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# **CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION POLICY**

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## **Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation**

The sexual exploitation of children and young people has been identified across the United Kingdom, in both rural and urban areas. It affects boys and young men as well as girls and young women. It robs children of their childhood and can have a serious long-term impact on every aspect of their lives, health and education. It damages the lives of families and carers and can lead to family break-ups. Sexual exploitation of children and young people is completely unacceptable.

Action to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who are sexually exploited should be child-centred and focus on the child's needs. Those working with children and young people should engage with them and their families throughout the process, unless to do so would place a child at greater risk or impede a police investigation. The particular needs and sensitivities of girls and boys, children with a physical disability or learning disabilities, those from ethnic communities, or those for whom English is not their preferred language, should be reflected in the provision of services. The wishes and feelings of children and young people as well as the concerns of parents or carers should be taken into account in reaching any decisions about the provision of services which affect them.

Professionals should be aware that children and young people do not always acknowledge what may be an exploitative and abusive situation and should recognise that disclosure of this form of abuse by a child or young person is exceptionally rare. Very often children and young people do not consider themselves to be victims of exploitation.

The sexual exploitation of children and young people is a form of child sexual abuse which includes some combination of:

- Pull factors: children exchanging sex for attention, accommodation, food, gifts or drugs;
- Push factors: children escaping from situations where their needs are neglected and there is exposure to unsafe individuals;
- Control: brain washing, violence and threats of violence by those exploiting the child

*Section 9* of these procedures provides general guidance on possible indicators of sexual abuse, in addition risk indicators of sexual exploitation are identified at paragraph 6.25.

## **The Nature of Sexual Exploitation**

Sexual exploitation can take many forms from the seemingly 'consensual' relationship where sex is exchanged for attention, affection, accommodation or gifts, to serious organised crime and child trafficking. What marks out exploitation is an imbalance of power within the relationship. The perpetrator always holds some kind of power over the victim, increasing the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops.

Sexual exploitation involves varying degrees of coercion, intimidation or enticement, including unwanted pressure from their peers to have sex, sexual bullying (including cyber bullying), and grooming for sexual activity. Technology can also play a part in sexual abuse, for example, through its use to record abuse and share it with other like-minded individuals or as a medium to access children and young people in order to groom them. A common factor in all cases is the lack of free economic or moral choice.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 and the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young people define sexual exploitation as:

“Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive “something” (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition: for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person’s limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.”

### Grooming

Many children and young people are groomed into sexually exploitative relationships but other forms of sexual exploitation exist. Some young people are engaged in informal economies that incorporate the exchange of sexual intercourse, or sexual acts, for rewards such as drugs, alcohol, money or gifts. Others exchange sexual intercourse, or sexual acts, for accommodation or money as a consequence of homelessness and experiences of poverty. Some young people have been bullied and threatened into sexual activities by peers or gangs which is then used against them as a form of extortion and to keep them compliant.

The Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has completed analysis of grooming methods used by offenders, with CEOP proposing a further definition of “*street grooming*” as follows:

“Where children have been groomed and sexually exploited by an offender, having initially met in a location outside their home, usually in public, such as a park, cinema, on the street or at a friend’s house. Offenders often act together, establishing a relationship with a child or children before sexually exploiting them. Victims may believe that the offender is an older “boyfriend”: These victims introduce their peers to the offender group, who might then go on to be sexually exploited as well. Abuse may occur at a number of locations within a region and on several occasions.”

### Who is Involved?

Although the predominant evidence is of men sexually abusing children and young people, both men and women have been known to sexually exploit young men and young women. There is a presumption that children and young people are sexually exploited by people they do not know. However, evidence shows that they are often abused by ‘boyfriends’ or people with whom they feel they have a relationship. Professionals should also be alert to organised familial abuse or abuse within closed community groups, including sexual exploitation and the making and distribution of abusive images of children and trafficking of children into, within and outside of the United Kingdom.

### Where Children might be Targeted

Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background, however some groups are particularly vulnerable. These include children and young people who have a history of running away or of going missing from home, those with special needs, those in and leaving residential and foster care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children who have disengaged from education and children who are abusing drugs and alcohol or those involved in gangs.

