A Guide to Running Groups Pre-Trial

Bluestar PROJECT

About the Bluestar Project

This guide forms part of a suite of best-practice resources developed by Harewood Consultancy on behalf of the Bluestar Project. The Bluestar Project was designed to understand the barriers and facilitators to accessing pre-trial therapy services among children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse. The subsequent training and resources have been designed to apply to any practitioner or service working pre-trial with any victims/survivors of any form of abuse/crime.

Contact the Bluestar Project

All resources and information about our Training and Accreditation Programme can be found at www.bluestarproject.co.uk.Contact the Team on: info@bluestarproject.co.uk

About this guide

This guide is designed to assist practitioners and services when setting up and running groups with children and young people, parents, or adults who are receiving support during an active police investigation and pre-trial.

There is a set of principles to follow when providing victims with therapy before a criminal trial. These resources were originally developed in response to the CPS Pre-Trial Therapy Guidelines (2022), which have been temporarily withdrawn from publication while under review. Bluestar will update this resource when the revised CPS guidance is published.

Since 2024, these principles have been strengthened by the introduction of statutory duties under the Victims and Prisoners Act (2024) and further detailed in the Victim Information Requests: Code of Practice (2026), which place clear safeguards around how and when police and other authorised persons can request access to Third Party Materials (TPM Requests) which may include therapy, counselling and support records. Together, these frameworks support access to timely therapy while ensuring that any requests for information are lawful, necessary, proportionate, and grounded in a reasonable line of enquiry.

Although the CPS Pre-Trial Therapy Guidance was developed for therapy services, this guide applies to all services providing therapeutic, health or advocacy support to victims and survivors of crime. The Victim Information Requests Code of Practice (2026) introduces enhanced statutory safeguards, including specific protections for services that fall within the legal definition of “counselling” services (see Glossary below), including ISVA/IDVAs.

These guidelines were produced after consultation with experts and voluntary sector providers.

The previous CPS Pre-Trial Therapy Guidelines discouraged services from delivering groups pre-trial. The new guidelines are clearer and no longer say ‘don’t do groups’ but do recommend certain kinds of group. If people want to access therapeutic pre-trial groups, they should not be dissuaded if this is the right option for them, but that they do need to be made aware of the risks. Therapeutic groups can and should be delivered pre-trial.

Acknowledgements

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Definitions

'Pre-trial therapy' describes any therapeutic support given to children or adults during a criminal justice process. There are a set of principles to follow when providing victims with therapy during a criminal investigation and before a criminal trial, as described by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Guidance

The CPS first published guidance in 'Provision of Therapy for Vulnerable or Intimidated Adult Witnesses' in 2001 and at that time this was restrictive in terms of what kinds of support could be available to service users pre-trial, including discouraging talking about abuse within therapy and groups. The CPS Pre-trial Therapy Guidance[i] published in 2022 sought to clarify and enable access for victims to therapy, counselling and groups, without impacting on criminal justice processes. This framework has been strengthened by the introduction of statutory duties under the Victim and Prisoners Act[ii] (2024) and Victim Information Requests: Code of Practice[iii] (2026).

The CPS Pre-Trial Therapy Guidance (2022) has been temporarily withdrawn from publication (as of May 2026). The legal authority for the principles it contained now sits within the Code of Practice (2026). Bluestar will update this resource when the revised guidance is published.

Victim

The term used for consistency in this document (rather than 'complainant', 'survivor' or 'witness') to refer to an adult, young person or child who has alleged that a crime has been committed against them. The term victim is used in this guide only when directly referring to or quoting the CPS guidelines.

Service user

An adult, young person or child who has alleged that a crime has been committed against them and for whom a referral has been received by a therapeutic service.

Therapist

Any professionally trained practitioner or one undergoing training who is providing therapy to victims.

Therapy

The range of psychological and emotional counselling and therapeutic approaches and support provided for difficulties that are associated with and/or exacerbated by a criminal offence.

Counselling Services

As defined in the Victim Information Requests: Code of Practice (2026), counselling services are remunerated or voluntary services which offer psychological, therapeutic or emotional support aimed at improving a victim's emotional, psychological and mental health. This includes both registered and unregistered practitioners. The Code provides a non-exhaustive list of who may fall within this definition, including those registered with statutory bodies such as the General Medical Council (GMC), Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), and Social Work England, those on voluntary registers accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA), and unregistered practitioners including Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs), Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), Independent Stalking Advocates (ISAs), ministers of religion, and other unregistered persons. Counselling services are subject to enhanced statutory protections, including a higher threshold for requesting information.

