

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE (PBK)

PBK AND ITS VALUE

WHAT IS PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE (PBK)?

Practice-based knowledge (PbK) in childhood sexual violence (CSV) prevention and response refers to the **valuable insights** developed through **direct engagement** in prevention or response. Often **informal** and sometimes **undocumented**, PbK is **not limited to those with formal credentials**. PbK strengthens CSV prevention and response by complementing and enriching other forms of knowledge.

These are some key characteristics of PbK:

- > **Dynamic:** PbK reflects what works in diverse contexts, how and why it works, and how approaches can be adapted to different circumstances.
- > **Formed through many methods:** PbK is shaped through repeated engagement, reflection, and adaptation in real-world conditions: team problem-solving, innovation in response to a challenge, or on-the-spot adjustments in a crisis.
- > **Takes many forms:** PbK may be informal and undocumented or take more structured forms, depending on the context and intended use.

WHO CREATES PBK?

PbK is not limited to those with formal credentials. It is created by a broad range of individuals, including:

- > **Practitioners:** who design and deliver interventions.
- > **People with lived expertise:** who draw on their experiences of seeking support, navigating systems, or surviving harm to improve practice.

IS PBK NEW?

Drawing on experience to guide action is not a new concept. Fields such as education, nursing, social work, and community development have long relied on knowledge generated in practice.

What is now called PbK also resonates with long-standing community knowledge systems, many of which predate formal research and have their own distinct methods. Current movements to decolonise knowledge are pushing for valuing these diverse ways of knowing.

PbK may be newly articulated, but it is not a new practice. What is emerging today is a clearer articulation and recognition of PbK as a legitimate and valuable form of knowledge.

WHY IS PBK IMPORTANT IN CSV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE?

In complex, sensitive fields such as CSV prevention and response, PbK adds depth, context, and immediacy to our understanding of what drives change- and what gets in the way.

- > It offers an **immediate window** into realities that formal research may take years to capture.
- > It **flags emerging risks, adaptations, and creative solutions** while work is still in progress.
- > It complements formal evidence by showing **what actually happens** in complex, sensitive settings.

PbK strengthens prevention and response by:

- > **Expanding learning from underrepresented regions:** Sharing insights from areas that are often overlooked by research.
- > **Strengthening frontline practice:** Enabling practitioners to improve practice in real time based on continuous, intentional learning.
- > **Capturing practitioners' expertise:** Sharing frontline knowledge so it informs collective learning in CSV prevention and response.
- > **Highlighting lived expertise:** Shaping strategies that reflect the realities, needs, and priorities of those most affected.

Taken together, these contributions provide a more comprehensive, practice-informed foundation for strengthening prevention and response efforts.

RELATIONSHIP WITH EXISTING PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

IS PBK THE SAME AS ACTIVITY/PROGRAM REPORTING?

Not all activity reporting automatically becomes PbK.

- > **Standard reporting** often focuses on activities, outputs or compliance requirements.
- > **PbK** involves intentional reflection. It is rooted in critical reflection about how and why something happened, and what can be learned from it. It turns doing into knowing, so practice can be adapted, improved, and applied again.

IS PBK INTENDED TO REPLACE MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

No. PbK is not a substitute for M&E or impact assessment. PbK focuses on tacit knowledge, everyday problem-solving, and context-specific learning — the kinds of insights that formal evaluations may overlook.

How they connect:

- > **M&E as a springboard for PbK:** When M&E data goes beyond tracking outputs and outcomes to explore how and why results were achieved (or not), it can generate valuable PbK.
- > **PbK strengthening M&E:** PbK can shape M&E frameworks by pointing to context-specific indicators to monitor, new questions to ask, or emerging risks to track. This makes evaluation more responsive and better aligned with real-world conditions.

Together, M&E and PbK provide a more comprehensive picture — combining systematic measurement with grounded insight.

RELATIONSHIP WITH RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

IS PBK DISTINCT FROM RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE?

Yes, PbK and research are complementary but distinct.

- > **Origins and process:** Research follows structured, predefined methodologies, often led from outside the practice setting. PbK typically emerges from direct, sustained engagement in practice and is led by those who are doing the work.
- > **Purpose:** Research often aims for systematic testing and generalisable findings. PbK provides grounded, context-specific insights and does not claim to be neutral or definitive. Instead, it makes its context explicit, aiming to improve practice and offer insights others can reflect on to strengthen their own work.
- > **Use of methods:** Academic research applies predefined, standardised processes to generate generalisable findings. PbK may emerge without formal methods.
- > **Review:** Research is typically subject to external peer review. PbK is refined through practitioner reflection and peer-to-peer exchange.

While PbK and academic research remain distinct in purpose and approach, PbK may at times use research-style methods (e.g., focus groups, assessments), adopt more formal review processes, be synthesised across contexts for broader insights, and be shared through formal platforms like journals or conferences.

CAN PBK BE INTEGRATED WITH CONVENTIONAL RESEARCH?

Yes, and when it is, both become stronger.

> Laying the groundwork for research

PbK often sparks new areas of inquiry. Questions, patterns, and hypotheses emerging from practice can guide researchers toward identifying knowledge gaps, shaping priorities, and highlighting emerging trends or underexplored issues that merit further investigation.

> Bridging research and reality

PbK adds depth to research by revealing the contextual factors, risks, and frontline adaptations that influence how interventions work in practice. These insights help interpret findings through the lens of lived realities.

> Including PbK in research

Where relevant and feasible, PbK insights can be examined using rigorous methods.

