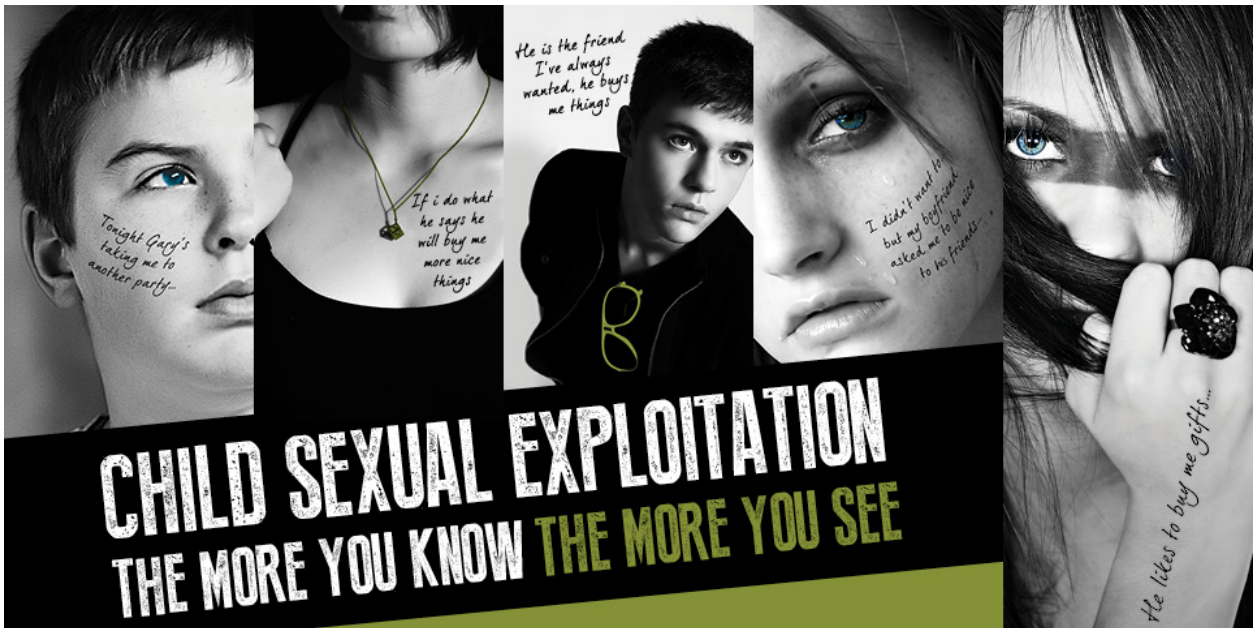


WEST LoTHIAN INTER-AGENCY GUIDANCE

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION



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Introduction

The sexual exploitation of children always requires a child protection response. This is reflected in the Edinburgh and Lothians Inter-Agency Child Protection Procedures (2015) and the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2014).

Child sexual exploitation is a distinct form of child abuse, which can affect both boys and girls. Children and young people affected are victims of abuse.

The issue of child sexual exploitation is receiving an increased level of political and public interest across the UK. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013) has been instrumental in changing our perceptions in how we tackle child sexual exploitation in Scotland. In November 2014, the Scottish Government published its National Action Plan to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation.

It is critical that all partner agencies responsible for the protection of children learn from these reviews, from research and best practice, and from what our children and young people tell us. We need to improve our knowledge and understanding of the issue and ensure that all staff across sectors and agencies recognise the indicators of child sexual exploitation and are confident in tackling it.

Early intervention and protection of children, together with disruption and prosecution of perpetrators are the key features of an effective approach.

This guidance is designed to enable practitioners to recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation and give them the confidence they need to confront it.

When developing a response to child sexual exploitation, public sector bodies have a general equality duty to consider the role of gender and other protected characteristics in order to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Referring to violence as 'gender-based' highlights the need to understand violence within the context of the way in which society is ordered; the relationships between men and women; the social, political and cultural environment within which they operate; and the code of conduct expected of them.

