

Building Bridges

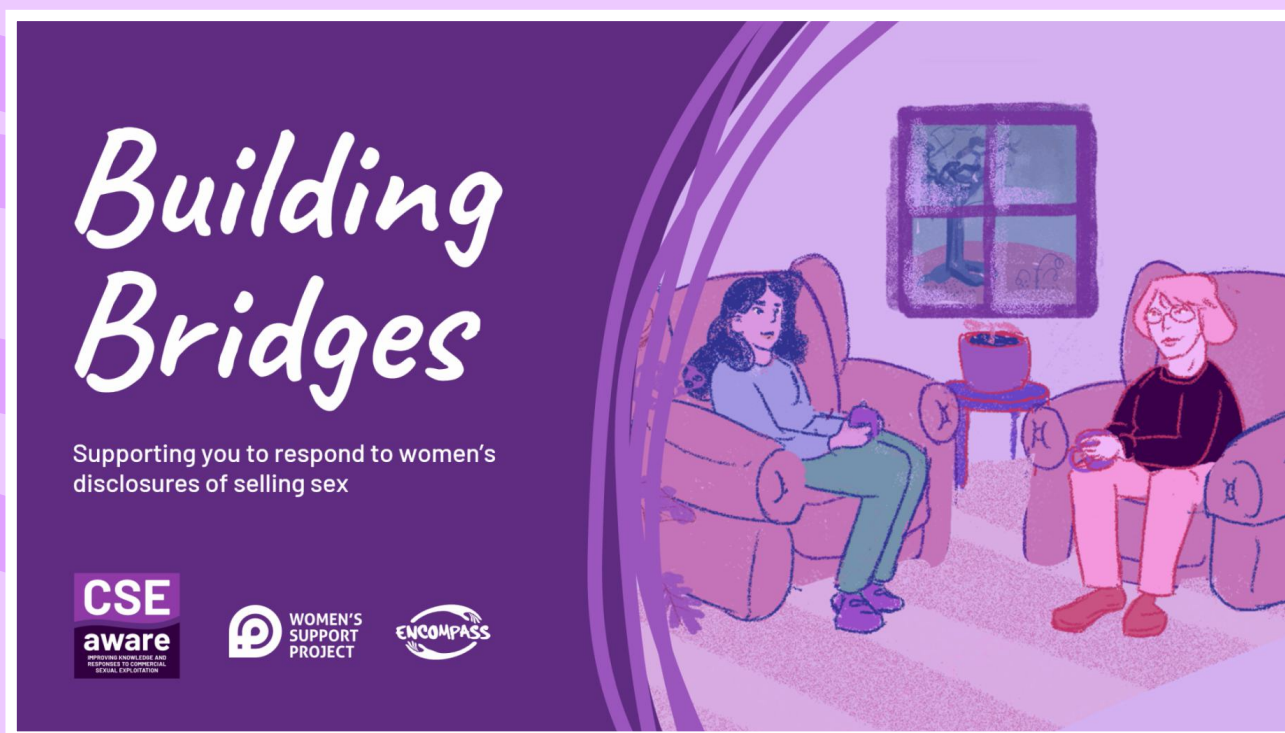
Supporting you to respond to women's disclosures of selling sex

