



Campaign in England

The next UK Government has the power to make a positive change to children's lives. For this to happen, we need to make protecting children a top priority for each and every election candidate.

Only with every candidate's commitment can we ensure vital child protection reforms take place, and secure essential funding and resources.

The next UK Government must:

- ensure that vital child protection reforms are fully implemented and resourced, following the tragic death of Baby Peter¹ and other child deaths since
- continue to fund helpline services for children and for adults concerned about the safety and welfare of a child
- tackle domestic violence from a child's point of view
- make the internet safer for children
- strengthen the role of the Children's Commissioner in England to act as a genuinely independent voice for children
- provide resources for vital therapeutic services for children who have experienced abuse.

1. Ensure that vital child protection reforms are fully implemented and resourced, following the tragic death of Baby Peter and other child deaths since

- **Save child protection funding from expenditure cuts.** The NSPCC supports Lord Laming's proposals for protected funding for child protection services. This will help to deal with some of the resourcing issues that lead to high thresholds for services. Lord Laming has said: "... there is no guarantee that funding provided by government for the purposes of keeping children safe from harm, and improving their well-being, is used for these purposes. ...The Government should therefore take decisive action to protect budgets for safeguarding children, thereby ensuring consistent appropriate levels of investment across England in both early intervention and statutory child protection services". It is crucial that these funding issues are resolved and that this is linked to focused work on the thresholds operated within different local authorities and the reasons for the variations that exist.
- **Make sure that professionals understand how to deal with neglect.** In particular, make sure they take action at the right time to protect children. It's very important that frontline staff consult with other professionals to help them take difficult decisions about children's protection.
- **Ensure that children are seen on their own by concerned professionals.** It's very important that professionals who have concerns about a child are given the support they need to be able to see the child without the presence of the child's parents/carers. Children at risk of abuse need the opportunity to be able to speak freely. In the case of a very young child, professionals need the opportunity to properly assess them.

1. Named on August 11 2009 as Peter Connelly.

- **Support professionals so that they spot the signs of child abuse.** All professionals working with children - including social workers, doctors, health visitors and teachers – should have the support and training they need to spot signs of abuse and know what to do if they are concerned about a child. Managers also need training so that frontline staff are getting the advice they need to make decisions, and minimise mistakes.

2. Continue to fund helpline services for children and for adults concerned about the safety or welfare of a child

Children must have access to safe confidential spaces in order to be able to speak out about abuse and to get help. Resources are needed to fund NSPCC helpline services that can help the many children and young people who would otherwise remain invisible, suffer in silence, slip through the cracks or develop more acute problems. Two vital services should continue to be provided: a central confidential service for children, through phone and online; and a child protection helpline for adults concerned about the safety or welfare of a child.

- **The NSPCC is calling for continued funding for helpline services for children, and for adults concerned about the safety or welfare of a child.** Currently the Government is contributing £30 million over four years to the cost of funding helpline services. This funding is only guaranteed to March 2011 – we hope to see a commitment to funding beyond this date; without this, vulnerable children may be more at risk.

3. Tackle domestic violence from a child's point of view

Every year 750,000 children experience domestic violence. In many families where there is domestic violence, children also experience physical and sexual abuse. Evidence shows that domestic violence is present in two-thirds of cases of child deaths and serious injury.

Children can experience domestic violence in many ways:

- seeing the violence or hearing shouts, screams and crying from another room
- witnessing the outcome of violence, such as cuts or bruises and the emotional impact on the abused parent
- intervening between the abuser and other person, sometimes getting physically hurt in the process
- being deliberately injured in order to terrorise the non-abusive parent.

The NSPCC is concerned about the effects of domestic violence on children. All children have the right to protection from violence and abuse and should have access to support. We want to see:

- **training for professionals** so that whenever they work with domestic violence, they consider the effects on any children. Where professionals have been trained, routine procedures should be in place to ask children and young people about direct and indirect abuse, in confidence.
- **adequate support services for children and families affected** - so that when they are brave enough to speak out, they know they'll be safe and supported. Every area needs programmes and information on safe and healthy parenting, a refuge which includes a child support worker, therapeutic groups for children, counselling availability, accessible specialist

services for black and minority ethnic children, a perpetrator programme which meets minimum standards and a supervised contact centre. Planning for these services should be coordinated on a multi-agency basis.

- **the current definition of domestic violence used in England extended.** This must be widened to include the impact of abusive behaviours, and to ensure that more attention is paid to the impact of such behaviours on children and young people – who are often the hidden victims of domestic violence - in policy and practice, including service provision. The current definition that applies in England refers only to abuse “between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.”

4. Make the internet safer for children

Governments throughout the UK and industry, NGO’s, police, professionals working with children, parents and children themselves, need to work together to keep children safe online, as well as prepare for new, emerging challenges.

The number of people per year who are prosecuted or cautioned for making or possessing indecent images of children remains persistently high (in 2007 the number of people proceeded against or cautioned for offences relating to child abuse images was 1,402).^{2 3}

The UK has acted to stop the distribution of these images via websites by taking down images hosted on websites in the UK and by blocking access to such images when they are hosted on servers in other countries. Taking further action to prevent people being able to access these images in the UK needs to include stopping people in the UK from passing on these images privately through the use of private file-sharing software and other means – what is known as “peer-to-peer file sharing”.

- The UK Government and industry should research and devise **an action plan on how to combat the use of peer-to-peer software** for the distribution of child sex abuse images.