Running groups pre-trial

The CPS first published guidance in 'Provision of Therapy for Vulnerable or Intimidated Adult Witnesses' in 2002 and at that time this was restrictive in terms of what kinds of support could be available to service users pre-trial, including discouraging talking about abuse within therapy and groups. The CPS Pre-trial Therapy Guidance published in 2022 recommend not delaying therapy because of the criminal justice process, are permissive of all therapy types including processing work and allow psychoeducational groups. If service users want to access therapeutic groups pre-trial, they should not be dissuaded from this but informed of the risks to their criminal case (see below). These principles are now reinforced by statutory duties under the Victims and Prisoners Act (2024) and the Victim Information Requests Code of Practice (2026).

The CPS 'Pre-Trial Therapy – Accompanying note for therapists' makes the following statement in 2022 regarding the use of groups pre-trial:

"Group therapies in which victims and other participants focus primarily on and are required to share their experiences related to criminal offences can present difficulties in the criminal justice process. That is because the defence may argue that the potential for confusion, collaboration, undue and even unconscious influence and fantasy is much higher than in other types of therapy. Although the defence could seek to use memories recalled or shared in the course of this type of therapy to undermine the credibility of related evidence, it is for the victim to decide whether to access this type of therapy based on their needs, health and wellbeing. Group therapy that focuses on psychoeducation emotional support and coping strategies should not be considered to be in any way undermining."

The CPS Pre-Trial Therapy Guidance (2022) has been temporarily withdrawn from publication (as of May 2026). The legal authority for the principles it contained now sits within the Code of Practice (2026). Bluestar will update this resource when the revised guidance is published.

Types of Group Work Pre-Trial

Specialist therapeutic and support services offer a wide range of groups to victims of abuse, including:

- Psycho-education courses for young people, adults and parents
- Counselling/therapeutic groups
- Short self-help courses and webinars
- Structured group education programmes
- Creative arts groups including dance, writing, yoga, forest bathing
- Empowerment groups and activities
- Online groups
- Survivor/peer led groups for young people or parents
- Forums and co-production groups for service improvement

This guidance applies to setting up and running any type of group, but each group will need planning and adjustments to meet the specific risks related to the type of group setting.

Benefits of group work pre-trial

There are myths and misunderstandings about therapeutic work in group settings which have historically caused concern to the legal profession, and can leave therapists worried about offering group support. However, under the current statutory framework groups can be run pre-trial. Professional expertise, research and the voices of service users tell us that groups are extremely beneficial in the recovery journey. Benefits include:

- Shared experiences and not needing to explain yourself
- A sense of belonging
- Reduction in feelings of shame and isolation
- Improvements in self-esteem and confidence
- Peer mentoring brings hope for the future

