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Child Exploitation

Identification, Assessment & Planning Tools

Practice Guidance

May 2020

**Introduction**

All children and young people are vulnerable to exploitation and it can affect any person regardless of age, gender, social or ethnic background. Exploitation of children and young people requires a wider perspective and understanding of the contexts, situations and relationships in which exploitation is likely to occur'. It is important to remember that anyone being exploited is a victim, and although they may not recognise this, as professionals we should refrain from ‘blaming’ or holding them to account.

A child is defined as any person who is under 18 years of age. However, some young people up to age 25 have specific vulnerabilities that may place them at greater harm e.g. learning difficulties and disabilities or being a care leaver) and as such, they may be considered in relation to exploitation.

This guidance does not replace the practice guidance from the **Kent and Medway** Safeguarding Children Multi-agency Partnership <https://www.kscmp.org.uk/> [Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership](https://www.medway.gov.uk/mscb) and should be used alongside the appropriate Kent & Medway Safeguarding Children Procedures (online) <https://www.proceduresonline.com/kentandmedway> and the Support Level Guidance/ Threshold Document regarding thresholds for referrals into Children’s Social Care (Integrated Children’s Services)

<https://www.kscb.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/80373/SLG-sheet-v13.pdf>

[Medway Threshold Children in Need](https://www.medway.gov.uk/mscb/downloads/file/317/medway-threshold-criteria-for-children-in-need)

The Exploitation tools are designed to be used by practitioners working with children, young people and parents or carers, both in a non-statutory and statutory capacity across all levels of support.

**What are the exploitation tools?**

Two tools have been designed to improve how the county disrupts exploitation and how agencies work together to create safety and reduce harm. The first tool is an **identification** tool which helps professionals to identify whether a child/young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, is being groomed or targeted for the purposes of exploitation or is being exploited. It is designed to support professional judgement for those professionals who do not normally complete social care assessments and to help you decide what action(s) is needed. The second tool, ***assessment and planning*** is an extension of the identification tool, as well as identifying if a child or young person is being exploited, it helps professionals to draw out the analysis, identify the most appropriate intervention(s) and formulate a plan which reduces harm in the contexts it is occurring.

To promote child centred practice, it is important that you engage with and listen to children and young people as well as parents/carers (where appropriate) to understand their needs and experiences when completing the tools.

**Child Exploitation**

Exploitation may involve force and/or coercion and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence. It is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation. Exploitation can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. Exploitation can still occur, even where the activity appears consensual.

Exploitation can take one or many different forms and there are overlaps between them. A child or young person may be exploited sexually, or exploited criminally through selling and/or trafficking drugs, money laundering, weapons storage or the ‘cuckooing’ of property (e.g., for cannabis cultivation), or they may be exploited through use of their labour and other forms of modern slavery. They could also be exploited through racialisation. Victims may be subjected to more than one form of exploitation; therefore, it is important that practitioners are able to recognise and address multiple forms of exploitation. The document below provides a brief overview of the different forms of exploitation along with links to useful resources.

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**Methods of exploitation**

As well as sometimes co-occurring and sharing many common characteristics, the different forms of exploitation feature common methods of accessing and controlling children and young people.

**Grooming:** Grooming is almost always present in the exploitation of an individual. A definition of grooming is; Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with an individual to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, exploitation, or trafficking. It takes many forms, and is not always a linear process, resulting in children and young people who are being exploited not recognising the relationship as abusive. Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender, or race (NSPCC).

**Gain**: Child or young person may be given or promised tangible rewards (e.g. money) and or intangible rewards (e.g. status) in exchange for sexual acts and or criminal activity. Perpetrators also gain financially or by increased status as a result of the abuse.

**Threats, debt bondage and fear tactics:** Related to gain, many children and young people who are trafficked to the UK are forced into exploitative situations, such as cannabis cultivation, sexual exploitation and domestic labour on the premise of a ‘debt bondage’ for the cost of their travel. ‘Debt bondage’ is a method that has also been documented in CSE and CCE, where children and young people are provided with material things (e. g. clothes, alcohol, drugs) and then threatened with an accumulated ‘debt’. In the absence of (or as well as) tangible ‘debts’, young people (and their families) can be threatened with or experience violence, or other forms of punishment, to ensure compliance (e.g. the threat of sharing a naked image of the child or young person online). All these tactics can be facilitated via online contact, as with grooming and the presence of gain.

