Why this learning matters for organisations now

Delayed disclosure of child sexual abuse is not unusual. Evidence considered by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse identified a wide range of barriers including fear of not being believed, shame or guilt, grooming, fear of consequences for family relationships and concern about losing control of what happens once abuse is disclosed. IICSA also cited research suggesting an average delay of around 24 years among those who do disclose.

Understanding disclosure as a process

The CSA Centre describes disclosure as a process influenced by relationships and interactions with others which may extend over a considerable period of time. Disclosure may be partial, non-verbal or develop gradually, and the way professionals engage with someone can help or hinder the process. It also highlights that negative responses can compound shame and guilt.

The response matters

This means that good organisational responses cannot depend only on practitioners knowing the correct procedure. People also need the knowledge, confidence, time and support to listen carefully, respond without blame or judgement, recognise that accounts may emerge gradually, and understand the potential impact of asking somebody to tell their experience repeatedly.

A changing safeguarding context

In England, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 explicitly identifies child sexual abuse among the hidden harms practitioners should consider. The Crime and Policing Act 2026 has also legislated for new mandatory reporting measures in specified roles, reinforcing the wider focus on how institutions recognise and respond to child sexual abuse.

This webinar creates space for practitioners to ask a related but different question: not only whether they understand their procedures, but what it actually might feel like to disclose to them and their service, and what their response communicates to the person who has chosen to tell.

Evidence and policy context checked October 2026. Working Together references apply to England; wider learning about disclosure may be relevant across jurisdictions.

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