The perpetrators of sexual exploitation are often well organised and use sophisticated tactics. They are known to target areas where children and young people might gather without much adult supervision, such as shopping centres, cafes, takeaways, pubs, sports centres, cinemas, bus or train stations, local parks, playgrounds and taxi ranks, or through the use of social media such as the internet and mobile phones used by children and young people. The process of grooming may also be visible in adult venues such as pubs and clubs. In some cases perpetrators are known to use younger men, women, boys or girls to build initial relationships and introduce them to others in their perpetrator networks.

However, young people can also be sexually exploited by informal and unorganised groups of people. Children and young people, who are themselves the victims of exploitation, may introduce other young people to their abusers. This may not be a deliberate attempt to groom others into sexual exploitation, but rather a way of ensuring that their abuser's attention is deflected away from themselves.

Children and young people may be groomed into "party" lifestyles where they go to houses/flats with numerous men and other women. These parties often introduce children and young people to alcohol and drugs. No single relationship may be formed but a general network is created and grooming occurs through these social relationships

### **Children are Hidden Victims**

These children and young people are themselves victims and should not be prosecuted except as a last resort when other interventions have failed and there is an absolute need to protect others.

The majority of sexually exploited children and young people will be hidden from public view. They are unlikely to be loitering or soliciting on the streets of red light areas. Sexual exploitation is also more likely to take place in private premises than the more 'visible' saunas or massage parlours. Young people are groomed to be secretive about their meetings, which are usually arranged over mobile phones or the Internet, and the places and people they are meeting, so the activities are concealed from parents or carers.

Because of the grooming methods used by their abusers, it is very common for children and young people who are sexually exploited not to recognise that they are being abused. The needs of children and particularly of young people aged 16 and 17 years, who legally can consent to sexual activity, are likely to be overlooked for this reason. Although faced with limited choice, they may believe themselves to be acting voluntarily. It may take many weeks or months for practitioners who work with young people to build up their trust, help them to recognise that they are being sexually exploited by challenging their perceptions with factual information, and overcome their resistance to interventions.

### **The Legal Age of Consent to Sex**

The fact that a young person is 16 or 17 years old and has reached the legal age of being able to consent to sex should not be taken as a sign that they are no longer at risk of sexual exploitation. These young people are still defined as children under the Children Act 1989 and 2004 respectively. They can still suffer significant harm as a result of sexual exploitation and their right to support and protection from harm should not be ignored or de-prioritised by services because they are over the age of 16, or are no longer in mainstream education or training.

Young people under 18, especially girls, can be located in brothels and massage parlours and they may hold fake identification. Where a young person is found in this situation, steps should be taken to establish the validity of their ID and assess their age, and services should always consider what action would be necessary if they are aged under 18 years.

### Identifying Risk

The earlier that sexual exploitation, or likelihood of it, can be identified, the more opportunities there are to prevent or minimise the harm suffered by a child or young person. Children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation or who are being sexually exploited may display highly complex and challenging behaviours. Anyone who has regular contact with children and young people is in a good position to notice changes in behaviour and physical signs, which may indicate involvement in sexual exploitation. Experience has shown that parents, carers, teachers and youth workers are particularly well placed to notice these changes.

Victims may appear abusive and anti-social, often involved in criminal acts and may become involved in bullying and exploitative activities towards others. These behaviours may mean that professionals can experience difficulty in recognising the young people's vulnerability and in responding to it. However, it is also important to recognise that some young people who are being sexually exploited do not exhibit any external signs of this abuse.

A detailed definition and more risk indicators are contained in the *Supplementary Guidance Safeguarding Children & Young people from Sexual Exploitation*.

