



# Safeguarding Children at Risk of Exploitation

## *Fostering, Adoption & Children's Services*

This procedure applies to the following agencies: Foster care Associates (FCA,) Foster Care Associates Scotland (FCAS), Fostering People, Orange Grove Foster Care, Clifford House Fostering, ISP, Foster Plus, ACS, AFA & Polaris Children's Services. The term 'agency' used throughout the procedure refers to these individual agencies.

As part of Polaris community, the term 'foster parent' is preferred but it is recognised that 'foster carer' is also used in legislation and within the community.

**All staff, foster parents and prospective adopters have a duty and a responsibility to promote and safeguard the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults.**

We care about all individuals and must take appropriate action if we become concerned that an individual is at risk or suffering from exploitation.

This procedure provides guidance for staff, foster parents and prospective adopters about how to recognise when a child may be at risk of exploitation. Children at risk of exploitation need help, safeguarding and support.

Child exploitation refers to the use of children for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in unjust, cruel and harmful treatment of the child. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. Child exploitation is often described in two main forms; Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation (as part of economic exploitation).

The term 'child' or 'children' is used to refer to all children under the age of 18 years. Where the context specifically relates only to older children, the term 'young person' is used.

The term 'adult' in Scotland legally refers to anyone aged 16 and over, however the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) defines a "child" as someone who has not attained the age of 18, therefore both Child and Adult Protection Procedures apply to all 16-18 year olds in Scotland.

Following consultation with local authorities, all agencies should implement Child Protection Procedures for all young people aged 16-18 in Scotland unless instructed by the relevant Local Authority/Trust that Adult Protection Legislation is more appropriate in an individual case.

This procedure forms part of the Polaris Quality Management System in line with ISO-9001:2015 standards and applies to all the agencies in the current structure.

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All the agencies above are part of Polaris group of companies and are detailed in the current legal structure.

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## What is Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (e.g. rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual images, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet.

The definition of child sexual exploitation in **England** is:

‘Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child Sexual Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.’

DfE Statutory Guidance, 2017 ‘Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation

The definition in **Scotland** is:

‘Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person(s), of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity *in return for something* received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the presence of perceived consent does not undermine the abusive nature of the act.’

Scottish Children and Families Directorate, 2016. Child sexual exploitation: definition and summary

The definition in **Northern Ireland** is:

‘Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which a person(s) exploits, coerces and/or manipulates a child or young person into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something the child needs or desires and/or for the gain of the person(s) perpetrating or facilitating the abuse.’

SBNI 2014, adopted from CSE Knowledge Transfer Partnership NI

The definition in **Wales** is:

‘Child Sexual Exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, ‘protection’ or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent.’

**In all cases, those exploiting the child 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. A child's poor social or economic circumstances or emotional vulnerability can result in them being more vulnerable to exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation is a complex form of abuse and it can be difficult for those working with children to identify and assess. The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment, which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly and appropriate support is given.

Even where a young person is old enough to legally consent to sexual activity, the law states that consent is only valid where they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they do not comply (all of which are common features in cases of child sexual exploitation) consent **cannot** legally be given whatever the age of the child.

**Child sexual exploitation is never the victim's fault, even if there is some form of exchange: all children under the age of 18 have a right to be safe and should be protected from harm.**

One of the key factors found in most cases of child sexual exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something), for the victim and/or perpetrator or facilitator.

Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection). It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a child does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange, for example a child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm their family.

### Trafficking

The International definition of Human Trafficking in the context of Child Sexual Exploitation is:

*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child, for the purpose of exploitation.*

UK and migrant children are trafficked into, within and out of the UK for sexual exploitation. It should always be borne in mind by any practitioner that a child subject to Human Trafficking is considered by the trafficker as a commodity and a source of income that they have in many cases paid for, or invested time and expense in recruiting or grooming for their benefit. If they lose that source of income or benefit they may go looking for it, so any child removed from a place or situation of exploitation may still be at risk from the trafficker. The indicators are the same indicators that could be present in more than one type of exploitation, just as the child victims could be subject to more than one type of exploitation.

However, one vulnerability is present in all forms of child trafficking that is the imbalance of power between the trafficker and the victim. In some situations this could leave the child vulnerable to sexual exploitation which may not be apparent at first contact. This possibility must always be foremost when considering the level of risk and potential risk. It is important to remember that any movement of a child for the purposes of Child Sexual Exploitation is trafficking, this includes but is not limited to, town to town, city to city, car to car, hotel room to hotel room.

