

Sibling Sexual Abuse – Key Insights for Parents

From: Understanding and Responding to Sibling Sexual Harm and Abuse. A research review and analysis by Dr Elly Hanson for NSPCC Learning, November 2024 (Dr Hanson's Full Research Review can be found and downloaded at [NSPCC Learning](#)).

1. Prevalence & Recognition

- Sibling sexual harm is one of the most common forms of intrafamilial sexual abuse—yet it is often overlooked.
- A UK study found that up to 38% of reported child sexual abuse cases involved siblings.
- Many cases go unreported because the behaviour is misinterpreted as harmless sibling rivalry.

2. Age & Power Dynamics

- Age gaps over two years and patterns of coercion or control are strong indicators of abuse.
- Girls are more often the harmed child; older brothers are more often the ones who cause harm.
- Any power imbalance, not just age, affects safety and consent.

3. Parental Misunderstanding

- Parents often struggle to believe that one child could harm another.
- Many focus on protecting the family unit instead of the harmed child.
- Denial or minimisation can unintentionally deepen the child's trauma.

4. Long-Term Impact

- Survivors may experience complex PTSD, chronic shame, fear of not being believed, or difficulties with relationships.
- These emotional injuries can persist long into adulthood.
- Early, safe conversations and supportive responses matter.

Parent Takeaway

- Your child doesn't need you to be perfect—they need to feel safe and heard.
- Be the one adult they trust to listen and believe.
- If something feels 'off' between siblings, don't dismiss your instinct. Pause, observe, and ask open questions.

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