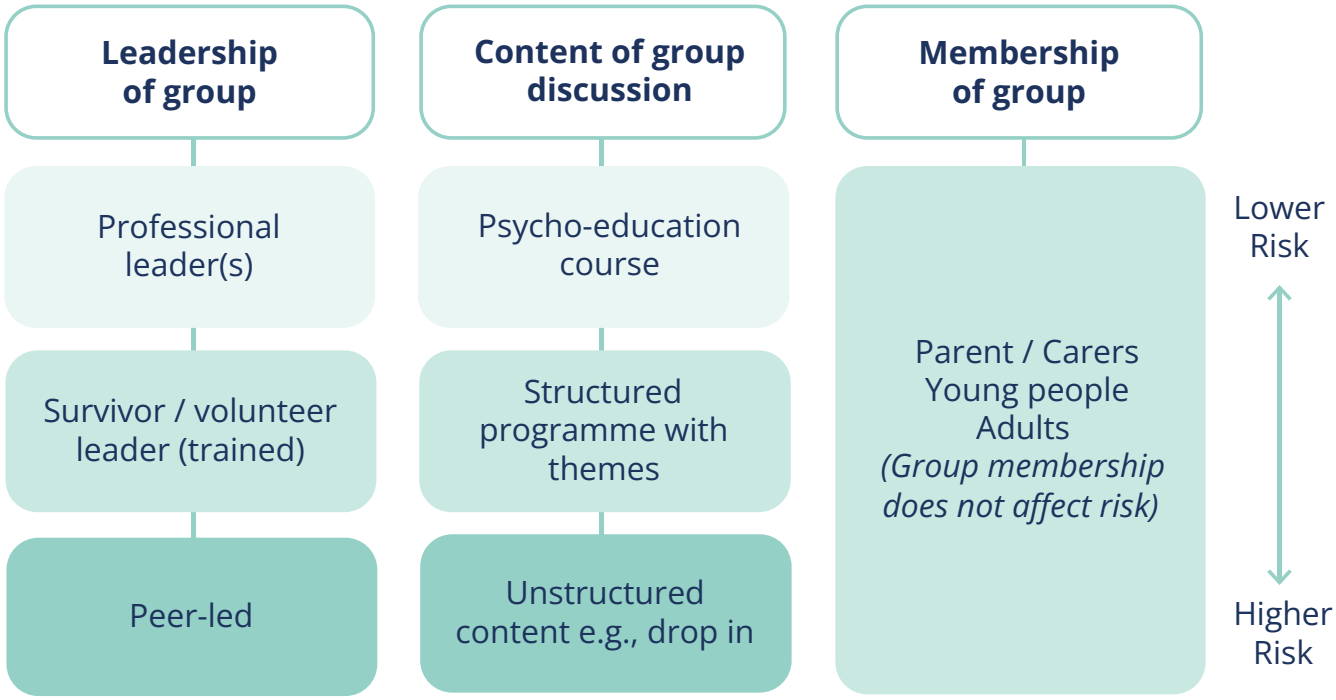
These benefits are amplified when diverse communities who face additional barriers to accessing support come together, such as groups that identify as LGBTQI+ and members of the Global Majority. Service users note the benefits of receiving validation in a group setting from a peer that has also experienced abuse.

Evaluations of groups in sexual violence services found reductions in feelings of isolation, improved self-esteem, greater confidence and improved wellbeing and ability to manage stress. Academic research of support in group settings identified that survivors felt empowered through the group intervention and had developed skills which enabled positive changes in their lives.

Risks associated with Groups pre-trial

The CPS guidelines highlight that group therapies which focus primarily on disclosing or sharing experiences related to criminal offence can present difficulties to the criminal justice process. This is because there is a risk that defence teams can argue that hearing the accounts of others can change or influence a service user's memory. Whereas, group therapy that focuses on psychoeducation, emotional support and coping strategies should not be considered to be in any way undermining.

This means that workshops and structured groups that create clear contracting with victims can enable service users to benefit from a group setting whilst minimising the risk of shared case information that would impact the criminal justice process. While certain structured, psychoeducational groups are considered lower risk – if a service user wants to access therapeutic groups pre-trial they should not be dissuaded from this but informed of the risks to their criminal case.



Potential risks to the criminal justice process

Therapists and service providers are required to make individual assessments of the risks when setting up each type of group. Risks are variable and dependent on three key factors: group leadership/facilitation, content of discussion and group membership.

Groups that are led by a pair of professional facilitators have a lower risk of detailed case discussion compared with a volunteer or peer-led group. A pair of professional facilitators who have received comprehensive pre-trial therapy training may be more able to set clear group agreements and to interrupt a service user should they start to share case information.

Groups that are educational, informative or focus on structured topics are less likely to move into detailed case information. Experience suggests that group membership has little impact on the risk of case information being shared – with parents, adults and young people being equally likely to avoid or share case information.

Common risks in groups

A greater risk when running groups in sexual violence services are the emotional impact and potential triggering from group discussions. Group leaders should consider how they will manage emotional impact in the group, considering two facilitators to allow for someone to step out of the room for 1:1 support and support mechanisms after and outside of the group. Common risks include:

- Group members becoming distressed by someone else who is upset or angry
- Group members may feel the need to rescue each other – important to keep reminding of the victim/rescuer/attacker triangle
- A group can become weighed down by grief and upset and struggle to lift back to a hopeful place
- The unpredictability of the level of distress

Myths and facts from the CJS system

Myth – Young people will be influenced by listening to each other's experiences and they may use this information to fill in gaps in their own memory

Fact – There is little to no robust evidence around false memory recall as a result of participating in groups

Myth – Young people will hear each other's experience and imagine that happened to them