The suspicion or concerns that a child may be being trafficked into, within or out of the UK for any purpose must be referred to Children's social care and the police to ensure the child's safety and welfare and to enable the police to gather evidence about abusers and coercers.

A multi-agency network or planning meeting/discussion should take place as soon as possible for all children considered at risk of trafficking for any purpose and should be chaired by a Child Protection Manager.

If there is a likelihood of significant harm a S.47 investigation must be progressed by Children's social care, the police and health (at a minimum), other agencies may be invited as necessary. Professionals can seek advice from Child Protection Managers or the National Crime Agency if required.

As an agency, we will:

- Share information and work in partnership to protect the child
- Ensure there is a Completed 'Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment and Management Plan'

#### [How to recognise the risk of child sexual exploitation](#)

There are three aspects to look at when considering whether a child may be at risk from child sexual exploitation. They are:

1. The signs and behaviour a child may be exhibiting

2. The typical vulnerabilities in children prior to abuse (their previous experiences)
3. Community intelligence – where they may be going and who they associate with

### **1. Signs and behaviour**

The following signs and behaviour may signify a child who is being groomed for sexual exploitation or being sexually exploited

- Missing from home or care and being defensive about where they have been and what they have been doing.
- Physical injuries (including marks and scars)
- Disclosure of physical/sexual assault and then refusing to make or withdrawing a complaint
- Indicators of CSE in conjunction with chronic drug or alcohol use
- Becoming involved in criminality/repeat offending
- Repeat sexually-transmitted infections, pregnancy, miscarriages and terminations
- Exclusion and/or unexplained absences from school or not engaged in education or training, non-attendance or excluded due to behaviour
- Change in physical appearance (new clothes, more/less makeup, poor self-image, weight gain/loss)
- Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking sites
- Becoming distant from family and friends
- Being hostile and aggressive in their relationships with parent/carers and other family members
- Gifts and/or money from unknown sources
- Associating with other sexually exploited children
- Expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression, appearing drunk or under the influence of drugs/alcohol, suicidal ideation, looking tired or ill, sleeping during the day).
- Use of internet and phone that causes a concern including;(sexting, obsession with mobile phone, being secretive on calls, leaving home in a hurry after receiving a text or phone call
- Disengaging from support, no contact or refusing engagement
- Report of being involved in CSE through being seen in hotspots (i.e in certain places and in the company of adults and children known or suspected to be involved in CSE)

(National Working Group; <https://www.stop-cse.org/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation/spot-signs/>)

### **2. Typical vulnerabilities in children prior to abuse**

Child sexual exploitation is not limited to any particular geography, ethnic or social background, and all agencies should assume that child sexual exploitation is happening and take proactive action to prevent it.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) provides the following vulnerabilities as examples of the types of things children can experience that might make them more susceptible to child sexual exploitation however notes that not all children and young people with these vulnerabilities will experience child sexual exploitation and that **child sexual exploitation can also occur without any of these vulnerabilities being present.**

- Having a prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example)
- Recent bereavement or loss
- Social isolation or social difficulties
- Absence of a safe environment to explore sexuality
- Economic vulnerability
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status
- Connections with other children and young people who are being sexually exploited
- Family members or other connections involved in adult sex work
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories);
- Sexual identity.

### **3. Community intelligence**

Community intelligence is about using the information about a local area to further understand any risk pertinent to child sexual exploitation. Local teams, be it a specialist child sexual exploitation team, a local Police force or Children's Social Care will have a more comprehensive understanding of the local area. Community intelligence encompasses contextual safeguarding – an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families and recognising the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and also online which can feature violence and abuse. Therefore the community intelligence considers the location of where the young people live and the risks they are exposed to outside of school/college or indeed within.

By providing information to local agencies, we will promote the use of 'community intelligence'.

Community intelligence can include providing information in relation to;

- New friendships
- Associates, names, nick names
- Vehicles / license plates
- Premises / locations / businesses
- Receipts for clothing



- Groups / gangs

Sharing information that staff, foster parents or prospective adopters may have with the local multi-agency child sexual exploitation team is vitally important to allow them to build their intelligence about the issue. They will want to know 'who, what, where and when' so ensure all of this information is accurately recorded and shared with them.

