



City of
Stoke-on-Trent
Child Exploitation Practice Guidance

Introduction

Stoke on Trent Safeguarding Partnership have adopted a revised Child Exploitation Strategy (<https://www.ssscb.org.uk/working-together-to-safeguard-children/child-exploitation/>) which has been approved by all partners and focuses on tackling all types of child exploitation including child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation (including “county lines”).

Whilst Stoke on Trent local authority and their partners have had clear processes and procedures in place to address child sexual exploitation for some time, it has become more apparent that nationally, and locally, children can also be exploited in other ways.

it is therefore the aim that all children who are identified as at risk of, or experiencing, child exploitation will receive the correct support at the right time to enable them to live safely and thrive.

What is Child Exploitation?

The Child Exploitation Strategy adopts the following definitions;

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. (Dept. for Ed: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation, Feb 2017)

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. CCE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. (*Home Office: Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018*)



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County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. ([Home Office: Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance, Sept 2018](#))

There is also significant cross over with other areas of safeguarding and enforcement including;

Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups. ([HM Govt: Prevent Duty for England and Wales, July 2015](#))

'Modern slavery' is a term which encapsulates slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking. ([Modern Slavery Act, 2015](#)).

Child trafficking is defined as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt” of a child for the purpose of exploitation. ([United Nations: Palermo Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, 2000](#))

Stoke on Trent Approach to Child Exploitation

Stoke on Trent Local Authority has supported the development and implementation of the Child Exploitation Strategy.

We have committed to;

- Support everyone to recognise all forms of child exploitation and raise awareness regarding child criminal exploitation in particular
- Improve our ability to protect children who are being, or are at risk of, child exploitation through adopting a contextual safeguarding approach to child exploitation
- Establish a problem-solving, multi-agency forum to disrupt child exploitation and
- Ensure that there is clear governance and oversight of Child Exploitation

In order to achieve these aims of safeguarding children who are at risk of, or experiencing, child exploitation Stoke on Trent Local Authority and their partners have;

- Developed a raising awareness webinar to inform and support practitioner’s understanding <https://view.pagetiger.com/open-to-all/child-exploitation>



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- Revised the risk factor matrix (RFM) to include all elements of child exploitation (<https://www.ssscb.org.uk/working-together-to-safeguard-children/child-exploitation/vamap/>)
- Developed services and support for children who are identified as low risk of CE
- Piloted, and launched, the Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panel where children who are assessed as medium or high risk are discussed
- Worked with the National Working Group to develop our processes and gained their support to embed best practice
- Established a Child Exploitation Steering Group to oversee the themes and areas for development presented by national and local research and the feedback from MACE
- Worked with the National Tackling Child Exploitation Project to support Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire and partners in assessing their effectiveness including the impact on children, families and communities.

Recognising Child Exploitation

Children who are experiencing exploitation can often be labelled by professionals as making “bad choices” or “taking risks”. However, children who are experiencing child exploitation have been groomed over a period of time. This targeted grooming often isolates children from family, schools and other protective factors. It can make them distrustful of professionals and scared to speak out.

The Children’s Society have produced a helpful explanation of the stages of recruitment which can be used with children and families and/ or by practitioners to aid understanding of a child’s situation. It can be found within the link below:

[Toolkits | CSE Police and Prevention](#)

CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION: STAGES OF RECRUITMENT

There are a number of different stages that people and gangs use when they are trying to exploit children.

There are 4 main recruitment stages when somebody is trying to exploit a child

Targeting Stage:

This is when a person or gang target a young person who is vulnerable, as this reduces their chances of getting caught.

Experience Stage:

This stage is where the person might try to get a child used to their lifestyle, or train them up in what they are doing.



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Hooked Stage:

This is stage where people make the child feel like they are a member of their gang, even though they are just exploiting the child for their own gain.

Trapped Stage:

The child feels dependant on the group, the relationship with the person or group exploiting them may start to become unpleasant, as they reveal their true intents or character.

Vulnerability Factors

Any child can be targeted and exploited. However, there is some evidence that certain factors place children at greater risk. The following vulnerabilities do not mean that a child or young person will be exploited, but they are factors that could increase the vulnerability that they could be exploited by someone.

NEIGHBOURHOODS: If the child or young person has been exposed to or has experienced violent crime, or lived in a deprived neighbourhood.