- > **Integration into broader research:** PbK insights from one context can be incorporated into larger, multi-site or cross-sector studies on the same topic.
- > **Targeted study:** Specific PbK findings, or approaches developed based on these insights, can be further tested and assessed in depth to validate, refine, or challenge them.

CAN PBK BE USED AS A REPLACEMENT FOR EVIDENCE?

No. PbK offers a form of context-specific knowledge that complements—but **does not replace**—formal evidence.

PbK is a supplementary form of insight, offering a window into what people are seeing, doing, and learning on the frontlines. Its value lies not in claiming universal truth, but in raising relevant questions, prompting reflection, and pointing to potential areas for further exploration or validation.

Used well, PbK can be part of a balanced knowledge ecosystem that values multiple forms of knowing.

TRUST AND LIMITATIONS: CAN PBK BE TRUSTED? WHAT ARE ITS LIMITS?

IS PBK ANECDOTAL?

No. Anecdotes are isolated stories. PbK, by contrast, is the result of intentional reflection—often over time and across multiple experiences or settings. Its credibility does not depend on whether it is presented as a story, report, or meeting note, but on the process behind it: reflection, contextualisation, and transparency about origins and limitations.

DOES PBK ASSUME ALL PRACTICE IS EFFECTIVE?

PbK does not assume that all practice is effective - it makes space for honest reflection on what does not work and why. Well-documented PbK often surfaces not just successes, but also missteps, unintended consequences, or practices that cause harm or fail to meet the needs of children, victims and/or survivors, or communities.

Far from being a weakness, naming these failures is one of PbK's strengths. It enables learning, identifies risks early, prevents the repetition of harmful or ineffective approaches, and supports continuous system improvement.

CAN PBK BE GENERALISED OR CONSIDERED REPRESENTATIVE OF BROADER REALITIES?

Not automatically and not in the traditional sense. PbK is grounded in specific relationships, power dynamics, and histories. Its strength lies in its contextual specificity. It reflects particular people, settings, and experiences. Unlike some academic knowledge, it cannot be generalised in a universal sense or assumed to speak for an entire field or sector. While PbK may not travel easily across contexts, its **rootedness is a defining strength** in child protection, a field where challenges are deeply local and require context-sensitive responses.

PbK helps others ask better questions to improve their practice, rather than copy solutions.

At the same time, when shared transparently and with critical reflection, PbK can be **informative across contexts**. This is not because it offers a model to replicate, but rather because it prompts deeper questions that help others reflect on their own practice. Asking such questions helps practitioners uncover assumptions, explore alternatives, and identify what changes may be needed in their own settings.

IF PBK IS NOT PEER-REVIEWED, HOW CAN IT BE TRUSTED?

PbK is not typically assessed through formal academic peer review because it follows different pathways. It emerges from practice and lived expertise, real-time decision-making, and tacit knowledge.

But that does not mean PbK is without scrutiny or rigour. **Rigour is inseparable from ethics in PbK**. Ethical reflection strengthens clarity, credibility, and integrity by ensuring that contributors' words are not taken out of context, nuance is preserved, and insights are not overstated.

Rigour in PbK means producing knowledge that is:

- > **Grounded** – based in the actual practice context and cross-checked with those involved.
- > **Contextually relevant** – clearly situated in cultural, political, and organisational realities.
- > **Transparent** – open about the processes, contexts, and limitations that shaped it.

Instead of traditional academic peer review, PbK is strengthened through practice-appropriate processes such as:

- > **Ethical safeguards** to prevent harm and misrepresentation
- > **Peer discussions and review** within and across organisations
- > Wherever possible, **triangulation** with program data, participant feedback, evaluation findings, or lived and academic expertise

The quality and accountability of PbK come from these deliberate processes. In the Guidance Framework, we suggest practice-appropriate peer review. These processes are rooted in frontline realities, while still upholding accountability, transparency, and collective scrutiny.

CAN PBK BE BIASED OR LIMITED?

Yes. Like all knowledge forms, PbK is shaped by power, positionality, and perspective. It can reflect internal hierarchies, dominant practitioner voices, or organisational priorities—and can risk overlooking marginalised or dissenting experiences.

Responsible sharing and use of PbK requires:

- > Being explicit about whose knowledge is being shared and whose is missing
- > Actively including diverse voices
- > Critically examining the conditions that shaped it

For practical steps, tools, and examples on how to gather, share, and use PbK responsibly, see the Guidance Framework. It offers reflection prompts, documentation templates, and peer review approaches to help put these principles into action.

HOW CAN OTHERS DRAW FROM PBK RESPONSIBLY?

PbK is not formal evidence and should not be treated as a blueprint that can be copied. Its value lies in prompting reflection and offering insight into how practice unfolded in a specific time, place, and set of relationships. When drawing from PbK in another context:

- **Focus on reflection, not replication** – look for ideas that help you reflect on your own practice, not step-by-step instructions.
- **Engage multiple perspectives** – avoid relying on a single account; seek other sources to build a fuller picture. Cross-check with available evidence, evaluation findings, monitoring data, and other PbK.
- **Start with local expertise** – those embedded in the local context should lead decisions on whether and how PbK learning from elsewhere is adapted.
- **Understand the context and limits** – clearly understand the origin, context, and limitations of the PbK before considering its application.

PbK can inspire and inform, but it cannot be assumed to “work” elsewhere.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DIFFERENT FORMS OF PBK CONFLICT?

Conflicting PbK insights are not a sign of failure or unreliability—they are a normal and valuable feature of practice-based insight. Practitioners may hold different perspectives based on their role, relationships, positionality, or the communities they serve.

Differing PbK insights are an invitation to reflect more deeply. Recognising and engaging with those tensions can deepen understanding and prevent oversimplified solutions.