Police Forces may have Single Point of Contact (SPOC) arrangements in place, which gathers intelligence in relation to exploitation. All staff should be familiar with the arrangements in their local Police areas and share intelligence as and when this arises.

### How to assess if a child may be at risk of or vulnerable to sexual exploitation

Professionals from a variety of agencies, particularly health, education and police are often best placed to identify whether a child is experiencing or is at risk of sexual exploitation. It is the role of the child's foster parent, prospective adopter and the Supervising Social Worker or equivalent to identify any underlying causes for concern and alert the child's Social Worker.

Along with the child's foster parent/prospective adopter, the Supervising Social Worker or equivalent should use the 'Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment and Management Plan' to assess the risks to a child and determine any concerns and risks. This assessment tool uses the three aspects set out above to assess the risks to a child. You should then share this assessment with the child's social worker and other agencies when appropriate (for example, the Police) and update the child **Individual Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Management Plan** (Formerly called: the Child Specific Safer Caring Plan 4+).

At the point a child is placed with a foster parent/prospective adopter, and where a risk is identified, this assessment tool should be used to set a baseline to assess the risk of sexual exploitation. This would ensure any previously unidentified risks are noted, and can provide a level to judge any changes in risks over time. The assessment should therefore be updated over time when appropriate and shared with the child's social worker.

### Child sexual exploitation online

When sexual exploitation happens online, children may be persuaded or forced to:

- Have sexual conversations by text or online
- Send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- Take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone

Abusers may threaten to send images, videos or copies of conversations to the child's family and friends unless they take part in further sexual activity. Images may continue to be shared after the abuse/exploitation took place, therefore the child may continue to be at risk of exploitation and harm.

## What to do when you are concerned a child is at risk of child sexual exploitation

As with any other safeguarding concerns, if there is felt to be an immediate risk to life, the emergency services must be contacted. In the first instance inform your Manager of the concerns and follow your internal procedures, which state that you must contact the Local Authority and make a referral to Children's Services without delay. The Manager can seek further advice from Senior Managers if necessary.

You will be expected to work with Children's Services with support of your Manager. In addition, you will need to follow the internal policies in relation to notifiable events.

Anybody who talks with a child about the risks from child sexual exploitation should:

- keep calm
- listen
- try to understand their situation
- ask if you can help them in any way
- come to a conclusion about what happens next
- record what they know or have been told and share this appropriately
- and seek further support from the professionals involved with the child and/or managers.

**It is important to always share your concerns with your manager and to always discuss them with the child's social worker/duty social worker** - no single person or agency can address the risks from child sexual exploitation alone. Consider the importance of recording the intelligence and information you have to hand, including concerns about young people at risk and action taken by the agency to try to mitigate the risks. You should seek advice from a Safeguarding Manager if needed.

It is also important to recognise that the child may not perceive themselves to be at risk. It is crucial therefore, that any work on this issue with the child is non-confrontational in manner, prioritises their safety, and involves joint working with our partner agencies to agree who will do what.

### **Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment and Management Plan**

If you have concerns that a child is at risk of sexual exploitation you should complete the 'Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment and Management Plan' in conjunction with the child's foster parent/prospective adopter. You should try to involve the child in the assessment if possible. You should consider the information you have been given about the child already, but also be considerate to the hidden nature of child sexual exploitation. You must also complete or update the Individual Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Management Plan.

It is also important to recognise that the child may not perceive themselves to be at risk, but may regard the people who are exploiting them as friends, "boyfriends" or

“girlfriends”. It is crucial therefore that any work on this issue with the child is non-confrontational in manner, prioritises their safety, and involves joint working with our partner agencies to agree who will do what.

**You must also be aware of and adhere to the multi-agency procedures about child sexual exploitation for the area in which the child is placed. These will be available on the Local Multi-Agency Safeguarding website for the relevant area.**

### How to work with children at risk of sexual exploitation

Keeping children safe is the absolute priority. Direct work specific to reducing the risk of child sexual exploitation should only be undertaken following consultation with a specialist team and where no court proceedings are pending, unless the Police and CPS has determined that therapeutic work could be undertaken, in line with a Pre-Trial Therapy or Pre –proceedings Protocol. Direct work should focus on building self-esteem and self-worth, without prejudicing investigations or specific child sexual exploitation work.

