

6.4 Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation

REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS

[The Protection of Children Standard](#)

SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

The information in this chapter is taken from Government guidance documents as listed below. It should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) procedures regarding sexual exploitation of children and young people and related procedures in this manual.

RELATED INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

[What to do if you think a Child is being Sexually Exploited](#), Department for Education, 2012.

[Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups \(CSEGG\)](#), Children's Commissioner, 2012.

[Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan](#), Department for Education, 2011.

[Safeguarding Children and Young people from Sexual Exploitation](#), Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009

[Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre \(CEOP\)](#).

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1. Introduction

The sexual exploitation of children and young people has been identified throughout the UK, in both rural and urban areas ... 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... Children who are sexually exploited are the victims of sexual abuse and should be safeguarded from further harm. Sexually exploited children should not be regarded as criminals and the primary law enforcement response must be directed at perpetrators who groom children for sexual exploitation. (p 4)

Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances. This includes boys and young men as well as girls and young women. 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, and those involved in gangs (p 17). (Safeguarding Children and Young people from Sexual Exploitation, 2009)

Child sexual exploitation takes different forms - from a seemingly 'consensual' relationship where sex is exchanged for attention, affection, accommodation or gifts, to serious organised crime and child trafficking. Child sexual exploitation involves differing degrees of abusive activities, including coercion, intimidation or enticement, unwanted pressure from peers to have sex, sexual bullying (including cyber bullying), and grooming for sexual activity. There is increasing concern about the role of technology in sexual abuse, including via social networking and other internet sites and mobile phones (see also [Correspondence, Communication and Social Networking Procedure](#)). The key issue in relation to child sexual exploitation is the imbalance of power within the 'relationship'. The perpetrator always has power over the victim, increasing the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops.

Many children and young people are groomed into sexually exploitative relationships but other forms of entry exist. Some young people are engaged in informal economies that incorporate the exchange of sex for rewards such as drugs, alcohol, money or gifts. Others exchange sex for accommodation or money as a result 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.

Children and young people may have already been sexually exploited before they were admitted to the home; others may become targets of perpetrators during their placement. They are often the focus of perpetrators of sexual abuse due to their vulnerability. The manager and staff in the home should therefore create an environment which educates children and young people about child sexual exploitation, involving relevant outside agencies where appropriate. They should encourage them to discuss any such concerns with their key worker or other member of staff, and also feel able to report any such concerns about their peers to staff.

2. Indicators of Possible Sexual Exploitation

Staff in the home should be aware of the key indicators of child sexual exploitation. They include:

Health

- Physical symptoms (bruising suggestive of either physical or sexual assault);
- Chronic fatigue;
- Recurring or multiple sexually transmitted infections;

- Pregnancy and/or seeking an abortion;
- Evidence of drug, alcohol or other substance misuse;
- Sexually risky behaviour.

Education

- Truancy/disengagement with education or considerable change in performance at school.

Emotional and Behavioural Issues

- Volatile behaviour exhibiting extreme array of mood swings or use of abusive language;
- Involvement in petty crime such as shoplifting, stealing;
- Secretive behaviour;
- Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults;
- Reports of being seen in places known to be used for sexual exploitation, including public toilets known for cottaging or adult venues (pubs and clubs).

Identity

- Low self-image, low self-esteem, self-harming behaviour, e.g. cutting, overdosing, eating disorder, promiscuity.

Relationships

- Hostility in relationships with staff, family members as appropriate and significant others;
- Physical aggression;
- Placement breakdown;
- Reports from reliable sources (e.g. family, friends or other professionals) suggesting the likelihood of involvement in sexual exploitation;
- Detachment from age-appropriate activities;
- Associating with other young people who are known to be sexually exploited;
- Known to be sexually active;
- Sexual relationship with a significantly older person, or younger person who is suspected of being abusive;
- Unexplained relationships with older adults;

- Possible inappropriate use of the Internet and forming relationships, particularly with adults, via the Internet;
- Phone calls, text messages or letters from unknown adults;
- Adults or older youths loitering outside the home;
- Persistently missing, staying out overnight or returning late with no plausible explanation;
- Returning after having been missing, looking well cared for in spite of having no known home base;
- Missing for long periods, with no known home base;
- Going missing and being found in areas where they have no known links.

Please note: Whilst the focus is often on older men as perpetrators, younger men and women may also be involved and staff should be aware of this possibility.

Social Presentation

- Change in appearance;
- Leaving the care setting in clothing unusual for them (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older young people).

Family and Environmental Factors

- History of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; neglect; domestic violence; parental difficulties.

Housing

- Pattern of previous street homelessness;
- Having keys to premises other than those known about.

Income

- Possession of large amounts of money with no plausible explanation;
- Acquisition of expensive clothes, mobile phones or other possessions without plausible explanation;
- Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding.

This list is not exhaustive.

