

children are vulnerable people

Research shows that at least one in ten children will be sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 16. In most cases the offender is known to, or related to the child.

Most survivors of childhood sexual abuse did not tell anyone at the time and those who did were often not believed or helped. Adults known to the child, in particular, have been protected from detection by using a variety of coercive methods to keep the child quiet. Survivors report that they were confused, frightened, convinced that no one would believe them and some felt that they would not be loved if the awful secret got out.

Sexual abuse can damage the emotional, sexual and general health of children and the adults they mature into. The long term effects of abuse seem to be worse; the longer the abuse has gone on; the closer the child had previously been to the abuser; and, the less help and support the child had from people they tried to 'tell' at the time.

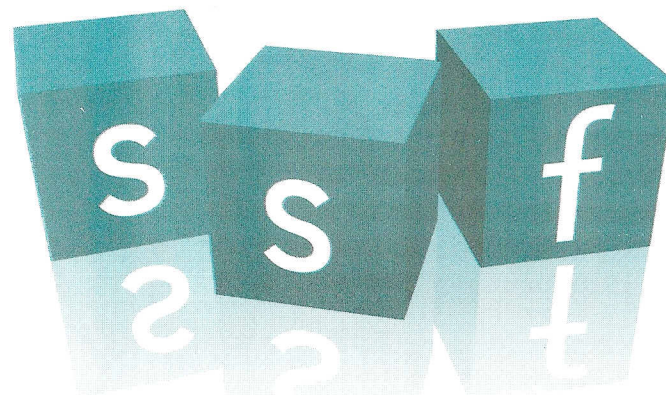
The **ssf** project has taken account of research findings such as these and the experience of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The project aims to raise the awareness of adults and run sensitive, careful workshops for children, designed to help them learn serious things in a 'fun' way. **ssf** firmly believes that children's vulnerability can be reduced by raising the awareness of parents, carers and the community in conjunction with providing children with resources of their own that they can call upon when they find themselves in a difficult or potentially dangerous situation.

In the **ssf** workshops children learn skills and strategies that help them deal with bullying, an approach from a stranger and an unwanted, inappropriate approach from a person the child knows.

the children's workshops

Each workshop lasts approximately 30 minutes and the average group size is eight participants. In nursery schools and partner centres where large numbers of children take part, each workshop is repeated several times. An interval of one week is left between each of the three workshops to give the parents and carers time to reinforce the strategies with the children.

The two main themes that run through all the workshops are assertiveness and telling. In every workshop we practice assertive responses and help the children identify who they can 'tell' if they are frightened, worried or confused. Various methods are used to introduce the strategies but the main ones are talking with the children, puppet plays, listening to the children and asking them to solve problems for the puppets ensuring that they stay safe, strong and free. The main puppet characters are called Callum and Shona and the children empathise with these characters very soon after meeting them, which is a major contributing factor to the success of the programme.



workshop 1: bullying

Introduces **ssf** to the children and also covers staying safe if someone tries to bully you. Two short plays with puppets are performed, the first showing Callum 'giving in' when he is bullied and the second showing Callum staying safe, strong and free. The main messages of this workshop are : say NO! if someone bullies you; get a friend to help you say NO! if you don't feel strong enough by yourself; get an adult to help if the person still won't leave you alone; and, bullying someone is not an 'okay' way to behave.

workshop 2: strangers

Looks at how to stay safe if a child is not with an adult and a stranger tries to talk to them. We ask the children what they already know about strangers and try to ensure that they understand that "a stranger is someone you don't know" - whether it is a man, woman or older child. A play is performed with puppets which demonstrates the main messages from this workshop: don't talk to someone you don't know when you are not with an adult; ignore them and keep walking; stand well back; yell and run away if they try to pick you up; and, always tell an adult what happened even if you were clever enough to stay safe. The children are also taught a very loud yell...!!

workshop 3: adults the child knows

Is about how to stay safe if someone you know asks you to keep a kiss, cuddle or touch secret. Three plays are performed which show: touches the puppets like and don't like i.e. ladybird, being pushed over and a cuddle; an adult asking a child to give a secret kiss; and, the child telling her mum (she gets a cuddle from mum which she likes and isn't secret). The main messages are: your body belongs to you; and, you never keep a kiss, cuddle or touch secret - they are not secret things - tell if someone asks you to keep them secret.

theparents'meeting

This is held before the children's workshops.

Prior to the parents' meeting information sheets are distributed which give :

- Information on bullying and advice on how to help children develop assertiveness skills to deal with bullying situations.
- Information on 'stranger danger' and how to help children cope if approached by a stranger.
- Information on child sexual abuse and its prevention. Advice on how to keep the 'telling barriers' down so that a child will ask trusted adults for help.
- Leaflet on how to react if a child says something, which causes concern.
- Book-list and useful contacts leaflet.

atthemeeting

- All three workshops we present to the children are demonstrated.
- The parents have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the issues.
- Project staff can discuss with parents how to give further explanation in a variety of situations and build on the messages we introduce to the children.



The project aims to reduce the vulnerability of young children to abuse and assault. A pro-active approach is taken involving children, parents, carers and pre-school staff to prevent children developing bullying behaviour, being victimised by their peers, abducted or sexually assaulted by adults.

ssf was piloted in 1989 and fully operational the following year. It is a voluntary organisation, a charity and a company limited by guarantee. Membership consists of individuals and groups who support or have an interest in the work of the project and the nurseries and partner centres who are the users of the service. Statutory agencies are associate members of the company.

The project is available in Highland to children in their pre-school year, their parents and carers. Great emphasis is given to the involvement of parents, carers and pre-school staff and recognition is given to the important role they have in keeping children safe.

A board of directors maintain the quality and high standards of ssf. They employ a project co-ordinator, who is responsible for the day to day management, and project workers to deliver the workshops. Trained volunteers help the project workers present the workshops and their contribution is highly valued.

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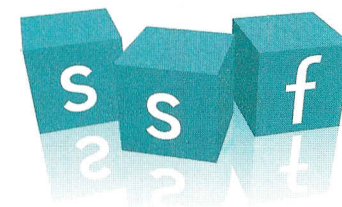
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safestrongandfree
HIGHLAND



a programme for
children in their preschool year
& their parents/carers

'The Safe Strong and Free Project believes that every child has the right to grow up safe, strong and free and that preventing sexual assault and exploitation of children is the responsibility of the whole community'

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