Training Pack



WOMEN'S
SUPPORT
PROJECT



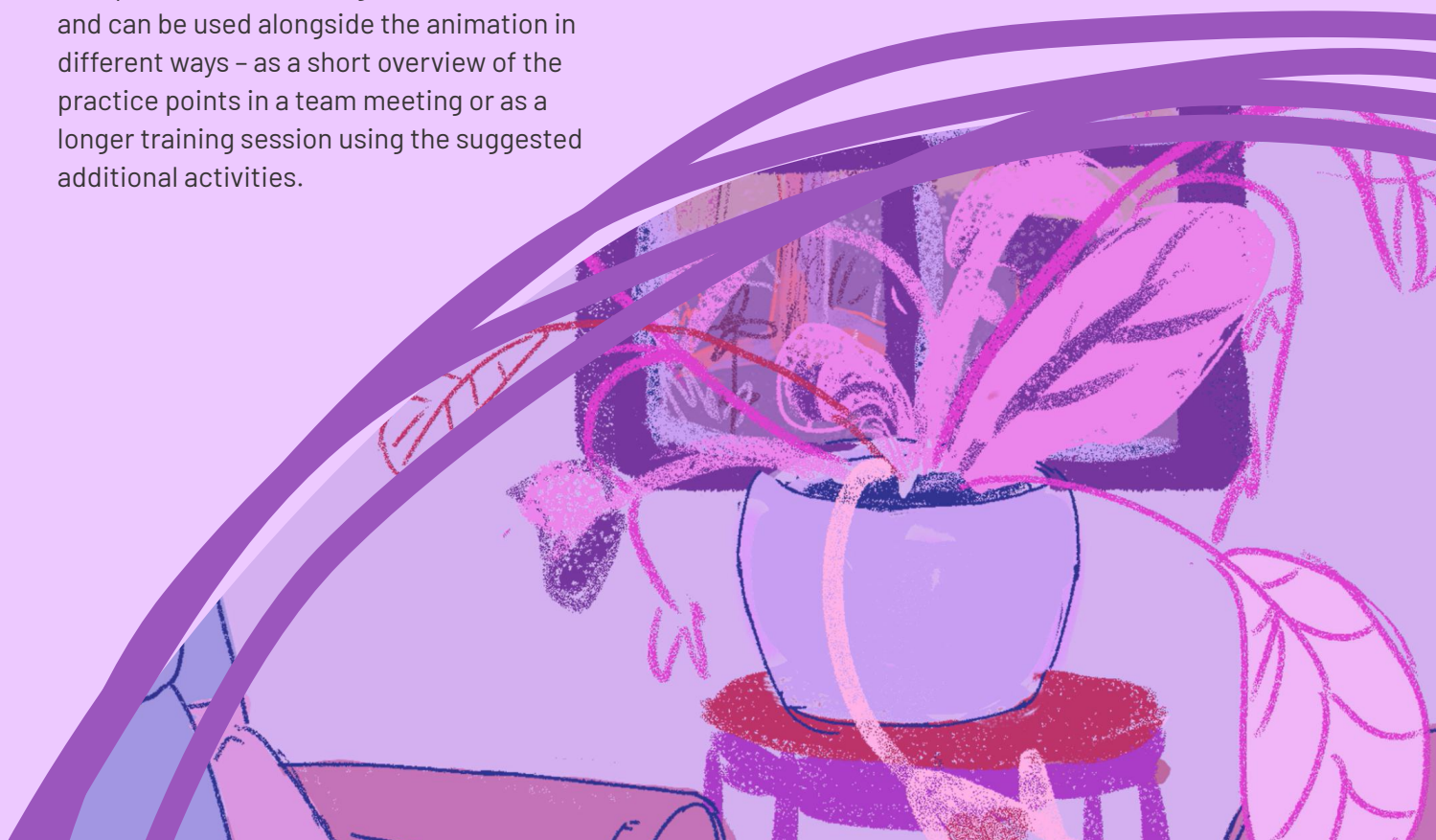


Slide 1 – cover

To support the use of the **Building Bridges** animation we have developed this presentation which can be used to help highlight the key practice points from the animation and the guidance.

This presentation is designed to be flexible and can be used alongside the animation in different ways – as a short overview of the practice points in a team meeting or as a longer training session using the suggested additional activities.

Optional activities are contained within the boxes in this pack.





Slide 2

Highlight that staff within your service are uniquely positioned to identify and support women who sell or exchange sex or sexual content or those at risk of becoming involved.

Recent research carried out in Scotland showed that women who exchange or sell sex or sexual content access support for an average of seven different needs. This highlights that there are women engaging with our services who are potentially affected yet are not having all their needs met.¹

During this session we are going to watch an animation which will show the interaction between Alice a woman who sells sex and Judy a worker in a generic service.



