



Hampshire
Safeguarding
Children
Partnership



Case Study: Child Sexual Abuse in the family environment

- Poppy -

When Poppy was three years old, she was observed getting a male action man type doll and rubbing his hand and groin area over a female toy that another child was playing with. She told her key worker: "His name is Alfie. They are playing". The key worker mentioned this to Poppy's mother when she picked Poppy up. Her mother said her cousin, Alfie, and his parents are staying with them at the moment until the sale of their house goes through and she plays with him a lot.

Poppy's mother later questioned Poppy about the incident. Poppy told her mother that her cousin '*put his willy in her moo-moo*' (which is the word that Poppy used for her vagina). Poppy's mum called children's services. A social worker went to visit the house initially and spoke to Poppy, but Poppy would not repeat what she had said. She would distract from the conversation and ask random questions.

The cousin later told his father that he '*had touched Poppy's vagina with his fingers and wiped his willy on it*' but he denied penetration.

Police advised that Alfie and his family moved out of Poppy's home. Poppy's mother asked about a medical examination but was told that it would be intrusive, a lot to put a child through and unlikely to be helpful as it had been too long since the incident.

At age four, Poppy had become increasingly fearful of being left alone and was having flashbacks and waking up frequently in the night with nightmares. She'd often wet the bed, despite being dry at night since two and a half. Her mother requested help and Poppy started having psychotherapy. In psychotherapy, Poppy described things creeping up the stairs and coming into her bedroom; things not fitting into holes; and play involving putting the tails of toy animals between a doll's legs and saying that it hurt. She also told the therapist that it hurt when her cousin '*put his willy in her moo moo*'. At that time, there was also contradictory information as to whether Poppy was having ongoing contact with her cousin.

The case was escalated. Poppy was then referred for a medical examination, where she was found to have a deep notch at the back of the hymen (the membrane that surrounds the entrance to the vagina). In research, notches like this have only been reported if there has been vaginal penetration. Poppy's mother was a single parent who has significant physical and mental health problems. There was concern that Poppy often went to different households for sleepovers with families and friends. The problem with Poppy not having a medical examination aged three, is that it was now unclear as to who perpetrated penetrative sexual abuse and when. Could it be from the cousin, when Poppy was aged three? Could it be ongoing from the cousin? Or, could it be from somebody else, as Poppy stayed with lots of different people? It was difficult to investigate.

There was lack of understanding about what the cousin had done, or had not done, and possible lack of intervention for him.