Staff should be aware that many children and young people who are sexually exploited do not see themselves as victims. In such situations, discussions with them about staff concerns should be handled with great sensitivity. Seeking prior advice from specialist agencies may be useful. This should not involve disclosing personal, identifiable information at this stage.

In assessing whether a child or young person is a victim of sexual exploitation, or at risk, careful consideration should be given to the issue of consent. It is important to bear in mind that:

- A child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex (it is statutory rape) or any other type of sexual touching;
- Sexual activity with a child under 16 is also an offence;
- It is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old if they hold a position of trust or authority in relation to them;
- Where sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old does not result in an offence being committed, it may still result in harm, or the likelihood of harm being suffered;
- Non-consensual sex is rape whatever the age of the victim; and
- If the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or his or her family has been subject to violence or the threat of it, they cannot be considered to have given true consent; therefore offences may have been committed;
- Child sexual exploitation is therefore potentially a child protection issue for all children under the age of 18 years and not just those in a specific age group.

As well as responding to an individual child or young person who goes missing (see [Section 3, Children who go Missing](#)), the home should also collate and share data on missing incidents. This should be discussed with local agencies involved in the strategic response in relation to missing children, to ascertain what data is required.

3. Children and Young People who go Missing

A significant number of children and young people who are being sexually exploited may go missing from care and education, some frequently. If a child goes missing from care, the [Missing Children Procedure](#) should be followed.

Return interviews for young runaways can help in establishing why a young person ran away and the subsequent support that may be required, as well as preventing repeat incidents. Information gathered from return interviews can be used to inform the identification, referral and assessment of any child sexual exploitation cases.

4. Referring Cases of Concern

Where a member of staff is concerned that a child or young person is involved in, or at risk of, sexual exploitation, they should discuss their concerns with a senior member of staff or the home's Designated Child Protection Manager. If it is decided that action needs to be taken to protect the child, local safeguarding procedures should be triggered. This will include making a referral to children's social care in which the home is located and the local police.

See [Child Protection Referrals Procedure, Reporting Concerns, Suspicions or Allegations of Abuse or Harm](#).

In the case of suspected child sexual exploitation [Ofsted](#), the placing authority and police must be informed (see also [Delegated Authorities and Notifiable Events Procedure](#)).

If the child or young person is not deemed to be in need, the social worker should consider onward referral to relevant agencies. This should include liaison with the keyworker at the home.

5. Supporting Children and Young People out of Child Sexual Exploitation

Statutory agencies and voluntary sector organisations together with the child or young person, and his / her family as appropriate, should agree on the services which should be provided to them and how they will be coordinated. The types of intervention offered should be appropriate to their needs and should take full account of identified risk factors and their individual circumstances. This may include, for example, previous abuse, missing incidents, involvement in gangs and groups and/or child trafficking. Health services provided may include sexual health services and mental health services. Advice should be sought from the nearest specialist service which works with children and young people involved in child sexual exploitation. A referral should be made as appropriate, if the child or young person is in agreement.

Issues raised and action planned should be incorporated into the child's [Care Plan](#) and [Placement Plan](#), and reviewed as part of the [Looked After Child Review](#).

Because the effects of child sexual exploitation can last well into adulthood, support may be required over a long period of time. In such circumstances, effective links should be made between children and adult services and statutory and voluntary organisations. This should be incorporated into the young person's [Pathway Plan](#).

6. Identifying and Prosecuting Perpetrators

The police and criminal justice agencies lead on the identification and prosecution of perpetrators. All practitioners, however, have a role in gathering, recording and sharing information with the police and other agencies, as appropriate and in agreement with them.

The home's manager and senior staff should proactively liaise with local police regarding child sexual exploitation. This should include police giving advice to staff about what action they should take if they are concerned a child in their care is at risk of or is being sexually exploited. This may include gathering information to pass onto the police, such as vehicle registration numbers, names, physical descriptions etc. It may also include what action staff should take in the case of suspected sexual or physical abuse in order to protect potential evidence, which may be useful in the case of an alleged perpetrator being prosecuted. Advice should be sought from local police regarding such matters.

Staff in children's homes should bear in mind that sexual exploitation often does not occur in isolation and has links to other crime types, including:

- Child trafficking (into, out of and within the UK);

- Domestic violence;
- Sexual violence in intimate relationships;
- Grooming (both online and offline);
- Abusive images of children and their distribution (organised abuse);
- Organised sexual abuse of children;
- Drugs-related offences (dealing, consuming and cultivating);
- Gang-related activity;
- Immigration-related offences;
- Domestic servitude.

7. Supporting Children and Young People through Related Legal Proceedings

Where alleged perpetrators are arrested and charged with offences against children or young people in the home, staff should ensure they are supported throughout the prosecution process and beyond. Specialist agencies should be involved in supporting the child or young person, as required. This may include using special measures to protect them when giving evidence in court for example. Independent Sexual Violence Advisers or specialist voluntary sector services, if available, may also have an important role to play.