Discussed within this chapter are some areas of the child protection system in the Caribbean which urgently need strengthening to better protect children from harm and to promote their well-being. Our focus is therefore on deficits and institutional failings, but we acknowledge from the outset that there are many committed persons within constituent parts of the whole service system who are working tirelessly to protect children and to prevent abuse and, equally, that there are examples of excellent practice in many agencies. These people work with limited resources, little recognition and often inadequate remuneration; yet it is to them we owe thanks for the many children and families who are supported in dealing with abuse. Child sexual abuse is invisible, but so too are the survivors and the actions of those who may have helped them out of victimhood. It is in the nature of this work that we must focus on harm, but perhaps our next project will be on strengths. We also acknowledge that working in the child protection field is exhausting and leads to fatigue, emotional burnout and frustration. If this applies to you, we hope the information in this chapter will give you renewed determination to work towards improving systems and services for protecting children from harm and promoting their well-being.

Introduction

The chapter focuses on two interrelated system/processes identified as crucial for addressing child sexual abuse in the Caribbean (Jones and Trotman Jemmott 2009): officials who by inaction, denial and evasion can be regarded as part of the problem of ‘collusion’; and ineffective systems, laws and policies (see Figure 5.1).

The elephants in the system? How ineffective systems, laws and policies, in tandem with officials who, by inaction, denial and evasion, can be part of the web of collusion which helps to sustain child sexual abuse.

The idiom focuses the reader’s attention on the two key components of the child protection system:

1. People and policy (the professionals and policies relating to agencies such as law enforcement, social work, judiciary, health and education);
2. Child protection and system problems that may be obvious or commonly acknowledged but while little talked about nevertheless impact the effectiveness of interventions and management of CSA.