Professionals, such as social workers and probation officers who work with online offenders, need to be appropriately trained to recognise potential online offending against children and manage the risks posed. It is important that professionals understand the dynamics of grooming and how to assess and risk-manage those who have viewed illegal images.

The social work profession and several other parts of the children’s workforce have a critical role to play - not only in managing or challenging problematic behaviour in adult offenders (or in children themselves), but also in developing our understanding of the risks that children face and providing appropriate support.

Therefore professional bodies responsible for the accreditation of police, health, probation, prison staff, social workers, youth workers and teachers must ensure that proper recognition is given in their professional qualifications and professional development programmes to the importance of dealing appropriately with online offending and related problematic behaviours.

2. Offending and Criminal Justice Group (RDS), Home Office, Ref IOS 503-04

3. According to the most recent 2008 IWF report in relation to websites and URLs containing Child Abuse Images - 69 per cent of the children that they see being exploited in images or video appear to be between the ages of 0-10; 24 per cent 6 years old or under; and 4 per cent 2 years or under. As regards the severity of sexual abuse being depicted in the domains they assess, 58 per cent of domains contain images classified as level 4 or 5. Whereas these statistics relate to images found on the public internet rather than those swapped via Peer to Peer technology – they do suggest a worrying trend in terms of perpetrator interest in some of the more abusive kinds of images.

- **Training should be provided for professionals** (social workers, probation officers etc) who work with, or come into contact with, online offenders to help manage the risks they pose.

5. Strengthen the role of the Children’s Commissioner in England to act as a genuinely independent voice for children

The powers of the Children’s Commissioner for England are the weakest of all ombudspersons and commissioners in Europe. 11 MILLION (The Office of the Children’s Commissioner) should protect and promote children’s human rights; however its capacity to do this effectively is significantly inhibited by its limited powers. Children are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations; they encounter significant problems challenging the day-to-day human abuses that they experience; and children find it more difficult to use the courts to protect their rights or to seek appropriate remedies when their rights are violated.

Strengthening the powers of the Children’s Commissioner would create real improvements for vulnerable children, particularly for those who experience institutional abuse or discrimination, and for vulnerable children who do not have involved adults to advocate on their behalf.

The NSPCC considers that to protect and promote the rights of children and young people effectively, the Children’s Commissioner for England needs to have the following *new* powers, which are available to other commissioners and ombudspersons throughout Europe:

- **the power to promote and safeguard children’s human rights.** This should be the key function of the Children’s Commissioner, expanding on the Children Act 2004 which established the general function of the Commissioner as “promoting awareness of the views and interests of children in England”.
- **the power to consider individual complaints and petitions, and carry out investigations** and complaints submitted on behalf of children or directly by children.
- **the power to support children taking cases to court**, including the power to intervene in court cases to inform the court about the child rights issues involved in the case.
- **the Children’s Commissioner should be accountable to Parliament, and not to the Government.** This would strengthen the independence of the Commissioner; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should be the principal framework for the Commissioner’s work, rather than programmes determined by the Government⁴. The appointment and funding of the Children’s Commissioner should be separate from the Government, and Parliament should remove the power of the Secretary of State to direct the Children’s Commissioner to undertake inquiries.

6. Provide resources for vital therapeutic services for children who have experienced abuse

Recent NSPCC research⁵ has revealed that the overall level of specialist therapeutic provision for children is low. There is a huge gap between the estimated *need* for services, and their availability both nationally and locally. Specialist services are too few and offered too late. The consequences of child abuse are increasingly being recognised. Sexual abuse for

4. Currently the Every Child Matters Framework

5. Allnock, D. et al (NSPCC, 2009) Sexual abuse and therapeutic services for children and young people: The gap between provision and need.

example, is associated with anxiety, depression, anger and guilt, poor self-image, difficulties in functioning at school (and later at work), difficulties with personal relationships and parenting, sexual problems and physical effects. Abused children can also suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The NSPCC's study⁶ of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in the UK remains the most authoritative study of its kind. It found that:

- 16 per cent of children experienced some form of sexual abuse⁷
- 25 per cent of children experienced one or more forms of physical violence during childhood and
- six per cent of children experienced frequent and severe emotional maltreatment during childhood.

DCSF 2009 figures show that of 60,900 children in the care system, 61 per cent were there for reasons of abuse or neglect.⁸

- **All children who have been abused should be assessed to identify whether they need and wish to receive therapeutic support to help them deal with the effects of the abuse on their health and emotional wellbeing.** This should be widely available to them across the UK, child-centred, of a high quality and should work with the child as long as is necessary for their recovery.

6. Cawson, P., Wattam, C., Brooker, S. and Kelly, G. (NSPCC, 2000) Child maltreatment in the United Kingdom: a study of the prevalence of child abuse and neglect. Sexual abuse definitions are detailed in the study. The NSPCC is currently undertaking a new study of the prevalence of child abuse, which will be published in 2010.

7. This percentage is derived from figures for both contact and non-contact sexual abuse experienced in childhood (under the age of 16).

8. DCSF: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care workers) year ending 31 March 2009 (www.dcsf.gov.uk).

NSPCC Helpline numbers

NSPCC Helpline: If you have concerns about the safety of a child, please call the NSPCC Helpline on **0808 800 5000**. It's a free service, and our advisors are here to help 24 hours a day. You don't have to say who you are.

ChildLine: Children and young people can call ChildLine for confidential advice and support, on **0800 1111** or go at **www.childline.org.uk**

Contact for more information

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