

Children's charity urges more action

✘ NSPCC Scotland has said that an increase in reports of sexual abuse against younger children last year demonstrates a clear need for children to be empowered to protect themselves at the earliest possible stage.

Last year Police Scotland recorded over 700 sexual offences against young children, aged under 13 – a four per cent increase on the previous year. Calls to the NSPCC's helpline for adults concerned about a child simultaneously experienced a significant increase in contacts from Scotland. Sexual abuse accounted for 13 per cent of calls resulting in a referral and 26 per cent of advice contacts. Compared with 2011/12 this showed a 68.4 per cent increase in referral figures and an 83.2 per cent increase in advice contacts.

Matt Forde, National Head of Service for NSPCC Scotland, said:- "These figures are unfortunately just the tip of the iceberg. We know that it can take many years before victims disclose abuse – in the meantime there will be many more children in Scotland who do not understand what is happening to them, or who have tried to tell but have not been heard."

A total of 3,369 sexual offences against children were recorded by police in Scotland last year, with a quarter of these having been committed prior to 1 December 2010.

NSPCC Scotland is so concerned about the risk to younger children that it is re-running its 'Underwear Rule' campaign which encourages parents of children aged 5-11 to talk to them about staying safe from sexual abuse.

The campaign, which originally launched last summer, was hugely successful in giving parents the confidence to have an easy conversation about what many originally saw as a

difficult area for discussion. Over 2.3 million people viewed the online video and nine out of ten parents who were aware of the campaign said they now knew how to broach the subject. However nearly half still haven't tackled the issue with their children.

Matt continued: "Sexual abuse continues to be a terrible scar on our society which won't heal by itself. Our campaign has started to make inroads in giving children the protection they need but there is obviously still a long way to go.

"Parents and carers can play an important role by ensuring their children are armed with the knowledge to recognise the wrong kind of behaviour and keep themselves safe. The Underwear Rule is a vital part of this process and is already striking a chord with some parents but we would urge more to get involved."

Supportive materials are available for parents and the NSPCC has developed an easy-to-remember guide – Talk PANTS – that helps children understand the key points of the Rule

Gillian McGhee, from Clydebank, is a mum to 5-year-old Aiden:
"It was a difficult subject to approach with my son, but using the Underwear Rule and the materials provided by the NSPCC gave me the confidence to start having these conversations with him.

"He responded really well to the materials. The guidance packs for parents and children allow for a perfectly natural conversation. It's not scary or boring; it's child-friendly, bright and colourful – which helped to keep his interest and allow us to chat openly about the issues raised."

The campaign complements the organisation's ChildLine Schools Service which is visiting every primary school in Scotland advising children on how to stay safe from all forms of abuse.

Find our more and access the materials

at www.nspcc.org.uk/underwear.