



## **Information about Respond's Investigative Assessment Service**

### **Background**

Respond has been providing Investigative Assessments of People with Learning Disabilities for the last 15 years. People who use this service often suspect that a person they are supporting has been abused. Their behaviour may have changed markedly; they may be more withdrawn or angry; they may be hurting themselves; or it may just be a hunch that is difficult to quantify. Referrals are often of people who due to communication difficulties, or other learning disabilities, are unable to clearly communicate if they have or have not been abused.

### **Initial Enquiry**

Clients are generally referred to Respond via PCT's, Social Services, other professionals, or family members and carers. The reasons for referral are varied but are usually based on a suspicion that abuse (often sexual) has taken place. If after an initial conversation it is felt there is a compelling need for an Investigative Assessment, the referrer will be asked to gather as much background information as possible on the client, including childhood, family history, employment history, any psychology or psychiatry assessments that may have been conducted. Respond will then read the material and then convene a meeting to discuss the history to the case, and the current areas of concern.

### **Investigative Assessment Thinking**

It's important to ask why an Investigative Assessment and why now? Primarily the assessment exists to assess the clients understanding of why they have been referred and what might have taken place and to ascertain such issues as: the client's understanding of alleged incident; their ability to exercise informed consent; their ability to comprehend the legal process. It is of course essential to have a dialogue with those who work with the client. Not just to seek pragmatic answers to pragmatic questions, but also to explore the less tangible areas. How does this person usually communicate? How does this person make others feel? What changes have taken place recently? When did people become aware that something might have taken place and with whom might it have happened? Is the team feeling worried, anxious, concerned about the client, while the other half of the team feel secure with him/her, as if something is being blown out of proportion. Both reactions will be there for a reason, and can tell us much about what people project into those around them.

### **Investigative Assessment Process**

Once there has been an opportunity to discuss these questions, the therapist will then meet with the client him or herself for between six and twelve sessions. Other sessions may take place in a client's home environment, with the client or family members or carers, or combinations of all three. Each session lasts just under an hour. Most of the sessions take place at Respond's clinical base.

In conducting an Investigative Assessment the therapist will work against a backdrop of ethical considerations. Confidentiality is high on the list. The stance of the therapist conducting the assessment also needs careful consideration, particularly in such areas as how much to push the client, using psychotherapeutic skills in what is not a psychotherapeutic piece of work. The process described here is a twelve session one, and Respond must always be mindful of the dangers of dismantling people's carefully erected defences if there is not time to think about what could take their place.

### **Psychotherapeutic Thinking**

Respond's Investigative Assessment process draws on psychotherapeutic thinking. One of the things to know about the psychotherapy Respond practices is that it is informed predominantly by psychoanalytic thinking. It seeks to provide a space in which clients can think about not just the experience of abuse they have experienced, but also other areas of their life that this experience has touched. For one client the thing she may wish to talk most about is not how her key worker raped her, but more about how she has always felt like she doesn't fit into every day living situations. Another client, referred because of being abused by his grandfather, will instead need to talk about how he never has enough money, or has never had a proper job, or feels upset whenever people on television talk about having lots of money. Respond's job is not to jolt the client back onto the 'right agenda', but, instead, to make links with these presenting issues and the underlying losses, abuses and traumas they have lived through. Often in the course of working with a client for two to three years it is, thus, not just the trauma of abuse that needs to be worked with, it is also the trauma of having a learning disability itself.

### **The Investigative Assessment Report**

Respond ends the assessment with a written report and another professionals meeting to discuss the findings. The report often covers such issues as – Reason for Referral, Progress of Sessions, Abusive Experiences or Incidents Reported or Suspected, Lasting Effects of Abuse, Conclusions and Recommendations.

The final meeting is often used as an opportunity to look in detail at the Recommendations and to discuss our Conclusions as to whether abuse has taken place or not. There is also time to think about the current and future needs of the client. Referrers often leave with knowledge, insights and ideas that had not been available to them before the assessment was undertaken.

### **Afterwards**

The final report is often used as a basis to make appropriate changes in a client's life in order to protect them from further abuse (if necessary) and to kick-start further investigative work through the Criminal Justice System. In cases where the recommendations have, in the main, been followed, it appears that services have been able to achieve a higher degree of safety for their clients.

**For more information and application form please contact:**

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