The Briefing Report (July 2012) from the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) “ See me Hear me” notes *‘extensive evidence shows that children who are being sexually exploited are inexorably drawn to their abusers. They may take years to escape. This can be compounded by threats to hurt family or friends if the child seeks to escape. The result is that children return repeatedly to their abusers...’*

*“Children and young people tell us that they are often misunderstood and even sometimes blamed by professionals for putting themselves in risky situations such as running away from home or care to be with their abusers. It is critical that in such cases they are always seen as being at risk and treated with respect and understanding. That’s what they have told us will make the biggest difference and will help make sure their needs are identified and they are protected from their abusers.”* (Penny Nichols from The Children’s Society in Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan – Progress Report July 2012, page 6).

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner Briefing Report (July 2012), identifies that *‘relationships with parents, care staff, outreach workers, social workers and other trusted adults, together with proactive action to prevent, disrupt and convict perpetrators, will impact most positively to protect children from sexual exploitation’* (page 40).

Therefore, our aim is to support children, without criticising or blaming, to develop a consistent and positive relationship but not to the extent that the professional relationship risks becoming collusive, or inappropriately accepting of behaviours which are incompatible with safeguarding children.

Through this relationship we should seek to:

- Show the child our respect and concern for them.
- Understand the child's feelings and the reasons for their actions.
- Provide the child with support to access the services they need.
- Work with other professionals to increase their understanding of the pressures in the child's life.
- Help the child to understand the exploitative nature of their situation, and to see what positive options are open to them.
- Build the child's confidence and self-esteem to the point where they are able to escape their abusers.

Where the child is in agreement with this, support the child to provide information, which may enable their abusers to be apprehended, thereby protecting other children, and support the child through the court process.

*In this relationship it is essential to be trustworthy and reliable, and to be open and honest with the child.*

Organisations have found it helpful to use a range of techniques, such as text messaging and mobile phone calls, to stay in touch with the child, and to be accessible to the child when they wish to make contact.

## The Sexual Exploitation of boys and young men

The Government Education Department Guidance published in 2009, supported by research in the field acknowledges that boys and young men, as well as girls and young women can be sexually exploited.

There is some evidence that young men who are being sexually exploited are more likely to be criminalised for their behaviour and viewed as a perpetrator. Young men's victim hood often goes unrecognised and professionals may tend to focus on boys and young men's outward behaviour, such as offending or drug and alcohol use, without questioning the reasons behind it.

Behaviours that may be likely to be recognised as evidence of risk for a girl or young women may be interpreted as a young man experimenting with their sexuality or demonstrating sexually harmful behaviours to others.

In addition boys and young men may be less likely to, or find it more difficult to disclose than young women.

Practitioners should continue to be professionally curious about boys and young men and assess their vulnerabilities, risks and behaviours with the same consideration as afforded to females.

## What is Criminal Exploitation

Criminal Exploitation, also called Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) is child abuse where children are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. It is a growing issue where gangs target vulnerable children and use them in criminal activity.

Child Criminal Exploitation often occurs without the child's immediate recognition, and with the child believing that they are in control of the situation.

In all cases, those exploiting the child have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength, economic, or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common. A child's poor social or economic circumstances or emotional vulnerability can result in them being more vulnerable to exploitation. The Child Criminal Exploitation Strategy 2018 identifies criminal exploitation of young people as a combination of:

- Pull factors: children performing tasks for others resulting in them gaining accommodation, food, gifts, status or a sense of safety, money or drugs; often the hook is through the perpetrator supplying Class B drugs such as cannabis to the child
- Push factors: children escaping from situations where there is high family conflict or the absence of a primary attachment figure
- Control: Brain washing, violence and threats of violence by those exploiting the child, particularly when the child is identified by the police, and is expected to take full responsibility for the offences for which they are charged i.e. possession and supply of illegal substances.

## Definition of Gangs

There are many different understandings of what constitutes a 'gang' and what distinguishes it from other youth groups. The UK Government has adopted the definition below, adapted from the Centre for Social Justice's report '*Dying to Belong*' (2009).

*A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who:*

- See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group
- Engage in criminal activity and violence, and may also
  - Lay claim over territory (not necessarily geographical but can include illegal economy territory)
  - Have some form of identifying structural feature
  - Be in conflict with other, similar gangs.