A gendered analysis lets us consider the way in which girls and boys may be more at risk from different forms of sexual exploitation. For example, boys and young men may be more at risk of online abuse, whereas girls and young women may be more at risk from an older 'boyfriend' or controlling adult. The impact of sexual exploitation on young men may be different because their abusers are mostly male. A gendered analysis of child sexual exploitation helps us understand which children may be more at risk, how abuse impacts differently on victims and how our detection and responses may need to vary accordingly. A gendered analysis also encourages us to take account of how wider societal expectations and gender roles contribute to the context which allows abuse to thrive.

By acknowledging these links, this guidance seeks to play its part in developing a culture where everyone feels safe, respected and equal in our communities and where attitudes that allow sexual exploitation to flourish are challenged.

The guidance applies to male and female children up to the age of 18 years, irrespective of whether they are living at home, with carers, in a residential setting or independently. All

references in this guidance to children or young people mean those under the age of 18, as defined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Purpose of guidance

This guidance is designed to assist practitioners in preventing child sexual exploitation, protecting children and young people who are at risk of abuse or are abused through sexual exploitation, and disrupting and prosecuting those who perpetrate this form of abuse.

The guidance is supported by West Lothian Public Protection Committee's CSE procedures and the Edinburgh and Lothians Child Protection Procedures. Everyone must take responsibility for protecting children from abuse and that means not only knowing your role, but also understanding the roles of other agencies and individuals.

This guidance is intended to support local agencies in applying Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) effectively in relation to child sexual exploitation. It should help local agencies to:

- identify those at risk of being sexually exploited;
- take action to protect and promote the well-being of particular children and young people who are being or are at risk of being sexually exploited;
- take action against those who are intent on abusing and exploiting children and young people in this way.

Sometimes the background and experiences of children and young people who are exploited sexually impact negatively on their behaviour, which may be challenging. The key principle for all practitioners is that children and young people who are sexually exploited are the **victims of abuse**. The responsibility for their sexual exploitation lies with the abuser. The focus of police investigations and of prosecutions should be on those who coerce, exploit and abuse children and young people.

What is child sexual exploitation?

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 Government 2016

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse, in which a young person is manipulated or forced into taking part in a sexual act. This could be as part of a seemingly consensual relationship or in return for attention, affection, money, drugs, alcohol or somewhere to stay. The young person may think that their abuser is their friend, or even their boyfriend or girlfriend, but they will put them into dangerous situations, forcing the young person to do things they do not want to do.

The abuser may be male or female; they may threaten the young person physically or verbally, or be violent towards them. They will control and manipulate them, and try to isolate them from friends and family.

Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology, without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet or on a mobile phone, without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child or young person will have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common. Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited choice, resulting from their social, economic and emotional vulnerabilities.

Who does it affect?

Young people from any background can be exploited for sex in this way. Boys and young men are abused, as well as girls and young women. The grooming and abuse can happen in person or online, and although most abusers are adults, some victims are exploited by their peers. There is often a misconception that only children from disadvantaged or chaotic backgrounds can be drawn into sexual exploitation because of their existing vulnerabilities. Whilst these children may be more at risk, abusers are very clever in the way they manipulate and take advantage of the children they abuse. Any child or young person can be taken in by their deception, no matter their background.

How does it happen?

There are numerous routes into sexual exploitation, many of which involve grooming. There is a growing understanding within agencies responsible for child protection that grooming plays an integral part in the sexual exploitation of children and young people. This is recognised within Section 1 of the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005, which makes it a criminal offence to groom a person under the age of 16.

Many young people are groomed by an abusing adult who befriends the young person and makes them feel special by buying gifts or giving them attention. In most cases, the abuser will have power of some kind over the young person. It may be that the abuser is older or more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or that they are in a position where they are able to control the young person. There are some situations that can make young people more vulnerable to exploitation. Young people who are having difficulties at home, who go missing regularly, or who have experienced care may be particularly vulnerable.