1. Lived Experience Engagement: the experiences of people who sell or exchange sex and their interaction with support services

The 'sex industry'

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Direct contact

These forms involve direct physical and sexual contact between a woman and a 'sex buyer' and can include transactional/survival sex outside of the more formal sex industry.

Indirect contact

These forms do not involve direct sexual contact. This includes making and performing in pornography, webcamming, image selling platforms such as OnlyFans. As well as stripping, lap dancing, pole dancing, and sex phone lines.

Women can be involved in different aspects of the 'sex industry'; some may be involved in webcamming and escorting or some may sell sex on the street as well as having regulars they see at home or on an outcall basis.



Slide 3

Women are involved in Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in all areas of Scotland. It is not isolated to our big cities and takes different forms in different areas. It happens here.

In our cities there have been recognised areas where street prostitution has historically been focused but the numbers of women involved has reduced over the years due to the growth of the internet and online advertising websites.

In towns and cities, along with more rural areas, it can happen where vulnerable women access services such as substance use, homelessness or mental health and are approached and offered money, drugs, a lift, or a roof above their head in exchange for sexual activity.

All across Scotland, sex is exchanged or sold indoors in homes, in hotels, in holiday lets or in brothels. The internet and the increase in online advertising sites and escort services has meant that wherever there are possible sex buyers, there will be CSE. The internet has also allowed easy access and led to a proliferation of these sites which offer 'services' to all communities in Scotland.

If you have more time then after introducing this slide ask:

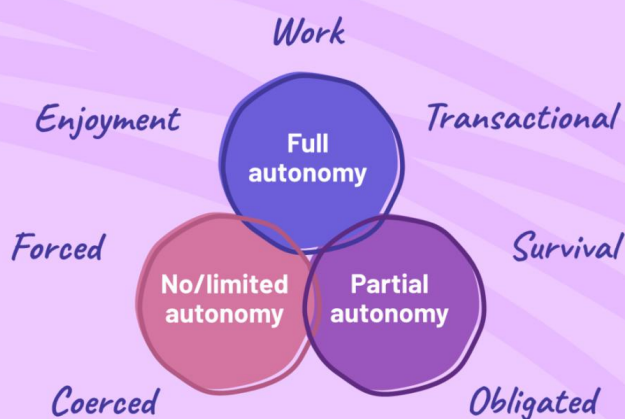
What forms of CSE they are aware of?

What of these forms do they think happen in their local area?

Have they worked with or come into contact with women who sell or exchange sex? How do they know/ think they know?

Levels of autonomy experienced in the exchange of sexual services

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Slide 4

The level of choice, agency and autonomy women have over their involvement will vary, from those who see themselves as sex workers and see themselves as having freely chosen to be involved to those who have been trafficked and have no choice or control.

As such women who exchange or sell sex or sexual content will have different thoughts and feelings about their involvement. Some will see their involvement as exploitative, others may see their involvement as empowering and based on a choice they have made, while others may be physically or emotionally dependent on the person who is coercing their involvement and not see this as coercion.

It's important that you don't make assumptions about how women feel and that you explore this with women after you receive a disclosure.

If someone discloses, use the language they use to describe this. If they refer to themselves as a working girl, prostitute or sex worker then use these terms, if they do not describe themselves in this way then do not use these terms.

When writing case notes and records you should remember that women have the right to access their records. Terms such as "sex work" or "sex worker" should not be used unless these are the terms women use to describe themselves.



Vulnerability factors

The factors that lead individuals into involvement in the 'sex industry' are often about survival in situations where choices can be severely limited. Those involved are often vulnerable because of:

- Living in poverty or with financial difficulties.
- Feeling they have few realistic or viable alternatives.
- Having addiction or substance use issues.
- Experiences of other forms of violence or abuse.
- Having difficult family backgrounds with little or no support.
- Being a migrant.
- Having no recourse to public funds.



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Slide 5

The majority of those who sell or exchange sex or sexual content are women, with the majority of buyers being men.