Young people may be involved in more than one 'gang', with some cross-border movement, and may not stay in a 'gang' for significant periods of time. Young people rarely use the term 'gang', instead they used terms such as 'family', 'breddrin', 'crews', 'cuz' (cousins), 'my boys' or simply 'the people I grew up with'.

Definitions may need to be highly specific to particular areas or neighbourhoods if they are to be useful. Professionals should not seek to apply this or any other definition of a gang too rigorously; if a child or others think s/he is involved with or affected by 'a gang', then a professional should act accordingly.

Violence is a way for gang members to gain recognition and respect by asserting their power and authority in the street, with a large proportion of street crime perpetrated against members of other gangs or the relatives of gang members. Youth violence, serious or otherwise, may be a function of gang activity, however, it could equally represent the behaviour of a child acting individually in response to his or her particular history and circumstances.

There is also no single definition of “**youth violence**”. The UK Government defines it as “community/public space violence committed by young people under the age of 25”.

The word ‘gang’ means different things in different contexts:

- Peer group: A relatively small and transient social grouping which may or may not describe themselves as a gang depending on the context
- Street gang: Groups of people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group’s identity
- Organised criminal gangs: A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (financial or otherwise).

It is not illegal for a person to be in a gang – there are different types of ‘gang’ and not every ‘gang’ is criminal or dangerous. However, gang membership can be linked to illegal activity, particularly organised criminal gangs involved in trafficking, drug dealing and violent crime. Addressing the problem of gang involvement is a multi-agency issue. Partnership working and information sharing is therefore a key to safeguarding children and young people at risk of gang-related harm. Children are put at risk by gang activity both through participation in and as victims of gang violence.

Overall, children particularly vulnerable to suffering harm in the gang context are those who are:

- Not involved in gangs, but living in an area where gangs are active, which can have a negative impact on their ability to be safe, healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being
- Not involved in gangs, but at risk of becoming victims of gangs
- Not involved in gangs but at risk of becoming drawn in, for example, siblings or children of known gang members
- Gang-involved and at risk of harm through their gang-related activities (e.g. drug supply, weapon use, sexual exploitation and risk of attack from own or rival gang members).

involvement have significant needs themselves. They should be held responsible for their actions and harmful behaviour but practitioners also have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of these young people and to prevent further harm both to themselves and to other potential victims (DCSF, “Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity” 2010).

### Characteristics of gangs and gang members

Analysis of gang members has provided evidence of the typical characteristics of people involved in gangs in major inner cities; characteristics of gangs may be different in other areas:

- Predominantly young with an average age of 20 years. 97% were aged under 30. Ages ranged from 13 to 42
- Predominantly male – 98%
- Have extensive criminal histories. Of 714 gang members who were matched to Police National Database information, 655 had criminal histories and were responsible for over 7000 known offences. Only 59 had no known criminal history
- Begin offending early, often in their early teens. The average age of a first conviction was 15 years. By age 18, 82% had been convicted for an offence.

Street gangs that are organised usually have a clear leader or hierarchy running the group, and the members meet either to socialise or to engage in certain activities together. Gang members will often have something in common, be it their ethnicity, religion, culture, or class.

A gang may choose to have a unique identity to distinguish themselves from the crowd.

Some examples of this are:

- Dress code – style, colour
- Tattoos
- Jewellery
- Graffiti tagging
- Nicknames
- Language
- Handshake
- Marking territory

Home Office (Tackling Gangs Action Programme) analysis of PCN data, unpublished (2008)

### Tell-tale signs of Gang Involvement

Many of these tell-tale signs could be normal adolescent behaviour and, indeed, many gang symbols and patterns of speech have been adopted more widely by children who are not in gangs, but they may be useful in identifying concerns.

Foster parents, and practitioners involved with the child may be best placed to recognise these signs. They may include:

- Withdrawing from family, foster parents, adopters, or support workers

- Sudden loss of interest in school. Decline in attendance or academic achievement
- Starting to use new or unknown slang words
- Holds unexplained money or possessions
- Stays out unusually late without reason
- Sudden change in appearance – dressing in a particular style or ‘uniform’ similar to that of other people they hang around with, including a particular colour
- Dropped out of positive activities
- New nickname
- Unexplained physical injuries
- Graffiti style ‘tags’ on possessions, school book or walls
- Constantly talking about another young person who seems to have a lot of influence over them
- Broken off with old friends and hangs around with one group of people
- Increased use of social networking sites
- Started to adopt certain codes of group behaviour e.g. ways of talking and hand signs
- Expressing aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of people, some of whom may have been friends in the past
- Scared when entering certain areas
- Concerned by the presence of unknown people in their neighbourhoods.