Fact – Meeting someone else who has experienced a sexual assault may lead a service user to reflect on their own abuse experience, and recognise it for the first time as sexual abuse

Myth – Spending time with other victims could lead them to inflate their own experience

Fact – As psychoeducational groups progress, feelings of self-blame may diminish and support survivors to understand that the only person to blame for the abuse is the perpetrator

Myth – Victims that are confident and less distressed at interview, as a result of attending a group, will appear complacent and less believable to a jury

Fact – Therapeutic support should improve wellbeing and enable a victim to give a clear testimony of evidence for the jury

Myth – Victims will contact each other outside a group and share the detail of their criminal case with each other

Fact – Victims often create supportive and validating friendships in the group which they continue to grow through contact outside of the group — but that does not mean they will share the full detail of their criminal case. They should not be prevented from creating ongoing support networks and friendships as part of their healing journey

Myth – Everyone attending a group should be aware that a defence team could argue they have been influenced by the group members

Fact – Each group leader should clearly explain that there is risk that defence teams will use any avenue to challenge the integrity of a victim's testimony. However, it is important to remember only a small percentage of cases make it to trial

Getting ready to start a group

Before starting a group for service users that are pre-trial it is important to assess readiness to join the group and to contract for clear ground rules. Ideally groups will be made of service users or family members that bring experiences of similar types of abuse (e.g. intra-familial, online, exploitation) or characteristics (e.g. parents of children with disabilities, refugees, LGBTQI+), to enhance the sense of belonging.

Assessing readiness

Many services consider group work as an intervention at the initial assessment with a service user. Assessment prior to invitation to join a group should include a one-to-one session and a standard assessment covering:

- Physical health and mental health conditions, including eating disorders
- Mental health needs, including symptoms (flashbacks, dissociation), level of coping and risk of suicide
- Type of abuse and whether recent/non-recent
- Risks to self and others, such as violence and aggression
- Risk of further abuse and safety planning
- Additional contextual information such as family, education, employment, housing
- Current or previous counselling including what was useful
- Hopes for the group
- Availability and commitment to attend group sessions

See **Appendix 1: SAMPLE Group Assessment**

Contracting

An important part of contracting in pre-trial groups includes introducing group members to the principles of confidentiality, privacy, and data minimisation that underpin the group — and explaining what this means in practice for how the group runs. Where there are active criminal investigations, there are additional considerations to explain, including the potential for defence challenges if case information is shared.

Example script for introducing pre-trial group contracting

- Explain that pre-trial therapy is any therapy service that is provided while a criminal investigation is underway and before an allegation has gone to trial.
- Explain that the group is subject to the same requirements of pre-trial therapy services as outlined by the CPS.
- Explain that the choice to access the group before, after or during the criminal justice process is theirs.
- As part of the criminal justice process, the police or CPS may seek access to the notes we keep about these sessions – but we only keep minimal group notes such as attendance and session topic. The starting point under the legal Code of Practice (2026) is that counselling records are not necessary or proportionate to request.
- In this group, we ask you not to talk about or recall the factual detail of the allegation that's under investigation (e.g., specific pieces of information about the incident under investigation).
- We will keep information about you confidential unless you give us your permission to share notes, we are worried about your safety or there is a legal reason to share information.

Therapists should explain to group members that in groups pre-trial, there may be live criminal investigations underway for some or all members. For this reason, group members are asked not to share specific case information during sessions – this is primarily to protect the privacy of everyone in the room and to ensure that no one else's personal information ends up in another person's records. It is also good safeguarding practice. There is an additional consideration for those with active cases – defence teams can sometimes argue that hearing the accounts of others in a group may have influenced a member's memory, so keeping specific case detail out of the group also helps protect everyone's criminal justice process. If a group member begins to share specific case detail, the facilitator will gently redirect the group – this is not about restricting what people can say, but about keeping everyone safe and protected.

Group and psycho-education course content

There is no set group/course content pre-trial, but a course or group with a schedule of topics and themes is less likely to move into detailed case discussion. Evidence based programmes include: Rockpool, Circle of Hope.