Involvement for many is driven by inequality and by demand. There is an over representation of marginalised and minority groups.²

You can ask your team if they can think of other factors that can make women vulnerable?

What of these vulnerabilities can you see in women who use your service?

2. <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/the-nature-and-prevalence-of-prostitution-and-sex-work-in-england>

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"I genuinely don't think I've ever had a 'good' experience with other services, or at least now when I look back I thought they were okay but now I think they weren't that great and did the bare minimum."
– Participant in Lived Experience Research



Slide 6

Creating the conditions that allow women to disclose their involvement in the 'sex industry' has benefits for individual women and for services.

Ask what you think the benefits may be for women and for services if women are able to disclose their involvement.

For women the benefits include:

- Makes it easier for women to tell you about involvement in CSE – now or in the future.
- Let's women know that you are aware of the issue and are prepared to help.
- Supports earlier intervention and can reduce harm.
- Opportunity for women to be provided with information to increase their options.
- Can lead to women feeling less isolated and being better supported.

For the services the benefits include:

- Knowing about a woman's experience of CSE will help inform your assessment and her care.
- Can help reduce/remove barriers and support women to engage with services.
- Positive experiences will spread to the wider community.
- Potential to reduce repeat presentations.

Ask the group what they think the barriers to identifying women who sell or exchange sex in their service are.

Meet Judy and Alice

Judy

Judy is a worker in her mid-40s. She is a caseworker for a generic service. She is a confident, empathetic worker who has been supporting women for years but is getting to grips with being more direct about asking women if they are involved in selling sex.

Alice

Alice is a woman in her mid-30s, she is of mixed ethnicity, has been involved in different forms of CSE (indoors and street). She is confident and self-sufficient and has been engaging with support. She is working class and a single mum to a daughter. She has not disclosed her involvement as yet.



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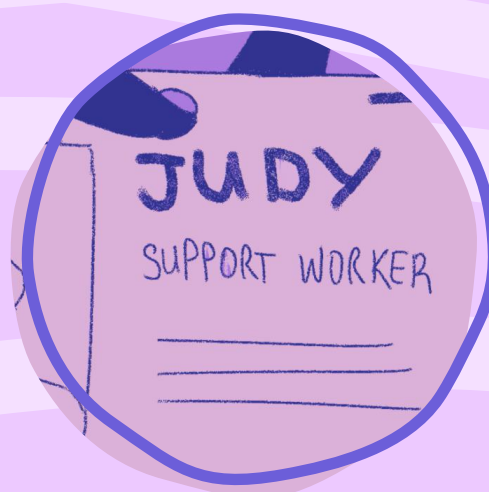
Slide 7

Introduce Alice and Judy, explain that Alice's vulnerability to involvement include being a:

- Single parent with no extended support and she has struggled to find work when her daughter is in nursery.
- Experiencing financial difficulties and has rent arrears as well as difficulty paying her credit cards.
- Has experienced domestic abuse previously and is not receiving any financial support from her daughter's dad.
- Has a friend involved in the 'sex industry' who told her it was 'easy money.'

Show the video in full.

Show the video up until after Judy talks about creating a safe space (1 minute 36 seconds on the animation) and ask the group what do you think the barriers are to women telling them about any involvement they have or have had in the sex industry with regards their setting/service.



Barriers to disclosing

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"We have to weigh up all the risks and benefits of telling workers like you. Why? Because we're worried of being judged, getting in trouble with the police or Home Office, or losing our kids."

- It's not the right time for women.
- Not trusting the organisation or person asking.
- Having fears about the consequences of disclosing. This can include worries about not being believed, about being judged, about information being passed on to the police, Home Office or social work, about it increasing the risk to them from pimps/sex buyers, losing benefit/housing and family/friends finding out.

Slide 8

Women have to make very complex decisions about who to tell, what to tell and when to tell. Different women will have different fears based on their individual circumstances and the context within which they are involved, some of these fears will be due to what others have told them. These fears can include:



If you have time ask the group what they think they could do to overcome some of the fears women may have about disclosing. How can they create a safe context for someone to disclose?