Barnardo's has identified four **distinct models of abuse**, which practitioners may find helpful in understanding how perpetrators operate:

- **Inappropriate relationships:** this usually involves just one abuser who has power – physical, emotional or financial; or control over a young person. The young person may believe they have a genuine friendship or loving relationship with their abuser;
- **Boyfriend:** the abuser grooms the victim by striking up a normal relationship with them, giving them gifts and meeting them. A seemingly consensual sexual relationship develops, but later becomes abusive;
- **Organised exploitation and trafficking:** victims are trafficked through criminal networks, often between towns and cities, and can be forced or coerced into sex with multiple people. They may also be used to recruit new victims. This serious organised activity can involve the buying and selling of young people;

➤ **Technology:** young people's access to the internet makes traditional protective factors more difficult to apply. Protection messages for children and young people on the safe use of technology should include reference to raising awareness on child sexual exploitation and the appropriate response if they are concerned about their own safety or that of others. All young people may be at risk, whether due to a lack of confidence and experience in the online world, or high exposure due to increased accessibility.

Where does the risk come from?

Content – children and young people accessing pornographic material or being exposed to unwelcome sexual content.

Contact – being targeted by a stranger who develops a relationship with the intent of sexually exploiting the child/young person.

Conduct – children and young people creating, uploading or seeking out sexually inappropriate material.

Combinations – content, contact and conduct are intrinsically linked and young people can be exposed to different risks at different times.

Policy and legislative context

The Edinburgh and Lothians Inter-Agency Child Protection Procedures (2015) reflect our collective commitment to inter-agency collaboration and joint responsibility, and will be followed by all services in dealing with child protection concerns. For children, young people and their families, these procedures set out what can be expected from the professionals who have a responsibility for their protection.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is an international agreement, which protects the human rights of children under the age of 18. It forms the basis for GIRFEC, and the Scottish Government has committed to embed this agreement into all of its work with children and young people. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is clear within articles 35 and 36 that the state shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including 'prostitution', trafficking for sexual purposes and involvement in the production of child sexual abuse images.

Getting it right for every child provides a framework for all those who work with children and young people. The framework puts children and young people at the heart of service provision, as well as encouraging inter-agency working to ensure children and young people have the best start in life. GIRFEC is being worked into policy and practice. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014 embeds the core principles of GIRFEC in legislation.

The 'Lead Professional' is the person within the network of practitioners supporting the child and family who will make sure that all agencies act as a team and the help they offer fits together seamlessly to provide appropriate support. The 'Named Person' acts as a main point of contact for children and families to help them access universal services.

Vulnerable Children and Young People: Sexual Exploitation through Prostitution (2003) highlights that sexual exploitation is abuse and should be treated accordingly. Any criminal justice action must focus on investigating and prosecuting those who are involved in abusing children. This includes not only those who sexually abuse children directly, but also those who coerce and are

involved in the sexual exploitation of children in any way.

The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2014) provides a framework for all those working with children and young people to enable all organisations, services, agencies, practitioners and individuals to protect children and promote their wellbeing. The guidance sets out key responsibilities and information regarding strategic planning of services and their delivery. Guidance on specific issues, such as child trafficking is also provided for practitioners working at local level. The guidance has specific sections, which should be read alongside this document.

The National Risk Framework to support the Assessment of Children and Young People (2012) is a national risk assessment toolkit for child protection to support practitioners in identifying and acting on child protection risks for children and young people. Based on the GIRFEC approach to well-being and on the National Practice Model, it sets out a process for assessing risk to enable practitioners to consider key factors in the child or young person's life. The factors include risk as well as resilience and protective issues. It can be used alongside any other assessment frameworks specifically designed to assess particular circumstances where children or young people may be at risk of harm or abuse at home or in the community.

Identification and Prevention

Child sexual exploitation is a hidden form of abuse and is not visible until we recognise some of the signs and begin to enquire further. Therefore staff should apply professional curiosity when there is any indication of a child or young person being exploited.