Common themes/topics in groups:

Common themes/topics in groups:

- Introducing the idea of 'healing' as a journey
- Understanding the impact of trauma on the body and mind
- Dispelling the myths and common feelings after abuse e.g. shame, isolation, stigma, blame
- Exploring the importance of self-care
- Building communication skills for parents in order to support their children and themselves
- Sex and sexuality – including intrusive thoughts
- Helping parents reclaim intimacy and positive relationships in their own lives
- Use of artwork and imagery to make sense of the abuse
- Family and relationship dynamics, including typical teenage behaviour, managing behaviours and parenting challenges
- Resetting the narrative – this was not your child's first sexual experience, it was an incident of power and control being exerted over them
- Moving into the future with confidence and hope

Support alongside group / courses

For many service users, group work is offered as an alternative to one-to-one therapy or after one-to-one therapy has ended. There may need to be some consideration of support before, during and after the sessions. Many groups/courses are offered with an accompanying self-help guide, homework or resources.

Note keeping in group sessions

Note keeping in group sessions should follow existing organisational and professional guidance on record keeping, information sharing and information security, as well as the current legal framework. Keeping group notes to a minimum is first and foremost about data minimisation and the privacy rights of all group members. Third-party information about other group members should never appear in individual case records. These principles remain best practice regardless of the current status of the CPS guidelines and are consistent with the Victim Information Requests Code of Practice (2026). Even where specific detail is recorded in group notes and a TPM request is subsequently received, that material would only be shared if it met the substantial probative value threshold - which in most group contexts it would not. Some record or case management systems provide a note keeping section for group meetings, but others use the existing case note chronology for each service user.

Case examples

Psycho-education course for young people:

This group is led by a therapist and a case worker, with a series of themed topics to cover each week. The group agreement includes a clear request not to share detailed case information with each other. The team take minimal notes of each session, noting only the topic covered and who attended. Young people are reminded not to discuss the detail of their cases with each other if they are in contact outside of the group.

Parent drop-in:

These sessions are facilitated by a volunteer parent, with no formal programme structure and a group led discussion. The group carries a potential risk of unplanned conversations that could include detailed case descriptions. There are no notes taken and no record of attendance at the drop ins in the child's clinical notes. If parents are part of the group and their child's case is pre-trial, they are advised there is a risk that defence lawyers may argue they have been discussing the detail of each other's cases and been unduly influenced. It is the parents' choice whether the benefit they gain from the support of other parents in a similar situation outweighs any potential impact on a future criminal trial.

A sample note for a group could include:

- Name of group facilitator(s)
- Name of service users who attended
- Topic of session
- Date of group session

A sample of an individual record could include:

- Date of group session
- Group session number
- Topic of group session

New Disclosures

If a group member shares something for the very first time during a group session – information that has never previously been shared with the police or anyone else – this is a potential first disclosure and one of the very few scenarios that may meet the substantial probative value threshold. In these circumstances the 1:1 disclosure protocol applies. The facilitator should make a verbatim record using the separate disclosure template as soon as possible after the session. For further information on managing first disclosures see the Bluestar Pre-Trial Therapy Protocol.

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Appendix 1: SAMPLE Group Assessment

Information			
Name		**Age**	
Record ID		**D.O.B**	
Address			
Telephone		**Postcode**	
Email			
Preferred site / location		**Virtual support preference**	*<Has access to confidential space for phone sessions?>*

Contact preferences	**Phone** *<remind that service number will appear unknown>*	**Email** *<Does anyone else have access?>*	**Post** *<Who do they live with?>*
Preferred method of contact	*y/n*	*y/n*	*y/n*

Emergency Contact Details			
Name Phone		**Relationship**	

Abuse type – tick all that apply

Timing of abuse			
Type of abuse	☐ Childhood	☐ Adult	
	☐ Recent (last 12 months)	☐ Non-recent	
	☐ Rape	☐ CSA	☐ CSE
	☐ Sexual Assault	☐ Sibling sexual abuse	☐ Online
Other risk factors	☐ Trafficking	☐ DV	☐ Multiple perpetrators

Criminal Justice – tick all that apply			
Has the abuse been reported to the police?	☐ Told police	**What stage is the investigation?**	☐ Referred to CPS
	☐ Planning to tell police	☐ Under investigation	☐ Trial awaited
	☐ Has an ISVA?		☐ Trial complete
Prompt: Introduce the concept of potential defence challenges if case information is shared in a group and explain that they will not be able to share detailed case information in the group sessions. If anyone starts to share detailed case information the facilitator will be required to interrupt them, to prevent any risk of breach of information.			

