

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse can be any type of sexual or indecent act or activity. Examples of sexual abuse can include:

- Rape, exposure to pornography and any physical sexual touching which the vulnerable adult does not want or does not truly understand
- Where a person is unable to give their informed consent
- Any sexual relationship that develops between adults where one is in a position of trust, power or authority in relation to the other, for example a day centre worker, social worker, residential care worker, or a health worker.

Signs and symptoms of sexual abuse can include:

- Unexplained changes in the character or behaviour of the adult
- Tendency to withdraw and spend time alone
- The vulnerable adult displaying sexual behaviour and / or language which is out of character
- Irregular or disturbed sleep pattern
- Bruising or bleeding in the rectal or genital areas
- Torn or stained underclothing especially with blood or semen
- Sexually transmitted disease or pregnancy where the vulnerable adult cannot give consent to sexual acts

Background

Jenny (34) has Downs Syndrome and lives with her elderly parents. On Wednesdays and Thursdays Jenny attends a community day centre where she has many friends. Jenny became friends with Robert whom she met in the canteen. Robert asked Jenny to go back to his flat, and on the third visit he started touching her in ways that made her feel very uncomfortable.

What happened next?

Jenny returned home very upset and wouldn't talk to her parents for several days. Jenny didn't want to go to the centre the following week which was very out of character. Jenny's father phoned the centre and spoke to the manager who arranged for Jenny's link worker to visit her and her parents at home. At this meeting Jenny eventually explained what had happened.

In the meantime the centre manager visited the Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board website, www.bsab.org, for more advice. When he found out that Jenny had been sexually abused he phoned 999 and also called Jenny's social worker.

What was the outcome?

The police started an investigation and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecuted Robert. He received a suspended sentence of 12 months and was placed on the Sexual Offenders Register for five years.

Jenny's link worker suggested that the centre run an adult abuse awareness course for staff. The centre manager contacted the Birmingham Care Development Agency (BCDA) who provided a course for all staff on identifying the signs of adult abuse and the procedures to be followed to raise an alert.