Children and young people who are the victims of sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited. This makes it hard to identify victims. It is essential that we are able to recognise the signs and provide an appropriate response or intervention.

Children at risk of sexual exploitation may find themselves in high risk situations, isolated from protective, nurturing adults. Of particular relevance is the impact of those who may have groomed and conditioned children in order to coerce and abuse them. Children may be under pressure, intimidated, afraid or dependent on those who have exploited them, especially where substance misuse is a factor. Children may therefore reject offers of help and support, and we need to work creatively with them to address this.

There are a number of signs that a child may be being groomed for sexual exploitation. Practitioners who have regular contact with children and young people have a key role in understanding the connections between these behaviours and the wider context of the young person's life.

Practitioners should exercise professional curiosity. If it is believed that there is any indication, however slight, that a child could be at risk, action should be taken and information should be shared.

Child sexual exploitation is widespread and can affect all young people, but there are certain vulnerabilities, which can make a young person more susceptible to exploitation.

Vulnerability Factors include:

- **A disrupted family life:** young people who get drawn into child sexual exploitation often have a chaotic or disrupted home life. This can include parental breakdown or separation and being looked after by the local authority;
- **A history of abuse and disadvantage:** this can include emotional, physical and sexual abuse as well as neglect;
- **Problematic parenting:** an evaluation of several child sexual exploitation services in the UK found that there was a huge deficit in the parenting capabilities of many parents of children who were exploited sexually. Fathers were often absent. Some young people move into adult life prematurely;
- **Disengagement from education:** school plays an important safeguarding role in a young person's life; if they disengage from education, they can be left vulnerable. They may become disconnected from their peers and lose sense of a regular routine;
- **Learning difficulties:** a young person with learning disabilities may be less able to recognise the risky situations they may be getting themselves into and they may be more susceptible to exploitation;
- **Going missing:** many young people have a history of going missing from home or care for various reasons. This leaves them susceptible to exploitative adults who may offer them a place to stay or somewhere to pass the time;
- **Poor health and well-being:** low self-esteem in adolescence may leave some young people vulnerable to older people who compliment them and make them feel good about themselves by offering them gifts and giving them attention;
- **Drug and alcohol misuse:** alcohol and drugs are frequently used in the grooming process. For young people who already have problems with substance misuse, this makes them easier targets for exploitation. They are more likely to be lured into risky situations by the incentive of drink or drugs. In the evaluation of several child sexual exploitation services in the UK, substance misuse was a key factor in approximately three quarters of cases.

The impact of drink and drugs

Underage drinking (offences related to sale and supply) and drug taking are criminal activities. Substance misuse can mask the exploitation and criminality and make adults less sympathetic to the young person's situation.

Perpetrators may lure young people in with the promise of drugs, alcohol, parties and a good time. Young people may come to rely on drink and drugs to cope with the sexual exploitation they are experiencing.

Know the signs – risk indicators

There are a number of indicators to which practitioners should be alert as signs of child sexual exploitation. These indicators should trigger concerns and a proportionate response.

Risk indicators can include, but are not restricted to:

- **Staying out late and going missing:** does the young person regularly return home late? Is the young person missing overnight or for longer with no known home base?
- **Multiple callers:** does the young person regularly receive calls or messages from unknown

adults or young people who may be slightly older than them? Perpetrators of child sexual exploitation routinely use mobile phones as a means of controlling their victims;