Continued below

Health assessment – are there any health reasons that would impact on attendance at a group?	
Physical Health: *Examples: Eating disorder, Epilepsy, Asthma, accessibility needs*	
Medication?	
Mental Health: *Prompt: Discuss suicide ideation (safety plan if necessary) and how are they coping? *Include symptoms such as: Flashbacks, Nightmares, Dissociation*	
Medication?	

Risks – are there any risks that would impact on attendance at a group?
Safety risks: *Prompt: Are they still in contact with alleged perpetrator? Are there any domestic abuse risks? How are they keeping safe? (Self/others) *make safety plan if necessary**
Risks to others / staff: *Prompt: History of violence +/or aggression?*
Contextual risks: *Prompt: Do they need any support with any of the following outside of the group before they can fully engage? Housing, substance misuse, isolation, faith, language barriers, local community. Is anyone already supporting them with this already? Is that working for them?*

Additional information	
Current relationships	*Prompt: Who are the important people in their lives? Partner? Friends? Family?*
Pregnancy and children	*Prompt: Currently Pregnant? Caring for children up to 6 months old? *include age of children and whether living at home*
Employment/ School	
Any other trauma experiences	*Any ongoing support needs not covered above*

Continued below

Previous counselling

Prompt: What did you find useful when you previously accessed counselling?
**detail any previous counselling? Including any currently accessed*

Hopes for the group

Prompt: What are your hopes for this group?

Concerns or anticipated challenges about coming to a group

Prompt: Where do you see yourself having the most difficulty as we begin to talk about abuse and trauma? How might you manage this?
For assessors – consider, do these concerns seem typical to most group members' concerns?

Assessing Readiness

Prompt: Have you been in group(s) before and how did you find it? How comfortable are you with sharing feelings or experiences in a group?
For assessors – any concerns around self-disclosure or talking in a group expressed/noticed?

Managing group dynamics

Prompt: Are there ways you feel you could be supported to contribute in group discussions- what would help you? How would you manage if you wanted to challenge or question something raised in the group? Or if you felt challenged?
For assessors– Discuss role of facilitators in supporting group dynamics and discussion

Continued below

FOR PARENTING GROUPS ONLY

FOR PARENTING GROUPS ONLY

Parenting

Prompt: Acknowledge the value of hearing a range of ways of coping and responding in the group which creates balance and difference. Are they open to sharing ideas and hearing alternative ways to responding to their child OR would this feel like a criticism/like something else to worry about if already overwhelmed?

Trauma response

Prompt: Find out what stage they are at dealing with and responding to their child's trauma. Numb/shock, in denial, angry, helpless, etc. Are they able to acknowledge their child's abuse to themselves and others?

Parental abuse

Prompt: Does the parent have their own sexual abuse/trauma history they want us to be aware of? Where do they feel they are in their own journey with this?

Availability and commitment

Prompt: Introduce the importance of commitment and stability in the group. Ask if they can commit to attend regularly?

Support

Prompt: How would you managed if you were upset by something in the group or felt challenged? What support would they need in place to enable attendance? E.g. transport, a supporter

Availability	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

Date	
Assessor	
Staff involved in case discussion	

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Appendix 2: SAMPLE Group Contract

Please read the following pages carefully, then sign and return the consent form to begin the therapy process

What is the group?

<<insert a description of the group including purpose, who the group is for, content of sessions, number and frequency of sessions>>

For example: This group is a 12-week creative therapy group for young people aged 15-19 who have experienced sexual abuse or assault. The group has a playful and reflective approach to bringing young people together and working towards feeling stronger. The group aims to reduce isolation, support emotional regulation and aid understanding of how we are affected by trauma.

For example: The weekly sessions will combine a psycho-educational presentation on a theme before moving into small or whole group discussion and reflection time. Sometimes we will explore a topic in small groups through talking, writing and using art materials. You can choose how you share your thoughts and you do not have to be a skilled writer or artist; what is most important is what helps you to think about and process the information that has been shared so that it is meaningful to you.

Working Therapeutically in a Group

Group therapy is a unique kind of therapy where a group of people who are experiencing similar challenges work together towards feeling stronger. We will make sure that the group is a safe place for sharing, accepting and taking care of each other. There is no expectation to share anything you do not want to about your history and experiences; you are invited to share as much or as little as feels comfortable.

Hearing other people's stories and experiences can bring up different feelings within us. The therapists will work with you to understand, identify and respond to any triggers you have that are activated in the group.