**Choice:** The issue of ‘choices’ is where grooming and gain intersect. Where a child or young person appears to have ‘chosen’ to engage in an activity they do not believe to be abusive, and are ‘gaining’ from that activity, this is frequently misidentified by professionals as consensual behaviour. Government guidance on recognises this dynamic and reiterates that an activity can still be exploitative even if it appears consensual. Government guidance on CSE and CCE recognises this dynamic and reiterates that an activity can still be exploitative even if it appears consensual (Department for Education, 2017; Eaton and Holmes, 2017; Home Office, 2017; Pearce, 2013).When thinking about the choices that a young person is making, please consider the fact that their choice will be constrained, i.e. there is a power imbalance, and a child may feel unsafe to leave the location that we feel is unsafe.

**Dual identities:** It is common across all forms of child exploitation for some children and young people to be instrumental in the exploitation of others. This can position some young people as both ‘victims’ and ‘instigators’ of abuse. This dynamic is exacerbated by the increased influence that peers have over a young person’s decision-making during adolescence. Children and young people who abuse others in these contexts are likely to have been coerced into this activity and/or to believe that complying will keep them (and others) safe.

**Factors which may create or increase a child or young person’s vulnerability:**

* Diagnosed or suspected undiagnosed learning disability
* Are a care experienced child or young person
* 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)
* Have previously been abused or exploited
* Significant events, past or present (particularly traumatic experiences) which might be impacting on the young person and what is happening outside of the home
* Missing from home/school
* Have suffered a recent bereavement or loss
* Being excluded from mainstream education and or on a part time curriculum
* Low self-esteem/self-confidence
* Previous experience of being bullied
* Social isolation or social difficulties
* Alcohol and substance misuse
* Absence of a safe environment to explore sexuality /sexual identity
* Economic vulnerability
* Homelessness or insecure accommodation status
* Connections with other children and young people who are being sexually or criminally exploited or with other people involved in gangs
* Family members or other connections involved in adult sex work

No child or young person is immune from the threat of exploitation and whilst particular life experiences, can be associated with increased risk, these experiences on their own should not be used to determine or diagnose that a child or young person is being exploited; particularly as some children and young people who are exploited/abused will display no obvious indicators of risk. An overreliance on looking for signs of exploitation/abuse should be avoided as potential victims, or those at risk, of exploitation could be missed.

**Behaviours**

There is no specific set of behaviours that any chid or young person demonstrates prior to, during or following exploitation, however policy, practice and research identify similar behaviours that may feature as a symptom or indication of child exploitation.

* **Displaying behaviours characterised professionally as risky**: going missing from home or school; frequenting areas associated with exploitation; Substance use; committing offences.
* **Displaying behaviours characterised professionally as suspicious**: acquisition of material items and money, excessive in secretive use of mobile phone/internet; having multiple mobile phones or changing numbers.
* **Change in relationships**: relationships with controlling/significantly older adult(s); isolation from peers; following the lead of peers to engage in new and harmful behaviours; association with peers who present a risk of harm and against parent’s wishes.
* **Decline in physical and mental health including** sexually transmitted infections; the impacts of trauma; evidence of physical or sexual assault; changing appearance (weight loss, changes to personal hygiene, signs of exhaustion) self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.
* **Services/parents experiencing new challenges in engaging the child or young person**; Significant decline in school performance, violence against parents; loss of parental control.

**Principles of Engagement**

Working collaboratively is important, and it is particularly important when assessing vulnerable adolescents because of the complexity of the issues and perspectives.