- **Excessive use of a mobile phone or multiple mobile phones:** does the young person use their mobile phone more than would otherwise be expected of them? Are they secretive about who they are contacting and why? Young people are often given more than one mobile phone so that perpetrators can contact them;
- **Expressions of despair:** is the young person displaying signs of self-harm, overdosing, eating disorders, challenging behaviour or aggression?
- **Disclosure of abuse followed by withdrawal of allegation:** has the young person disclosed being abused and then retracted the allegation? This can indicate fear and intimidation;
- **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies:** has the young person contracted an STI or disclosed an unwanted pregnancy? These are often signs of unsafe sex and could indicate sex with multiple people;
- **Peers involved in sexual exploitation:** has the young person disclosed peers being sexually exploited? It is very common for peers to be the gateway into child sexual exploitation;
- **Drug and alcohol misuse:** has the young person started experimenting with drugs or alcohol? Drink and drugs are a central part of the grooming process. Young people may start to normalise the sexual behaviour that follows, even if they don't like it at first, because it leads to the good feelings of drugs and alcohol;
- **Use of mobile devices that cause concern:** does the young person spend more time than usual online? Are they secretive? Are they accessing inappropriate websites? The internet is a very effective means for perpetrators to connect with, groom and exploit young people. They can have almost unlimited access to young people via social networking and gaming sites, whilst grooming them for face to face exploitation;
- **Lack of positive relationship with a protective or nurturing adult:** does the young person have a strong adult figure in their life to whom they can turn? If they do not have a nurturing adult in their lives, they may look elsewhere;
- **Truancy or exclusion:** has the young person been excluded from school or been truanting persistently? Young people who are not in school during the day may be more at risk of sexual exploitation. Living independently and failing to respond to attempts by a worker to keep in touch: has the young person started withdrawing from their social and formal networks? Perpetrators will try and separate young people from their networks of support. They may try and convince the young person that their family and friends do not care about them;
- **High number of sexual partners:** is the young person displaying signs of sexual behaviour with multiple partners? This may be a sign of exploitation; the young person may be being coerced or forced into having sex with others;
- **Unexplained amounts of money or other material items:** does the young person turn up with expensive clothing or other items? Children who appear to have new clothes, jewellery, mobile phones or money that cannot plausibly be accounted for may be being groomed;

Other **significant** risk indicators to look out for include:

- presence of an older boyfriend or relationship with a controlling adult;
- abuse by boyfriend or controlling adult;
- entering and leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults;
- frequenting areas known for street prostitution;
- physical injury or symptoms of abuse;
- children under 13 years asking for sexual health advice;
- being taken to flats, houses or hotels and engaging in sexual activity.

Lack of disclosure and response

Disclosure of sexual exploitation is always difficult for children. The sophisticated process of grooming and priming executed by abusing adults and the exchange element of this form of abuse can act as additional barriers, which increase denial and make disclosure especially difficult.

Children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation can display disruptive and difficult behaviour and often fail to recognise that they are being exploited. This presents practitioners with many challenges in providing the support they need to escape exploitation. The grooming process may be so effective that young people believe they are in a real relationship over which they have control.

Young people are unlikely to disclose information to people they do not trust. If they feel as though an adult does not understand or that they will judge them, they are unlikely to disclose what is happening.

Challenges practitioners face in identifying and responding to sexual exploitation as a child protection issue:

- Age of the child or young person – responses can vary if the child is 16 years and over. Nevertheless, there should be a robust inter-agency response;
- Gender of the child or young person – responses can vary if the child is male. Practitioners should guard against making assumptions based on gender;
- Sexuality of the child or young person – responses can vary if workers are focused on the possibility of young people exploring their sexuality;
- Difficult behaviour of the child or young person;
- Scale of child sexual exploitation – some disclosures may seem implausible to workers;
- Children may be involved in other criminal activity;
- Lack of awareness or training on the part of the practitioner;
- Lack of understanding of the child protection response to be triggered;
- Lack of disclosure – children do not see it as abusive or dangerous and trivialise or blame themselves;
- Fear of what follows disclosure;
- Continuity in support to young people aged 16 years.

16 and 17 year olds

It is important to remember that just because a young person is over the age of 16 – irrespective of whether they are subject to a statutory order – it does not mean they cannot be victims of child sexual exploitation. A young person who has been subject to a complex pattern of life experiences, including sophisticated grooming, does not stop needing support and protection when they reach the age of 16. They remain a vulnerable young person with ongoing needs. A

person's vulnerability will depend on their circumstances and environment, and each case must be judged on its merits.