Many of these signs could be ‘normal’ teenage behaviour, or may indicate other concerns such as bullying or sexual exploitation. Careful assessment is always required.

#### Circumstances which can lead to gang involvement

Individual factors, such as low self-esteem, are the most powerful signs of risk. However, there are community factors, which can foster the emergence of gangs:

- Areas with a high level of social and economic exclusion and mobility (which weakens the ties of kinship and friendship and the established mechanisms of informal control and social support);
- Areas made up of predominantly social housing, and especially where it is high rise/high density social housing.
- Areas with poor performing schools - in terms of leadership, positive ethos, managing behaviour and partnership working;
- Lack of access to pro-social activities (e.g. youth service) and to vocational training and opportunities;
- Communities who have experienced war situations prior to arrival in the UK;
- Areas with a high level of gang activity/peer pressure and intimidation, particularly if the family is denying this or is in fear of the gangs; and
- Family members involved in gang activity and criminality



Domain	Strong risk factors for youth violence	Strong risk factors for gang involvement
<b>Individual</b>	Troublesome	Substance use
	High daring	Displaced aggression traits
	Positive attitude to delinquency	Anger traits
	Previously committed offences	Aggression traits
	Involved in antisocial behaviour	
	Substance use	
	Aggression	
	Running away and truancy	
	Gang membership	
	Low self-esteem	
	High psychopathic features	
<b>Family</b>	Disrupted family	No strong risk factors identified
	Poor supervision	
	Parenting which is cold/uncaring, non-nurturing and neglectful; or which includes harsh disciplining	
	Maltreatment, such as physical or sexual abuse in childhood (abuse by adults and peers within and outside of the family)	
	Trauma such as domestic violence or involvement in or witnessing conflict violence	
<b>School</b>	Low commitment to school	Low academic achievement in primary school
		Learning disability
<b>Peer group</b>	Peers involved in criminal/anti-social activity	No strong risk factors identified

Early Intervention Foundation, 2015. [Preventing gang and youth violence: A review of risk and protective factors](#)

## Gangs and the Law

There are no laws banning gangs or gang membership. There are laws that clearly prohibit the criminal activities often associated with street gangs, and if an offender is involved or part of a gang, this could lead to a longer jail sentence.

Illegal activities include:

- Carrying or having drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy
- Keeping or carrying a gun without a license, which includes replica or imitation fire arms
- Carrying or using a knife, even with no intention of using it.

Fear and a need for self-protection is a key motivation for children to carry a weapon - it

affords a young person a feeling of power. Neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation and social exclusion generally have the highest rates of gun and knife crime. Young people are more likely to carry knives and other weapons than guns.

### Gang related Sexual Exploitation

There is evidence of a high incidence of rape of girls who are involved with gangs. Some senior gang members exploit young people including “passing” their girlfriends around to lower ranking members and sometimes to the whole group at the same time. Very few rapes by gang members are reported.

Gang members often groom girls at school using drugs and alcohol, which act as a disinhibitor and also create dependency, and encourage/coerce them to recruit other girls through school/social networks.

It is also important to add to this that whilst boys are “seen” as the benefactors of the above they can also be forced to rape females and forced to have sex as a group. Not all boys joining gangs wish to do this, however, there can be repercussions to the boys if they do not comply. . This is also a form of exploitation that needs to be considered when assessing the exploitation of males.

### What is County Lines

County lines is the police term used to describe gangs, groups or drug networks that supply drugs from a ‘hub’ into a new ‘market’ (which can be in another county, within the same county or even the same city or town). This is happening across the country, including in cities, towns, villages, and coastal towns, using dedicated mobile phone lines or ‘deal lines’. They exploit children and vulnerable adults to move the drugs and money to and from the market area, and to store the drugs in local markets. They will often use intimidation, violence and weapons, including knives, corrosives and firearms.

It involves child criminal exploitation as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as ‘cuckooing’. More recent research has found that county lines groups are using accommodation other than that acquired through cuckooing in the rural marketplace. This includes the use of serviced apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks.