Below are some examples of **vulnerability factors** linked to child sexual exploitation. It is important to be aware of these background concerns when completing any assessment of risk:

- family history of abuse or neglect;
- family history of domestic abuse;
- family history of substance misuse;
- family history of mental health difficulties;
- breakdown of family relationships;
- low self-esteem;
- history of local authority care.
- death or illness of a significant person in the child's life.
- Bullying in or out of school
- prolonged absence from school
- being looked after in residential care
- going missing frequently

**Risk indicators** of child sexual exploitation are indicated below. These should not be read as a definitive list; they are intended as a guide and should be considered in a wider assessment of the child or young person's needs and circumstances. They include:

- staying out late;
- multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people);
- a preoccupation with their mobile phone which indicates the child is being controlled (e.g. possession of multiple phones, distress when one is lost or not working)
- expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression);
- disclosure of sexual or physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation;
- sexually transmitted infections and/or vagueness about partners or the number of partners.
- peers involved in clipping (receiving payment in exchange for agreement to perform sexual acts but not performing the sexual act) or sexual exploitation;
- involvement in theft, shoplifting, deception (often this may be organised by the person exploiting them)
- drugs misuse;
- alcohol misuse;
- use of the internet that causes concern;
- unsuitable or inappropriate accommodation (including street homelessness and living in a place where needs are not met);
- isolated from peers and social networks;
- lack of positive relationship with a protective, nurturing adult;
- exclusion from school, unexplained absences from school or not engaged in education or training;
- living independently and failing to respond to attempts by workers to keep in touch.

Significant risk indicators include:

- periods of going missing overnight or longer;
- older 'boyfriend' or relationship with a controlling adult with difficulty in accessing the young person because of that relationship;
- physical or emotional abuse by that 'boyfriend' or controlling adult;
- entering and/or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults;
- unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothing or other items;
- physical injury without plausible explanation;
- frequenting areas known for sex work;

It is unlikely that concerns about the possible sexual exploitation of a child/young person are as a result of a one off incident. Concerns often build up as a result of deteriorating behaviour. The information above can be used to identify risk.

It is important that professionals act on early concerns to support the individual child/young person and their family. Concerns may arise during the *Common Assessment Framework (CAF)* process or initial assessments for other concerns.

## **Making a Referral for Child Sexual Exploitation**

A child or young person who is suffering or is at risk of suffering sexual exploitation should be regarded as a Child in Need and should be referred to the Initial Response Team specifically as a sexually exploited child/young person, in line with Section 10 of the **Caf/Child in Need procedures**.

During the course of this referral, it may be the case that the identity of the offender(s) and the location of the offences is also apparent. This information should also be included with the referral and will be considered in the assessment of risk by the Initial Response Team.

In order to ensure consistency in decision making, the Initial Response Team will undertake a risk assessment of the available information utilising a child sexual exploitation risk assessment matrix (hyperlink attached). The assessment will consider all the vulnerabilities and risks and place the child in one of 3 categories of risk: low, medium or high. The Initial Response Team assessment of risk will be then be shared with the referrer and the locality Safeguarding team or One point, as appropriate.

If risk is assessed as low and not meeting the threshold for Safeguarding and Specialist services, the Initial Response Team will advise the referrer to initiate a Caf, with the assistance of One point if necessary. However, if the risk is assessed as either medium or high, the Initial Response Team will transfer the case to the appropriate Safeguarding team for a multi agency planning meeting.

During the process of undertaking an Initial Assessment, for reasons other than child sexual exploitation, there is the potential that the Initial Response Team may identify that a child is at risk of sexual exploitation. If this occurs, the child sexual exploitation risk assessment matrix will be utilised, as above, and the categorisation of risk applied.

### **Multi Agency Planning Meeting**

Following completion of the child sexual exploitation risk assessment, it may be decided that a multi agency planning meeting is required. A multi agency planning meeting or strategy discussion should always take place where a child is assessed at medium or high risk of sexual exploitation.

The purpose of any multi agency meeting is to bring together interested parties to agree a workable multi-agency support plan to address prevention, protection and prosecution. This work would also include the consideration of a disruption plan for the offender(s), which would require representation by the police. Consideration should be given to contacting neighbouring and other Local authority areas where children and young people have been sexually exploited and are believed to have lived or temporarily been present, or where abusers and coercers have been present.

The person making the referral should be informed of the outcome of the planning meeting.

Where the threshold for child protection enquiries (**Section 47**) is met, a strategy meeting **must be held** involving Safeguarding & Specialist Services, Police Safeguarding Unit, appropriate health professional and other relevant agencies. See **Section 5 of the Child protection procedures** - Managing Individual cases.

