

**Letter to Luke Small :**

Thank you for your letter asking about the NSPCC's support of the reduction of the consenting age for homosexual activities.

The NSPCC supported the provisions of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act. These included the equalisation of the age of consent and the establishment of a new offence of "abuse of trust" to provide additional protection for young men and women between the ages of 16 and 18.

The age of consent has an important role in protecting children from possible physical and psychological harm, and in deterring adults from committing harmful acts. Sixteen is recommended as a significant age in a young person's development: they can leave school, enter work and marry for instance. We believe it is also an appropriate age at which young people may be considered able to make informed decisions about their private, consensual behaviour.

Our experience shows the sexual abuse of children and young people is in part dependent on maintaining a sense of exclusion, secrecy, low self esteem and fear. Discriminatory practices, particularly in law, encourages all of these key factors. The NSPCC believes this will remove an obstacle to the delivery of important messages, including those around sexual health.

We believe that there must, of course, continue to be adequate protection under criminal law for children and young people, assaulted by a person of either sex. We are supportive of the proposals by Westminster Government to legislate for additional protection of young people aged 16-18 in situations where an older person abuses his or her position of authority, influence or trust, and to prevent unsuitable people working with children.

Yours sincerely,

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**The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline - 0808 800 5000 - is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide advice and support to anyone concerned about a child's welfare. Calls to the Helpline are free.**

**Expert advice is also available online at [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk).**

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