Children and young people exploited in this way will quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked to areas a long way from home as part of the network's drug dealing business. Young people may refer to this as “going country”.

**If you believe a child / young person is at risk you should refer this information to the local**

**authority Children’s social care services. If you believe a person is in immediate risk of harm you should contact the police using the emergency number**

## Spotting the Signs of County Lines

A young person's involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs. They might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in a child's lifestyle should be discussed with them.

Some indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls
- Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- Leaving home without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results / performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

Threats of kidnap and serious violence, including the use of firearms and bladed weapons are made towards victims and their families, particularly where victims attempt to leave the offending network. Sexual abuse and exploitation is also used as a method of control particularly against female victims.

## Potential indicators of County Lines and Drug dealing

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g different accents compared to local accent)
- Change in resident's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community
- Unexplained injuries

## What to do if you are concerned a child is at risk from criminal exploitation, gangs or county lines

As with any other safeguarding concerns, if there is felt to be an immediate risk to life, the emergency services must be contacted. In the first instance inform your Manager of the concerns and follow your internal procedures, which state that you must contact Children's Social Care Services to make a referral without delay. The Manager can seek further advice from Senior Managers if necessary.

You will be expected to work with the assessing services with support of your Manager. In addition, you will need to follow the internal policies in relation to notifiable events. You must also be aware of and adhere to the Local Authority safeguarding procedures about gang activity and child protection for the area in which the child is placed. These will be available on the Local Authority / multi-agency safeguarding partnerships website for the relevant area.

Anybody who talks with a child about the risks from CCE/gang related activity should:

- keep calm
- listen
- try to understand their situation
- ask if you can help them in any way
- explain to the child that you are worried about them and will have to share this information with others
- consider the next steps, safety for the child is of paramount consideration
- record what they know or have been told and share this appropriately
- seek further support from the professionals involved with the child and/or managers.

**It is important to always share your concerns with your manager and the child's social worker/duty social worker** - no single person or agency can address the risks from gang activity alone. Consider the importance of recording the intelligence and information you have to hand, including concerns about young people at risk and action taken by the agency to try to mitigate the risks.

It is also important to recognise that the child may not perceive themselves to be at risk. It is crucial therefore, that any work on this issue with the child is non-confrontational in manner, prioritises their safety, and involves joint working with our partner agencies to agree who will do what.

## Risk assessment and care planning

Along with the child's foster parent, you should use the Individual Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Management Plan to detail the risks to a child and determine any actions to

be taken. This should be completed at the time of a placement being agreed, and should be regularly updated over time as the risks may change. You should share this information with the child's social worker and with other agencies when appropriate (for example, the Police).

You should involve all professionals working with the child, including the foster parent. Professionals from a variety of agencies, particularly the Local Authority/Trust and police are often best placed to identify whether a child is experiencing or is at risk of harm as a result of child sexual or criminal exploitation, including gang activity (as a victim or a gang member). It is the role of the child's foster parent and their Supervising Social Worker to identify any underlying causes for concern and alert the child's social worker. The child's Social Worker will then decide, with input and assistance from the foster parent and Supervising Social Worker, what action needs to be taken to protect the child using local child protection procedures.

**Supervising Social Workers must also be aware of and adhere to the multi-agency procedures for the area in which the child is placed.**

### Matching and Placing

It is important that at the point a foster parent/prospective adopter is being considered as a potential placement for a child, any issues of risk must be considered and noted as part of the matching process. A child should only be placed if the foster parent/prospective adopter is capable of managing the identified risks. You should consider whether additional training is needed as part of the matching process.

It is also important to consider the neighbourhood and any community intelligence that any party has when considering matching a child to a foster parent(s) /prospective adopter(s). Where matches are declined by the local authority due to locations being considered a "hotspot" referral teams must ensure this is recorded on charms under progress item "**Referral – Offered – Location declined by LA (exploitation)**".

At the point of placement, the household and Individual Safeguarding Risk Assessment and Management Plan must be completed/updated to ensure any risks from sexual or criminal exploitation are considered and addressed.

This is also to be considered within an existing foster placement. Foster parents will be supported to increase their knowledge to enable them to continue supporting the child either by attending organised training or being given training on a 1:1 basis. Consideration of additional support for the foster parent(s) /prospective adopter (s) should be undertaken as part of risk assessment, care planning and supervision.