### **Child/Young Person Already Known to Safeguarding and Specialist Services**

The child or young person may currently have Safeguarding and Specialist Services involvement, for example, be a looked after child or be subject to a child protection or child in need care plan. This plan might already recognise the concerns and be aimed at enabling the child or young person to exit the exploitation. In such cases, multi-agency plans (see intervention and support and disruption plans) setting out how the child is to be protected should be drawn up, which will form part of the overall care plan for the child. To ensure consistency in assessing the risk to the child or young person, the risk assessment matrix (hyperlink attached) should be considered by these other services. A specific code for child sexual exploitation will also be applied to case records to facilitate the identification of cases and future monitoring of responses.

For victims in residential care or foster placements, staff should also be aware that more than one child may have been targeted or that the abuser has previously been involved with other children. The following factors should be taken into account:

- The risks to other children in any placement, which may involve additional planning.
- Whether the child should remain in their present placement
- The feasibility of controlling the child's movements and the likely effects of doing so.

Consideration should always be given by a Team manager to holding a strategy meeting (under section 47) for a looked after child when sexual exploitation is recognised as a concern. If the decision for not holding a strategy meeting is that the current plan already adequately addresses the concerns this needs to be clearly documented.

### **Issues for a planning meeting where sexual exploitation is being considered**

Multi agency planning meetings should involve agencies currently providing services for the child and any other agency in a position to contribute significantly to the development of an intervention and support plan for the child and a disruption plan for offenders.

Where a support service for sexually exploited children is available, the service should always be engaged in any strategy discussion.

The wishes and feelings of a child or young person should be obtained when deciding how to proceed in these circumstances. He or she may be at a particularly important turning point in their life and will need to be enabled to express their wishes and feelings; make sense of their circumstances and contribute to decisions that affect them. However, this should be approached with a high level of sensitivity as the child/young person concerned may often be subject to significant threats, bribes and conflicted loyalties. They may feel impelled to tell their abusers what is being planned and in turn become more isolated from services.

Professionals who are assessing the views of these children must be aware that perpetrators may have 'groomed' them and conditioned their responses and that they may be denying what has happened to them. Equally, children may fear for their personal safety or safety of their family and they may initially reject offers of help or support.

It is necessary to involve the child or young person and to ascertain the concerns of parents and carers at all stages to enable children to successfully escape from sexual exploitation and

reintegrate into society. Wherever possible, family members should also be involved and supported in work with the child.

The factors leading to a child or young person being sexually exploited may be complex. One of these factors may be the development of a strong relationship with the coercer or abuser, which may make it difficult for the child or young person to break the relationship and move away from the exploitative situation. Agencies should recognise the strength of this attachment and the time and difficulty there may be in breaking it and helping the young person to develop a meaningful relationship with appropriate adults. A strategy should be developed with the child and family which addresses the child's needs and also helps them to move on from the exploitative situation.

### **Immediate Protection**

Where immediate action to safeguard a child is required, it may involve removing the child to a safe place. However, those working with children in these circumstances must never underestimate the power of the offender(s) to find where the child is. Such children will need placements with carers who have experience of building trusting relationships.

### **Intervention and Support for the child or young person**

The outcome of any planning meeting is to develop a plan of intervention and support to enable the child to protect themselves, to enable them to recognise and avoid risky behaviour and people and to engage in positive activities and relationships.

The planning meeting will also consider disruption plans for offenders (see later).

The resultant plan should specify who is responsible for undertaking the work, the plan should be forwarded to all agencies involved and a date for a review meeting should be agreed.

Intervention and support could include continuing outreach work and engagement with professionals, mentoring to assist a return to education or employment, help to secure appropriate health services, pursue leisure activities and to develop a positive network of friends and relatives to offer continuing support.

Follow-up may include specialist therapeutic support, for example through the provision of mental health services.

Parents should be engaged in this process unless they are implicated in the sexual exploitation.

### **Identifying and Prosecuting Offenders**

Whilst the police and criminal justice agencies lead on this, the support of all partners in gathering and recording information/evidence is vital. All those involved in caring for a child who is suspected to be at risk of sexual exploitation, should gather record and share relevant information in line with their agency practice. Parents and carers should also be encouraged and supported to do so, ensuring that information is recorded appropriately, as this may be required in subsequent criminal proceedings.