Highlight that women tell us it is easier to disclose if we ask as it shows the person asking has an awareness of the issue and is open to listening. Not asking means that women are at risk of not receiving the right support.

Barriers to asking

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"Training in communicating better with the women and knowing the correct questions to ask, to not offend them, but to gain as much information as possible. How best to put them at ease to gain their trust and confidence."

"It would be good to have a clear guideline of how to handle a disclosure and what the common procedures are, but I also think more people need to be aware of what language to use when discussing these subjects and how to handle them sensitively and discreetly."

Slide 9

Fears about asking can be experienced by workers in any organisation these can include:

Not having the skills to be able to help

Upsetting women

Not knowing about the legalities around the selling or exchanging of sex

Appearing judgemental or further stigmatising women

Opening a can of worms

Using the wrong language

If you haven't already, show the video up until Alice discloses so from 1 minute 36 seconds to 3 minutes 3 seconds.

Ask the group to consider what they think Judy has done to encourage Alice's disclosure.

What could they do?

Ask the group why Judy felt ok to ask?

How you ask the question will depend on whether you are asking about it as part of your routine processes or because you already have a relationship with the woman and you have picked up on signs.

Explore how they could ask the question based on their role.

Asking the question

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Recognise signs and vulnerabilities

- "I know you've been struggling financially. Women in crisis do what they can to get by like borrowing cash or getting a loan. Some women start selling sex. Is this something you've considered?"
- "Has anyone ever offered you money or goods such as drugs/alcohol in return for sex/ sexual activities?"
- "Has anyone ever made you feel like you have had to have sex with them for somewhere to stay?"

Follow up and ask again if circumstances change

- "I know we have spoken about this before but given the changes you have spoken about in your life, and I know that some women we work with will at times sell or exchange sex to manage financially. I wanted to check if this is something that's affected you?"

Slide 10

Staff often have many fears about asking someone directly about their involvement in the 'sex industry'. These often revolve around worrying that the person will feel judged or about using the wrong language. While these worries are normal and are experienced by staff in all services, they should not stop us from broaching the subject and asking the question sensitively and appropriately.

If you are asking because you have noticed signs or identified vulnerabilities to involvement, then you can use the things you have observed or have heard to help frame your question.

Some women who sell or exchange sex or sexual content will not frame their experience as prostitution, sexual exploitation, or sex work. In these circumstances it can be helpful to give examples based on the women's circumstances and what is making you think there may be involvement when you ask.

Where you are asking as part of routine processes, never caveat routine enquiry questions with "I'm sorry to ask...", or, "I know this won't affect you, but we have to ask everyone this..."

If you are continuing to support someone and her circumstances change, or you become aware of signs, then it may be appropriate to ask again.



After disclosure

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"Judy didn't assume anything, she checked how I felt about selling sex and believed me."

Check out what the woman's thoughts and feelings are about her involvement, ask her what she wants you to support her with, get her permission for any referrals to other organisations.

Check out any risks:

- "Is there a person or situation that makes you feel you don't have choices in your life?"
- "Is there anyone or any situations that cause you fear?"

Slide 11

It's important that we don't make assumptions about how women feel and that you explore this once you have received a disclosure.

It's essential that we explore the risks women face from their involvement in selling or exchanging sex or sexual content. As women tell us that, however they are involved in the 'sex industry' or their feelings about their involvement, there are risks associated with all forms of activity.

If you have time ask the group what risks they think women may face? Ensure the following are covered:

- *Increased risk of violence and abuse (including harassment from sex buyers who have tracked down women involved online, and from partners/pimps).*
- *Increased risk of attempted murder/murder.*
- *Risk to mental health (from living with the fear of violence or being outed to family and friends, from the impact of waiting to be picked whether in person or online, from repeatedly having to feign sexual desire).*
- *Risk to physical and sexual health.*
- *Risk of images being stolen and shared more widely than the individual had intended.*
- *Loss of anonymity – through the potential to be outed to family and friends (doxing).*
- *Links with organised crime and other forms of criminality.*

Show the remainder of the animation from 3 minutes 3 seconds to the end.