SCHOOLS: If the child or young person has been excluded from school and is not in education, training or employment, or is exposed to or has experienced violent crime.

PEERS: If the child or young person is exposed to other children and young people who are known to be exploited, or exposed to or experiencing peer on peer abuse.

HOME/FAMILY: If there is neglect/abuse, exposure to or experience of violence, parental substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse, poverty, lack of a positive relationship with a protective and nurturing adult, homelessness or insecure accommodation status

CHILD/INDIVIDUAL: If a child or young person is looked after, has learning disabilities, substance misuse issues, or mental health problems

Warning Indicators

There are a number of indicators listed in the following table that could alert professionals to a child or young person being criminally exploited. Practitioners should be aware of these warning indicators and if there are concerns should seek support from their line manager/ safeguarding lead and complete a risk factor matrix. If you believe the child should be open to children's social care please refer to the threshold of need and contact Childrens Advise and Duty Team on 01782 23-5100

- Arrested— especially for drug related offences.
- Frequent missing episodes including being found out of area
- Returned from missing episodes with injuries, or changes to their appearance or clothing.



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- Reports of being taken to parties, people's houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adults
- Unexplained absences from, or not engaged in school, college, training, or work.
- Found with large quantities of drugs or weapons.
- Made to conceal drugs within their own body.
- Unexplained amounts of money, mobile phones, credit, clothing, jewellery, new haircuts or other items and gifts.
- Multiple referrals for incidents in the same location
- Change in behaviour, i.e. more secretive, withdrawn, or isolated from peers, or not mixing with usual friends.
- Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive at home or school, including the use of sexualised language and language in relation to drug dealing and/or violence.
- Expressions around invincibility or not caring about what happens to them.
- Increased interest in making money.

Concerns Regarding Child Exploitation

It is everyone's responsibility to safeguard children from child exploitation. If you have concerns that a child is at risk, or experiencing, child exploitation then you will need to; speak to your manager or safeguarding lead and complete a risk factor matrix. It is important that you draw on information from other professionals in order to fully complete the RFM. This will provide you with necessary information to assess their risk. Key professionals with whom to discuss may include; Children's Services, Early Intervention Services, Education, Health and Police. Where appropriate, parents should also be consulted and remain informed of any concerns. The risk factor matrix can be found here <https://www.ssscb.org.uk/working-together-to-safeguard-children/child-exploitation/vamap/> and will support you in considering the extent of the risk, but it also includes a professional override that can be used if you feel that your concerns raise or lower the risk.

If a child is considered to be low risk of child exploitation, and you do not believe it reaches the threshold for a children's social care referral, then if consent has been given by the child and family, they are referred to the commissioned service which is currently catch 22. Catch 22 work with Missing children, CSE and CCE.

Youth Offending Service (YOS) Prevention Team also provide support, intervention and education for the child around CCE especially if linked with other offending.



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If a child is considered medium or high risk of child exploitation then they should be assessed to consider whether they require on-going intervention by Children's Services. Please contact Chad with regards to the concerns.

They will also be discussed at MACE and as the referrer you will be asked to attend to share your concerns.

The Role of The Multi Agency Child Exploitation Panel

The MACE panel meets fortnightly and discusses children who are at medium or high risk of child exploitation. However, this does not replace other statutory meetings such as Child Protection or Child in Need Meetings. MACE is not intended as a case management forum but meets to understand the risk that a child/ group of children is experiencing and to provide a multi-agency, problem solving approach to disrupt exploitation.

My Role in Tackling Child Exploitation

Children who are experiencing child exploitation have been groomed and their groomers are likely to have promoted a dependant relationship. Therefore, children experiencing exploitation may describe their actions as choices that they have made, but this is in the context of exploitation and should not be taken at face value.

It has been well documented that fear of violence and actual physical violence is used to ensure that children remain in the exploitative relationships. Therefore, children experiencing exploitation may also be scared and reluctant to talk to professionals. Despite this it is all of our responsibility to make sure that we are persistent with the child and ensure that they are safeguarded, supported and protected from exploitation.

Children who are at risk of, or experiencing, child exploitation who have a trusted adult with whom they can talk, are likely to have better outcomes. Therefore, listening (and believing) a child and investing in that relationship can make a significant difference to the child and family.

It is important that all professionals understand the vulnerability factors and the warning indicators discussed within this guidance. Identifying child exploitation safeguards children and creates better outcome for them, their family and communities.