Why Children Don’t Tell

There are many reasons why a child may not easily disclose that they have been abused:

1. Children may not understand they have been abused. For instance a child may perceive sexual abuse as ‘normal’, they may have always been subjected to verbal/physical assaults or may be accustomed to having to fend for themselves.
2. Children may fear the consequences of disclosure. They may have been threatened by their abuser, they may assume they will be removed from their family or that the abuser will end up in prison and the family will be torn apart. They may feel their silence will protect a sibling from abuse.
3. Children may feel to blame for the abuse. They may feel they deserved punishing because they have been told how ‘naughty’ they are. Sexual abuse perpetrators often tell children that their behaviour made it clear they wanted to get involved. Children may be frightened they will get into trouble.
4. Children may not have the language to describe what has happened to them. Young children may not understand the nature of the abuse, they may not have the vocabulary to explain what has been going on. Disabled children may not have the words, signs or symbols for body parts or be able to differentiate between safe/unsafe touches.
5. Children may feel that they will not be believed and they can’t trust adults to keep them safe.