Practitioners should take account of child protection and adult protection procedures.

The age of the individual concerned should not be a barrier to an Inter-agency Referral Discussion taking place. A response proportionate to the level of risk is the priority.

What prevents young people disclosing sexual exploitation?

Young people rarely self-disclose directly, sometimes because they do not recognise the exploitation. Other inhibiting factors are set out below:

- Loss of supply of alcohol or drugs;
- Loss of "boyfriend" – love and attention;
- Fear of retribution from other young people;
- Fear of domestic abuse from "boyfriend";
- Shame – family, friends and workers finding out;
- Fear of letting everybody down;
- Fear of being labelled a prostitute or gay;
- Fear of not being believed;
- Fear of separation from family or change of placement;
- Threat of secure accommodation;
- Fear of loss of control following disclosure;
- The perceived benefits of the exploitation appear to outweigh risks;
- Fear that the situation will get worse.

All young people have a right to be: listened to; respected; valued and feel valued. These are key principles for practitioners when it comes to reading the signs of child sexual exploitation.

Key messages from recent significant case reviews (SCR)

Several SCRs have been undertaken over recent years in response to cases of child sexual exploitation. The SCRs are intended to draw out what went wrong and find out what lessons can be learned for individual agencies, so that similar things do not happen again.

The SCR in Rochdale uncovered several themes:

- Services not listening to young people;
- Young people felt that they had given sufficient information for the agencies to protect them, but nothing changed and the abuse carried on;
- Parents were told by the police that their daughter was associating with the wrong crowd and was making choices about relationships and sexual partners;
- Perpetrators had control over every element of their lives;
- Threats and the use of violence – towards young people and their families;
- Threats towards families as one of the main reasons for not telling parents and coming forward to services;
- Young people were told they would not be believed;

- Young people with no hope of escape;
- Even when the young people cooperated with services, nothing changed and the abuse continued.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham identified:

- Leadership, in particular from elected members, senior police and council officers is critical;
- Inappropriate negative attitudes of agencies to challenging behaviour of looked after and accommodated children and young people, and/or young people presenting difficult behaviour in local communities;
- Need for trauma-informed awareness;
- Taxi services linked to organised crime;
- Resources, volume of demand and pressures on staff;
- Rarity of prosecutions;
- Traditional statutory approaches versus the effectiveness of community and third sector resources, which may connect more effectively with local communities;
- The line between a reluctance to believe and active collusion;
- Inaction justified by fear of accusations of racism; a simplistic understanding of a complex dynamic;
- Need for effective: awareness-raising; strategic planning; resource allocation; professional supervision; engagement with children, young people and their families; engagement with local communities; criminal investigations.

Roles and responsibilities

As all child sexual exploitation will warrant a child protection referral, individual and agency roles and responsibilities must align with those set out in the Edinburgh and Lothians Inter- Agency Child Protection Procedures (2015).

West Lothian Public Protection Committee (PPC)

The PPC is an inter-agency strategic partnership responsible for the design, development, publication, distribution, dissemination, implementation and evaluation of child protection policy and practice across the public, private and third sectors in the area. The PPC's role is to provide individual and collective leadership and direction for the management of child protection services.

Monitoring

The PPC will ensure that monitoring arrangements are in place. The number of strategy meetings held under this protocol, number of children involved and any deficits in service provision will be recorded and monitored by the PPC in order to evidence local prevalence and need, and to ensure adequate service provision.

Member agencies are encouraged to collect information to monitor prevalence, activity

patterns and effectiveness of interventions for children who are sexually exploited.

Understanding prevalence

Child sexual exploitation is a hidden issue. There is no central system for recording cases, meaning that it can be difficult to get an accurate picture of the number of young people at risk. However, without systems in place to monitor local levels of risk, young people who are experiencing exploitation are all the more likely to go unnoticed and unprotected.