In the absence of a complaint being made by a child or young person and where it is in the best interests of the child, other methods should be considered in order to proceed with a

prosecution. The decision over whether to prosecute should be made in the context of considering what is in the best interests of the child and of the potential for future victims.

### Disruption Plans for Offenders

Any planning meeting should consider developing a disruption plan for offenders. Again the plan should identify who is responsible for undertaking the work, it should be shared with the agencies involved and timescales for a review meeting agreed.

Disrupting offenders is an important part of local work to tackle child sexual exploitation. A disruption plan could involve a number of activities:

- The use of warning letters, arrest and prosecution for offences contrary to Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 and Section 49 of the Children Act 1989 (Harbouring)
- The use of anti social behaviour orders
- The use of automatic number plate recognition systems (ANPR)
- Obtaining risk of sexual harm orders
- Obtaining sexual offences prevention orders
- Seeking civil injunctions
- Seizing of vehicles used in the commission of offences
- Targeting of those who may be involved in the transport of young people to suspects.
- Targeting of premises where offending is suspected
- Police surveillance

### Information sharing about offenders, vehicles or locations

Where any professional receives information about a potential victim of child sexual exploitation, the process for information sharing should follow the established procedures for making a referral through the Initial Response Team (see paragraph 6.29 above).

Any professional may come across information about child sexual exploitation which could identify offenders, suspect vehicles or locations of interest. This should be forwarded to the police (paragraph 6.64 below) where the information will be assessed against other information sources.

Working with young people in areas of sexual behaviour requires great sensitivity to the wishes and needs of young people. **Section 5 of these procedures provides guidance around “Confidentiality” for young people who are sexually active.** In addition, in line with the principles of information sharing, agencies should also make staff aware that a young person’s request that information is not shared may not necessarily be supported. HM Government has produced “Information sharing guidance for practitioners and managers” (2009) **hyperlink required** which guides practitioners to make decisions, on a case by case basis. The guidance recognises that information could be shared and justified in the public interest:

- To prevent significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult, including for the purpose of prevention or detection of crime, apprehension or prosecution of offenders (paragraph. 3.42)

The disclosure of information about offenders, vehicles and locations may make a significant contribution to the prevention of future offending and the protection of others.

There will be occasions when professionals access information about offenders, vehicles or locations which is not linked to an identified child/young person. **Under these circumstances, it is important that this information is still shared with the police, not the Initial Response Team. If an immediate police response is required, then the referrer should call 999 for an emergency and 101 for a routine police response.**

It may be the case that the available information is incomplete, it may be third hand or anonymous and the reliability may not be confirmed. This should not discourage a professional in sharing this information, as it will be assessed with other information sources and may corroborate other information or provide a missing link in police intelligence.

Where there is information which does not require a police response, a reporting document should be completed by professionals and then emailed to the police on [requestforchecks@durham.pnn.police.uk](mailto:requestforchecks@durham.pnn.police.uk) . Upon receipt of this information the police will research their intelligence databases and decide on the next course of action, if any.

### **Monitoring Arrangements for Child Sexual Exploitation**

The Local Safeguarding Children Board, through the Missing and Exploited sub group, has responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of suspected child sexual exploitation and to monitor the effectiveness of multi-agency working. The Missing and Exploited sub group should monitor the practices of agencies to ensure the procedures are being followed.

The Initial Response Team will apply a specific code for a child sexual exploitation referral. This will facilitate the identification of cases, monitor the numbers of referrals and allow for the subsequent monitoring of such referrals.

### **Child sexual exploitation investigations which are organised and complex**

Experience, nationally, has demonstrated that some child sexual exploitation investigations involve organised criminality and should be pursued in line with the established Organised and Complex abuse procedures. This may necessitate a joint operation between the Police and Safeguarding and Specialist services, with the Crown Prosecution Service consulted at an early stage.

The Organised and Complex abuse procedures can be found at [Section 6](#) of these procedures and should be followed by all partners.