The following principles underpin effective identification, assessment and promote the engagement of children/young people and their families in the identification and assessment process:

* Children/young people and their parents/carers should be actively engaged. Children and young people who have been abused have already experienced a loss of control so the process needs to be managed so that they can meaningfully participate.
* Children/young people and their parents/carers need the opportunity to tell their story through conversation rather than respond to a series of questions. You need to ask them what is happening rather than tell them what you think is happening.
* Be interested, professionally curious, listen to what the child or young person is saying and hear it from a safeguarding perspective.
* You need to consider how this child/young person experiences the world around them, in terms of safety and harm and try to see the world from their point of view.
* You need to be holistic in your approach, examining risk, harm and protective factors and addressing the child/young person’s needs within their family/living environment, their peer group, their school, and neighbourhood.
* It needs to be recognised that grooming can cause a breakdown in the protective ability of parents/carers.
* Engaging parents in being as protective and supportive as possible is very important in the context of extra familial risk. Alongside thinking about parental safeguarding capacity, ask yourself who else’s capacity to safeguard is being undermined in this situation (e.g. education provision, community safety, etc.)
* Identification and assessments should be underpinned by professional curiosity and not simply rely on checklists, disclosures or what is or is not known. If something is not known, you should not assume that it may not be happening.
* You need to provide an analysis of the information gathered, drawing on your professional judgement.
* You should consider the impact of the issues identified on the child or young person and identify the support that is required to meet their needs.
* The focus needs to be on outcomes, not process.
* You should avoid any suggestion of judgement or blame in respect of either the child/young person or the parent/ carer. A child or young person who is exploited is not making a ‘lifestyle choice’, ‘putting themselves at risk’, or ‘engaging in risk taking behaviours’. It is our job to identify that they are being exploited and navigating harmful environments. Professional Guidance has been developed which provides lots of suggestions on how to express concerns and describe what the child or young person is experiencing that avoids any suggestion that the child is to blame. [Appropriate-language-guidance-Child-Exploitation.pdf](http://www.westsussexscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Appropriate-language-guidance-Child-Exploitation.pdf)
* It is important to remember that a child or young person might not relate to their experience as being abusive or exploitative. They may feel a sense of ‘loyalty’ and ‘brotherhood’ to the exploiters, they may feel emotionally fulfilled in a way they haven’t experienced from parents, carers or professionals before. The young person may feel they have gained ‘friends’ or ‘family’ and that these people care for him or her. The young person may be receiving money or rewards that they have not had access to previously or the money may be supporting their family to cover basic needs. The young person may feel a sense of ‘status’ and ‘power’ that they haven’t had before. The young person may see themselves as an autonomous drug dealer rather than a victim of exploitation at the bottom of a large organised crime structure. This links in with the process of how an exploiter may target and groom a young person. This however also links in with barriers to engagement and why a young person may not relate to the term ‘criminal exploitation’.
* You need to draw on the perspective of the professional network, this will enrich the assessment and also provide a good platform for any multi-agency intervention work to follow.

Some suggested conversations starters can be found in the document below.



The table below identifies actions to be considered/taken for each of the four potential outcomes, which are based on your professional judgement and have been linked to Kent Support Levels. Actions and next steps are important in ensuring the protection of the child and young person, the pursuing and disruption of the exploiter and the wider preventative actions that can be taken to minimise harm to the child, peer group and places and locations.