Post-session check-in calls with one of the facilitators can be arranged if: you feel you need to talk to one of the facilitators between sessions about an issue that you have not been able to bring to the group; you miss a session; if you have found some of the material or group work emotionally challenging and need some time to process this individually.

Working in a group pre-trial

If groups members have an open police investigation and their case be 'pre-trial', there is a risk to the outcome of the criminal trial if case information is shared. For this reason, we ask you not to share detailed case information in the group sessions. If anyone starts to share detailed case information the facilitator will be required to interrupt them, to prevent any risk of breach of information.

Group commitments and Confidentiality

In group work people often share personal stories. Confidentiality means keeping everything that is shared in the group safe and private. It is OK to share what you have learned in the group/course, and the topics discussed, but are asked to do so

Continued below

in a way that respects and protects everyone's privacy and does not compromise the confidentiality of the other members of the group. For example, if you talk about your experience of being in our group to others outside the group, it is very important not to use identifying details of other members.

To help everyone feel a sense of safety, we ask participants to commit to the following:

- When sharing personal experiences, try to make sure that they are within the scope of the topic or being discussed.
- Do not share identifying information about an event, court case or about the person who abused you or your child.
- For parent group contracts - It is OK to use your child's name, if you would like to. This will be something we think about when setting up the course agreement together with other group members too.

What to expect

During the course, there may be discussions that bring up painful or upsetting feelings and memories for you. At times you might:

- Feel emotions in response to the trauma of sexual abuse including anger, shame and powerlessness.
- Experience vulnerability or exposure after sharing an aspect of your experience or feelings with others
- Find it difficult hearing about others' experiences or about aspects of the impact of sexual abuse that others are struggling with.
- Be validated by sharing your emotions in the group
- Discover new ways to manage and work with uncomfortable feelings
- Feel more able to connect with others as you experience the support of people the group.
- Build your confidence by realising how much you already know and intuitively do to support your child.

Attendance, Cancellations and holidays

Regular attendance is important. We ask that you attend these sessions regularly and on time to create group stability and a feeling of safety. Missed or delayed sessions interrupt the process, making it less effective for everyone.

If you miss two sessions in a row, you will not be able to attend the rest of the group sessions and the facilitators will think with you about whether you would like to return to a future course if the timing was not right for you, or whether there were other areas of support you and your family might need.

Cancellations

We understand that occasionally a session has to be cancelled unexpectedly. We ask that you please give us as much notice as possible. If you have to cancel on the day, you can contact us by phone call or text.

Continued below

Signed Contract

- I have read and understand the contract and agree to its terms and conditions.
- I provide my full consent to join the group.
- I agree to attend the group regularly and on time, and that I will inform the service if I am unable to attend.

Signed: Name:

Date:

Counsellor / therapist signature: Name:

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Appendix 3: SAMPLE Ground rules / Group agreement to use in first session

We agree that:

- We're all here tosupport each other. We know why we're here together, but we don't necessarily have to speak about this, and some people may not want to. We will be mindful of what we share and what questions we're asking – are they supportive or just curious?
- We will take care of ourselves – if we need time out, or want to speak to one of the facilitators, we can, and they can give us space or support. Each of us is the expert of what we need.
- If our case is within the criminal justice system, we will take care not to discuss specific details of the incident under investigation (e.g., the factual information included in our Victims Statement given to the Police) – for the safety of our case and other peoples
- We will be non-judgemental and make this a welcoming space for all women including women of any age, religion, sexual orientation, women with disabilities, trans women, women of any racial, ethnic or cultural background.
- We agree that what's said in the group stays in the group – this is a confidential space. Exceptions to this will include if a facilitator is concerned that you or someone else is at risk of harm*. Facilitators may speak to their supervisor.
- We will respect other people's right not to be identified outside the group.
- We will support the facilitators to run the group and we'll be careful not to cross-talk over each other.

What else would the group like to agree to?

** Please ask them for more details on this if you need to.*

References

i CPS Pretrial Therapy Guidance (2022) – temporarily withdrawn https://www.cps.gov.uk/prosecution-guidance/pre-trial-therapy

ii Victim and Prisoners Act (2024) – https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2024/21

iii Victim Information Requests Code of Practice (2026) – https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/victim-information-requests-code-of-practice--2/victim-information-requests-code-of-practice-accessible

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