

What first responders should know about child sexual abuse

December 12 2022



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The rise of the internet has led to a rampant growth in online child

sexual exploitation and abuse material. To take swift action in the best interests of suspected underage victims of sexual abuse, police officers need to have the necessary skills and training.

The GRACE project has published a set of guidelines to help [first responders](#). The document is the result of a collaboration formed through the GRACE project between child [sexual exploitation](#) specialists from Europol's European Cybercrime Center and the European Cybercrime Training and Education Group (ECTEG).

The guidelines have two versions: a [public version](#) and a restricted version that will be embedded into ECTEG's eFIRST project, which is an e-learning tool for first responders that focuses on essential IT forensics and cybercrime. A [newsletter](#) posted on the project website briefly outlines the aim and significance of the guidelines.

"The guidelines will enable first responding officers to effectively handle delicate situations that usually take place at a victim's close whereabouts, such as their home or school, often hidden from the eyes of the public. The guidelines are prepared in a way that encompasses the unified standards that these officers can use in their daily work, thereby equipping them with relevant information on how best to respond if they came across a child suspected of being the subject of sexual [abuse](#)."

The primary concern

The public document opens with a list of key terms for officers to be aware of and follows with an overview of victims' rights. A guiding principle is highlighted: "The best interest of the child, especially as victims of sexual abuse and sexual [exploitation](#), shall be the primary concern in all activities carried out by a first responder." Emphasis is also placed on the fact that each victim of sexual abuse or exploitation acts differently, which may cause untrained officials to doubt that any

sexual violence may have occurred.

The guidelines outline four possible situations that first responders might encounter. The first scenario is that the abuse or exploitation is directly disclosed by the child. Second, it is directly reported by another person following a child's disclosure. The third scenario involves someone disclosing child sexual abuse and exploitation that happened in the past. The fourth involves first responders suspecting that a [child](#) was sexually abused or learning about such a case indirectly.

The section titled "5F'S IN TRAUMA" offers important information on five different automatic and instinctive responses to fear and trauma stemming from sexual assault. These are: fight (resisting the [attacker](#) by fighting physically and/or verbally); flight (running, backing away or hiding); freeze (becoming tense, still and silent around the attacker); flop (when the body relaxes and goes limp as an automatic reaction to the [physical pain](#) being experienced); and friend (asking the attacker for help or trying to "befriend" them in an effort to stall, placate or negotiate with them). The authors emphasize that freezing or trying to befriend the attacker is by no means consent, but rather a survival mechanism.

More information: GRACE project website: grace-fct.eu/

Provided by CORDIS

Citation: What first responders should know about child sexual abuse (2022, December 12) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-child-sexual-abuse.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.