Any identified gaps in knowledge or understanding of the foster parent must be recorded and passed on to the Supervising Social Worker or equivalent and included within the individual foster parent personal Professional Development plan. They should also be regularly discussed and noted in foster parent supervision or discussions with prospective adopters to ensure that any gaps or areas for development are known, monitored and addressed as quickly as possible.

## Information Sharing

It is important that information is shared in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018) which says that **‘Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe’**. Good relationships should be developed with local safeguarding partners as part of the agency approach to keeping children and young people ‘safe and happy’.

It is well-established that we need to share relevant and appropriate information in a timely and safe manner. It is important that information is shared in line with the community information sharing policy and as agreed with local services. Information must always be shared with the child’s responsible Social Worker in the first instance.

Information that other agencies, particularly the Police and the local multi-agency child sexual exploitation team will find useful is:

*WHO*: is reporting and who are they reporting      *WHAT*: information they are sharing

*WHERE*: did the incident occur      *WHEN*: did the incident take place

Consideration should be given to the time, place and physical appearance. Sharing information with specialist agencies means they can interpret area or specific information according to their local intelligence, for example if a child was frequenting a park where several child sexual exploitation investigations had been undertaken, it would be clear the risk was much higher in that area.

## Missing from Home

If a child already has a history of running away or going missing, it is even more important to discuss the potential impact of any planned actions, so as to not increase the likelihood of them disappearing with suspected exploiters. Critical to this process will be creating written records of agreed actions, so that we are always able to evidence what has been agreed, what has been done, what has happened and what will be done next and by whom.

The Child Missing or Away without Authorisation Procedure provides assistance in this situation, as going missing may be one of the indicators that a child is being sexually or criminally exploited.

Keeping accurate records is one key element of dealing with concerns. Other elements of the Child Missing or Away Without Authorisation Procedure that provide a useful framework for practical action are ensuring that a child is always spoken to when they return and the reasons for their absence are asked about.

Any unauthorised absence should be treated as a critical incident and recorded in line with the Monitoring and Notifiable Events Procedure. This will also assist in terms of noting any pattern or regularity in relation to going missing.

Return Home Interviews must be offered to all children, the child's Social Worker has responsibility to ensure these are completed. However professional judgement should be used by the Supervising Social Worker to determine the need for a post missing visit in the absence of a timely independent return home interview.

## References and Key Reading

### [Advice to parents and carers on gangs](#)

All Wales Protocol guidance [Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children who are at Risk of Abuse through Sexual Exploitation](#)

Children's Commissioner: [Improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation](#)

Department for Education: [Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners](#)

Department for Education: [Safeguarding Children and Young People who may be affected by Gang Activity](#)

Department for Education: [Working together to safeguard children](#)

Home Office: [Child exploitation disruption toolkit](#)

Home Office: [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines](#)

Home Office: [Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance](#)

Local Government Association: [Tackling child sexual exploitation](#)

NSPCC: [Criminal exploitation and gangs](#)

NSPCC: [Protecting children from sexual exploitation](#)

NWG: [Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation](#) – resources for professionals, parents and young people

National Crime Agency (NCA): [County Lines Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply](#)

Ofsted: ['Time to listen' – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing](#)



children

Ofsted: [Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery: an addendum](#)

Public Health England: [Child sexual exploitation: prevention and intervention](#)

Scottish Children and Families Directorate: [Child sexual exploitation: definition and summary](#)

Scottish Government: [Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy](#)

## Further reading

[Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham](#)

[House of Commons: Child sexual exploitation in Rotherham: some issues for local government](#)

Staff should be aware of the observations and recommendations in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham.

[Real Voices: Child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester](#)

The report into child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester contains a number of recommendations for local agencies about what can be done to improve services and raise awareness.

[Ofsted: The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here, could it?](#)

In November 2014, Ofsted published a thematic review of eight councils examining their response, action plans and strategies to dealing with child sexual exploitation. The report includes a series of recommendations for local government covering the themes of strategic leadership; performance management; raising awareness; findings from practice and disruption and prosecution.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner's two year inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups helped raise awareness of child sexual exploitation, and includes the 'See Me Hear Me Framework.' The See Me, Hear Me Framework outlines key areas for protecting children and young people from child sexual exploitation, from strategic planning to operational interventions.