document, there is no reason why either should not lead the interview. The decision as to who leads the interview should depend on who is able to establish the best rapport with the child. In circumstances where a social worker leads the interview, the police should retain their responsibility for the criminal investigation by ensuring that the interview is properly planned and that the police officer has an effective role in monitoring the interview (see paragraphs 2.87 and 2.88). Similarly, where a police officer leads the interview, the local authority should retain their duty to make enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 by ensuring that the interview is properly planned and that the social worker has an effective role in monitoring the interview.' - (2.25)

In December 2014 the HMIC published a report that raised among other things the role of the social worker when investigating going investigations

4.7overall inspectors found little evidence that social workers were involved in interviews with children. There were several reason cited by police officers during interview, including: the lack of trained social workers; the movement or promotion of social workers once trained; and social workers lack of confidence even where they had been trained. this is turn, was attributed

to limited experience of interviewing. Local Authority areas where trained social workers conducted ABE interviews on a Rota basis completed joint interviews more frequently

4.8 'Force should review their current interview procedure with children's social care services within their force area to ensure that it is in line with the Guidance. Where social workers are not regularly interviewing or monitoring interviews with children, arrangements need to be in place to ensure that they are still able to gather the information required safeguard the child, without requiring the child to repeat their story'

Social workers have commented that they do not feel they receive sufficient training in talking to children. They often feel ill equipped to speak to children about allegations they have made and are concerned about leading them. Social workers need to appreciate the process of interviewing, have an understanding of what a crime is, particularly when Police Officers ask them to speak to the child first, and be able to assist any interview ensuring that the focus remains on the child. Using social workers with experience in working directly with children may also prevent the inappropriate use of intermediaries when the officer does not have experience working with a particular child.

Course Compliance to DoE KSS

In the context of Joint Investigation and Specialist Child Interview Skills Course, the requirements of the Department for Education 'Knowledge and Skills for Child and Family Social Work.' are applied. Including in the course is

- The role social workers play in Joint Investigations and Interviewing children
- Child development in the context of Significant Harm and interviewing children
- Understanding abuse and neglect in the context of thresholds of intervention
- Effective direct work with children who are victims of abuse
- Analysis and decision making when conducting joint investigations,
- Considering professional dilemmas of working with parents and ensuring a child focus on intervention (ethics)
- Using supervision and support effectively when working jointly
- Understanding the organisational context in which joint investigations sit.

Course Overview

3 day Achieving Best Evidence Foundation (the process)

Social Workers attend a 3 day ABE foundation course run by the LCSB; complete an assessed interview and need to be considered 'competent' prior to attending a specialist child interviewing skills course jointly with police.

Joint Police/ Social Worker 10 days course in Specialist interviewing skills for child victims or witnesses

The focus of this course will be Joint Investigations as outlined above and communicating effectively with children who have been victims and witnesses of crime rather than ABE as a process.

Subjects covered:

A child focus input on the 4 phases of the interview

Child development – on understanding, language, memory, suggestibility and impact of trauma on recalling account

Questioning skills development in clarifying allegations and interviewing children as victims of crime

Understanding pitfalls particularly when interviewing children

In-depth consideration when interviewing very young children (under 5), and children with specific communication impairments. This will include the use of props, drawings and play material.

Understanding what children are able to tell us and how we can assist and support children to give information appropriately.

Planning Interviews and the roles of professionals in this process

Pre and post interview preparation with a child

Challenging oppressive practice when interviewing children

The course concludes with a reflective exercise using transcripts of previously conducted ABE interviews.

Feedback from previous participants

I liked the fact that this was a joint training with Children Social Care and the Police in the same room, I found this very helpful to clarifying and reaffirming and roles and expectation during joint investigations and ABE interviewing.

All round, brilliant – I recommend this become a mandatory training for all social workers.

Great balance between practicals, groups work and theory; life changing and practice evolving training experience. Thank you.

The training was excellent, thank you Sam and Toran

I feel that the training course was very useful, insightful and worthwhile. I do not feel that there is another training course that would be able to provide you with as much information that can be applied to practice.

The training was the best opportunity to re-fresh my knowledge as well as assimilates new learning

I am grateful for having had this experience and I am hoping that I will be able to put in practice the knowledge achieved

The trainers used their knowledge and experience, and coupled with real cases made it a fascinating training Programme.

Eligibility Criteria for ABE Foundation and Joint Child Abuse Investigative Skills Course

As this course includes an assessment with a competent or not competent element it is important that social workers are suited to the training. In consultation with the London Safeguarding Children's Board the following eligibility criterion has been created to assist boroughs in their selection. If you are in doubt or think that a social worker is suited but doesn't meet all the requirements please do not hesitate to contact me Sam Tarling on 07989 351362 or sam.tarling@btinternet.com.

Criteria

- Candidates need to be working in children and families
- Have at least 6 months post qualifying child protection experience
- Agree to attend the Joint Child Abuse Investigative Course within 12 months of successfully completing the ABE foundation course
- Read chapter 2 of the ABE guidance prior to attending the foundation course

Preferable but not essential

- Observed an ABE interview
- Experience of Court work and giving evidence

Information about the current training team

The training team consists of a social work trainer and a police trainer. Both trainers have extensive experience in investigating child protection and interviewing children. In the past year the course has been reviewed and rewritten. There are also regular amendments made, based on changes to legislation, case law, procedures and policy as well as a critical analysis of the evaluation forms.

Information about Costing

The fee for this 13 day training course is currently £900 per delegate; this is inclusive of travelling expenses and materials (and exclusive of VAT). 50% of this cost is payable following completion of the 3 day ABE foundation course and the remaining 50% paid upon the candidates completion of the 10 day Joint Child Interviewing Course. In the event that the candidate does not successfully complete the 3 day course, an additional place will be offered without fee, as long as the eligibility criteria are followed. In the event that a candidate does not attend the ABE foundation, arrangements can be made for the candidate to re-attend. In order to ensure this, a discussion needs to be had between the trainer and the authority. Non attendance with no explanation will incur a charge of £450.

In the event that the person nominated withdraws, the authority will be responsible for finding a replacement. If you do not believe that the place can be filled, you can contact the Co-Coordinator who will advertise the place again. In the event that a replacement is found, arrangements for fees can be transferred to the new borough.

Once a place has been allocated and no replacement found, a 100% cancellation fee will be charged.

Sam Tarling Consultancy will do everything they can to ensure that a replacement is found.

In the unusual situation of a course being altered due to circumstances beyond the control of Sam Tarling Consultancy Ltd. The Co-ordinator, Sam Tarling and The Metropolitan Police will formulate an alternative plan. It is expected that all local authorities will respect any decision made, particularly when it is decided that the course, while altered, will continue. The Co-ordinator will contact the local authorities as soon as possible if any changes occur.

**Dates for ABE Foundation and
Joint Specialist Child Witnesses Interview Skills Course
2017/18**

ABE Foundation course (3 days)

6th – 8th September 2017

4th – 6th October 2017

1st – 3rd November 2017

10th – 12th January 2018

7th – 9th February 2018

Joint Specialist Child Witness Interview Skills Course (10 days)

18th – 29th September 2017

16th – 27th October 2017

13th – 24th November 2017

22nd January – 2nd February 2018

19th February – 2nd March 2018

12th – 23rd March 2018