Tell the group your role and the level of contact you have with women will influence what is expected of you in relation to identifying and supporting women who exchange or sell sex or sexual content

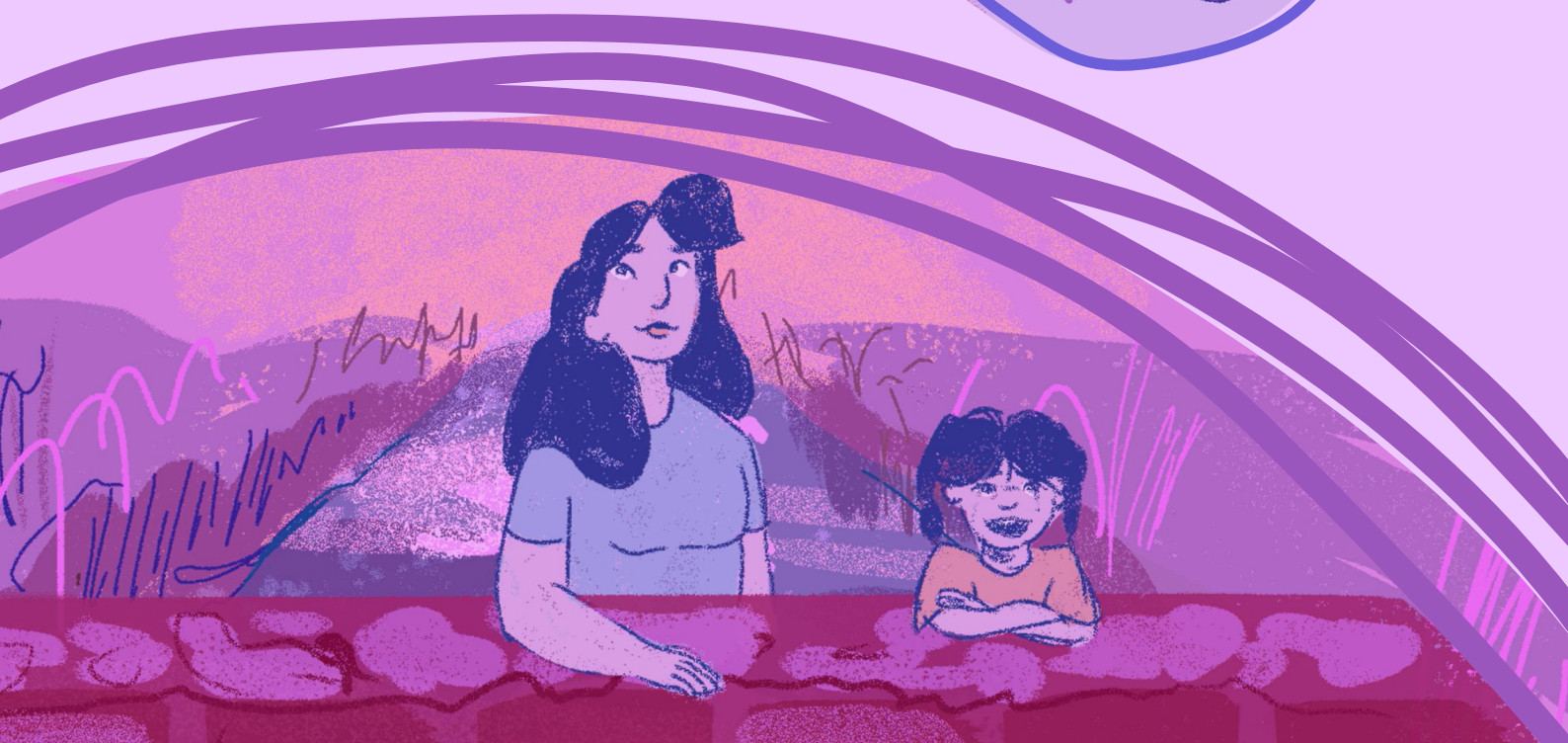
To build trust and confidence with women, we need to be clear about what our role is and ensure women know about any limitations. While you may not be a specialist in working with women who exchange or sell sex or sexual content you can play a key role in supporting her. Some of her needs may be directly linked to your role whilst others can be met through referring or signposting on to other organisations. This may at times include taking a more a proactive multi-agency approach if this is appropriate for your role.