**Outcome and Next Steps**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Outcome** | **Associated actions** |
| **Universal Support Level 1** | **No concerns ofexploitation**, concerns relate to behaviours appropriate to my age | No further action needed, although you should keep a copy of this form in line with your own record-keeping policy.  Is the child or young person aware of who they can speak to should they have any questions, worries or concerns.  Raise the young person’s awareness of general safety tips and measures along with potential dangers and harm.  Consider Youth Service Offer  <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people>  [Medway Youth Service](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200215/youth/318/youth_programmes_and_activities_in_medway/6)  If concerns increase, please update and review if additional support is needed. |
| **Additional Support Level 2** | **Evidence of vulnerability to exploitation** | Liaise with Agency Designated Safeguarding Advisor for any advice/guidance.  Work with child/young person and family to address the identified support needs, intervene early and take proactive action to prevent escalation.  Talk to the child or young person to see if they need any additional help or guidance.  Does the child or young person have a safe and trusted adult they can speak to? Are they aware of who they can speak with if needed?  Does the child or young person have a good relationship with at least one positive adult role model?  Does the child or young person feel safe at school? Are there places in the school that they feel unsafe? Are there specific times or classes that they feel unsafe? Is safety planning is needed for the school environment or another context?  Discuss with family which professionals are already involved, explore options for extending their service.  Discuss with the child or young person safety tips and measures that can help them be safer in general.  Is there a need for work around online safety or the child/young person’s internet use, healthy relationships? Does the child/young person understand ‘consent’ [tea consent video](https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=YouTube+Tea+Consent+Clean&&view=detail&mid=53440FBCAF56A476FE2953440FBCAF56A476FE29&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DYouTube%2BTea%2BConsent%2BClean%26FORM%3DVDMHRS).)  Explore opportunities to engage the child/young person in positive activities. Consider Youth Service Offer <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people> [Medway Youth Service](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200215/youth/318/youth_programmes_and_activities_in_medway/6)  Encourage the child/young person to make positive contributions at home, school, within the community, leisure, or work.  Peer mapping – Guidance to peer mapping can be found at <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/publications/peer-group-assessment-and-mapping>  Disrupt the child or young person’s contact with adults or young people who are suspected to be increasing or presenting a risk of harm.  Do the parents/carer/s require any support and advice around parental controls online and increasing their parental presence? Understanding exploitation and the grooming processes. They can also access a wide range of support from Open Access Youth Services.  Consider sharing intelligence with police using the Kent Safeguarding Children’s Multi Agency Partners (KSCMP) information sharing form using the link below (for Kent and Medway).  [partner information sharing link](https://www.qes-online.com/Kent/eIntel/Live/m/eintel/public/index)  <https://www.kscmp.org.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/0004/76135/20171025-KSCB-Multi-Agency-guidance-for-sharing-CSE-information-and-intelligence.docx> |
| Intensive Support Level 3 | **Evidence that the child/young person is being groomed or targeted for the purposes of exploitation** | Liaise with Agency Designated Safeguarding Advisor for any advice/guidance.  Send a [request for support form](https://www.kscb.org.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/0007/89053/Single-Request-for-Support-Form-Version-5-2019.docx) to Front Door Services  [Medway Threshold Referral](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200170/children_and_families/600/worried_about_a_child/1)  A multi-agency approach requiring local authority services to work together with universal services will be needed to assess, plan and work with the child or young person to promote their needs, safety and well-being.  Work with child/young person and family to address the identified support needs, intervene early and take proactive action to prevent escalation.  Peer and safety mapping and planning. The young person should lead mapping and the development of plan, but with your support. <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/publications/peer-group-assessment-and-mapping> <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/publications/safety-mapping>  Explore opportunities to engage the child/young person in diversionary activities and build their self-esteem.  Consider Youth Service Offer <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/young-people> [Medway Youth Service](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200215/youth/318/youth_programmes_and_activities_in_medway/6)  Adopt a strengths-based approach and seek to engage parents as safeguarding partners, empowering them about how to support and protect their child and working with them to enhance protective factors around the child or young person. This might include:   * Helping parents to strengthen their relationships with their children, particularly in understanding teenage development and what may make their child vulnerable. Being non-judgemental and respectful. * Helping parents to obtain a better understanding of child exploitation, the nature of it and its impact. * Enabling and empowering them (for example, let them know what type of information to record about people/places/spaces/cars of interest/concern and how to share this.   Consider need for specialist support through other agencies (Sexual, Drug and Alcohol Counselling, Advocacy Services, Mentoring Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).  Continue to support the child or young person and ensure that they have a safe place or a safe person to talk to. Building positive relationships and trust with victims is an essential part of helping to reduce the risk of harm and creating safe spaces for disclosure.  Offer children and young people persistent, consistent and assertive support that reaches out to them. They need to know and experience the tenacity of someone who is genuinely concerned for them. This means continuing to try to engage them even if they turn support down or display negative behaviours to practitioners trying to support them.  Share intelligence with the police using (KSCMP) information sharing form using the link: [partner information sharing link](https://www.qes-online.com/Kent/eIntel/Live/m/eintel/public/index)  <https://www.kscmp.org.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/0004/76135/20171025-KSCB-Multi-Agency-guidance-for-sharing-CSE-information-and-intelligence.docx>  Ongoing review of harm required particularly if there are any changes in circumstances. |
| Specialist Support Level 4 | **Evidence that the child/young person being exploited** | **If the child or young person is in danger or you need an immediate police response, call 999**  Liaise with Agency Designated Safeguarding Advisor for any advice/guidance.  A multi-agency approach will be needed to promote the child/young person’s safety and well-being.  Send a [request for support form](https://www.kscb.org.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/0007/89053/Single-Request-for-Support-Form-Version-5-2019.docx) [Medway Referral to Children's Services](https://www.medway.gov.uk/info/200170/children_and_families/600/worried_about_a_child/1)  to Front Door Services if the child or young person does not have an allocated worker. Ensure a copy of the tool is shared.  If there is an allocated worker, share concerns and ensure a copy of this is shared.  Continue to support the child or young person and ensure that they have a safe place or a safe person to talk to. Building positive relationships and trust with victims is an essential part of helping to reduce the risk of harm and creating safe spaces for disclosure.  Offer children and young people persistent, consistent and assertive support that reaches out to them. They need to know and experience the tenacity of someone who is genuinely concerned for them. This means continuing to try to engage them even if they turn support down or display negative behaviours to practitioners trying to support them.  Adopt a strengths-based approach and seek to engage parents as safeguarding partners, empowering them about how to support and protect their child and working with them to enhance protective factors around the child or young person. This might include:   * Helping parents to strengthen their relationships with their children, particularly in understanding teenage development and what may make their child vulnerable. * Helping parents to obtain a better understanding of child exploitation, the nature of it and its impact. * Helping parents to understand how their children may respond to trauma and the behaviours they display. * Being non-judgemental and respectful. * Giving parents and carers enough information to help them to protect their children. * Enabling and empowering them (for example, let them know what type of information to record about people/places/spaces/cars of interest/concern and how to share this.   Share intelligence with the Police using the KSCMP information sharing form using the link below (for Kent and Medway):  [partner information sharing link](https://www.qes-online.com/Kent/eIntel/Live/m/eintel/public/index)  <https://www.kscmp.org.uk/__data/assets/word_doc/0004/76135/20171025-KSCB-Multi-Agency-guidance-for-sharing-CSE-information-and-intelligence.docx> |