For example, if you work in housing and you identify that a woman is involved in exchanging and selling sex or sexual content you will need to support her with her housing related needs. At the same time, you may also identify that she needs mental health support. While you do not need to provide support in this area you should provide information on what is available or make a referral into an appropriate service.

Get the group to consider what would be expected of them in relation to providing support to women.

Ask “what role can my service play in supporting women and positively shaping their future?”

Ensure the group consider tasks associated directly with their role as well as tasks associated with harm reduction approaches (such as letting women know where to get condoms/lube, sexual health testing), as well as referring into or signposting into local and national organisations to address wider needs.



Confidentiality

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"I'm glad Judy really listened, asked me and gave me the space to open up. I felt ok to do that because she was clear about confidentiality right from the start, knowing that selling sex is not a reason in itself to breach it."

While Alice has a child and one of her fears of disclosing is that Social Work will get involved. As there were no direct risks to her child when Alice disclosed her involvement in selling sex to Judy, this was not a child protection issue and Judy kept the information confidential.



Slide 12

Fear of information being passed on to other services and the potential consequences is one of the biggest barriers to women disclosing. It is therefore important to be clear about the right to confidentiality with those you work with.

In Scotland most of the ways in which women exchange or sell sex or sexual content itself are not illegal and would not be a reason to pass on information to any other organisation without the person's consent, including Police Scotland and Social Work Services.

Under Data Protection legislation we must have a legal basis for sharing information. Most often the legal basis we use for passing on information without consent is that we are concerned there is significant risk to the individual we are working with or to another person (including children).

If this is the case, then your organisations child protection and adult support and protection processes should be followed.

Ask the group in what circumstances based on their work would they consider breaching confidentiality.

Ensure that the examples given fit with your organisations confidentiality and safeguarding policies.



Addressing support needs

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- Maintain women's trust: don't over-promise, be clear about your role
- Offer options and choices.
- Provide information on accessing condoms, lube, and testing.
- Don't try to rescue or make this the only focus of the support you offer.
- Check out if the woman wants to exit.

"There wasn't any intrusive questions and we worked at my pace, focusing on what I needed. Judy was really clear about what she and others could do to support."

Slide 13

It is unlikely you will be able to address all the issues women may have, however it is essential that you address the areas which are related to your role and that you are able to signpost or refer women on appropriately.

Once a woman has disclosed, take things at her pace. Don't feel you have to talk about it every time you see her.

You do not need to know all the details about a woman's involvement to be able to support her. If a woman discloses, do not ask her intrusive questions about her experiences; instead ask her if there is anything she wants to tell you about this or if there is anything she would like you to support her with.

Remember there will be risks for women who exchange or sell sex or sexual content and disclosing may increase these for some. Explore with the woman what these risks may be. This will be dependent on how she is involved in the 'sex industry' and the level of autonomy/control she has.

Recognise that the woman is the expert in her own life and provide her the space to identify the support she needs and the help she wants now.





"Women who sell sex we are all different and we often have to make complicated decisions about who to tell, what to tell and when to tell. We have to weigh up all the risks and benefits of telling workers like you."

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Slide 14

Too often women who exchange or sell sex or sexual content are often invisible to services across Scotland, because:

- we think it doesn't happen here
- it's not our issue as we aren't a specialist service
- we can't deal with it, as women's needs are too complex.

Recognising that selling and exchanging sex is happening all over Scotland and that there will be women in our services who are affected by this is the first step to improving responses.

Understanding the role that you can play in responding to this issue ensuring you can identify those affected, by providing opportunities for disclosure which then allow appropriate support to be put in place is essential if women are to get access to the support they need.





www.cseaware.org

www.womenssupportproject.org.uk

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