The Home Office has published a [**Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit) which sets out many of the tools useful for police and other safeguarding professionals to disrupt the exploitation of children and young people and sets out best practice in information sharing and multi-agency working as well as intelligence and evidence gathering.

**Resources for young people, parents, carers and guardians:**

* NSPCC [www.nspcc.org.uk](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/)
* Children Society <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/advice-hub>
* CEOP (Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre) [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/)
* Net Aware [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk/)
* PACE (Parents Against Child Exploitation) [www.paceuk.info](http://www.paceuk.info/)
* UK Safer Internet Centre [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/)
* Parent Zone [www.parentzone.org.uk](http://www.parentzone.org.uk/)

**Resources for professionals:**

* The Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre (CEOP): <https://www.ceop.police.uk/>
* Safeguarding Children and Young People From Sexual Exploitation - Supplementary Guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>
* [Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit) which sets out many of the tools useful for police and other safeguarding professionals to disrupt the sexual and criminal exploitation of children and young people and sets out best practice in information sharing and multi-agency working as well as intelligence and evidence gathering.
* Contextual Safeguarding Network <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk>
* [Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1541/gillick-competency-factsheet.pdf)
* [Risk assessment tool for sexually active young people](https://medway2-my.sharepoint.com/personal/kerry_mcmorris_medway_gov_uk/Documents/CP/BCP/•%09http:/www.medway.gov.uk/mscb/downloads/file/61/risk-assessment-tool-for-sexually-active-young-people)
* [Consideration of risk assessment of sexually active young people](https://medway2-my.sharepoint.com/personal/kerry_mcmorris_medway_gov_uk/Documents/CP/BCP/•%09http:/www.medway.gov.uk/mscb/downloads/file/62/consideration-of-risk-assessment-of-sexually-active-young-people)
* [Guidance for working with children who are sexually active](http://www.medway.gov.uk/mscb/downloads/file/63/guidance-for-working-with-children-who-are-sexually-active)