Accessing specialist support

Child sexual exploitation is a child protection concern and support will always be available from the core agencies, alongside any other specialist supports, where available. It is vital that the right specialist support is available to help young people exit and recover from exploitative situations, and that there are clearly determined pathways from universal to specialist services.

Raising awareness

Professionals in universal services have a critical role in identifying and addressing sexual exploitation. Frontline staff in services for children and young people should be able to recognise the warning signs and risk factors of child sexual exploitation and know how to respond using child protection procedures. The Public Protection Committee has a role in engaging with the public to raise awareness of child protection issues, including child sexual exploitation, providing advice on what the public should do if they have concerns.

Police Scotland

The priority for Police Scotland is the safety and wellbeing of the victim. A child centred approach should always be adopted during efforts to secure evidence to prosecute offenders. All intervention and disruption opportunities for perpetrators should be fully explored and implemented. This role should be carried out in accordance with the principles of multi-agency cooperation to protect children.

The role of the police is central to tackling child sexual exploitation. Victims often display behaviours deemed anti-social and sometimes criminal, such as underage drinking, drug taking, underage sex, truancy and other risky behaviours. The police therefore are often on the frontline and are best placed to pick up on these indicators. A balance must be struck between dealing with anti-social or criminal behaviours and being alert to signs of child sexual exploitation.

The single force gives increased opportunities for national training on the issue, stronger multi-agency relationships and action to ensure there is always a culture of support for victims.

Set out below is a checklist of core features for effective local policing of child sexual exploitation.

- Clear responsibility for the issue;
- Officers with specialist knowledge;
- Force-wide training; strong, local multi-agency links; strong cross-border police links;
- System to identify child sexual exploitation on local police data bases;
- Culture of support for young victims.

Responsibility

Police action on child sexual exploitation needs strong leadership to ensure that it is not undermined by staff changes or resource pressures. This lead should be clear to police and external agencies.

Specialist Officers

Dealing with young people who may have been sexually exploited presents specific challenges, even for experienced officers. Having officers with specialist knowledge can help young people in giving evidence, enhances inter-agency working and assists in developing a picture of local abuse.

Force-wide training

Both frontline officers and senior officers should have training. Training senior staff promotes a force-wide understanding of the importance of tackling this abuse. Any training should be updated as knowledge of the issue continues to develop.

Cross-border links

Policing needs to respond to cross-border movement of abusers and victims. Systems for working with neighbouring police forces reinforce individual efforts to tackle child sexual exploitation.

Culture of support

Young victims of sexual exploitation and young people who are highly vulnerable deserve to be treated sensitively by the police. Furthermore, they need confidence in the police before they will engage with efforts to protect them or prosecute the abusers.

Social Work Services

Social work services have a statutory general duty for the promotion of the welfare of the person. Children's social work services have a specific responsibility for:

- supporting families to maintain children at home and in their community where appropriate;
- investigating allegations of child abuse;
- where necessary, providing appropriate care placements for children.

The Council has a statutory duty under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act, 2011 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and to enquire into the circumstances of children and young people who may require compulsory measures of supervision, who may have been abused or neglected or be at risk of abuse or neglect, and take all measures to protect them from further harm.

All social work staff have responsibilities to respond to the needs of children who may be vulnerable or at risk of abuse. This includes those working in criminal justice, substance misuse workers, hospital social workers and child and adolescent mental health workers. All staff must work in close collaboration with their colleagues in children and families services to protect children who may be at risk of harm or abuse. All staff across social work services have a duty to contribute to the assessment of risk to all children.

All referrals received suggesting a child may be in need of protection will be dealt with through an Inter-Agency Referral Discussion, as a matter of the highest priority, on the same working day.

All referrals suggesting that a child is in need of compulsory measures of supervision, social work staff will make enquiries and give the Children's Reporter all relevant information about the child.

Criminal justice social work staff have a statutory responsibility with the police for supervising and managing risk from adults who have committed offences against children.

Corporate Parenting

There are difficult boundaries and balances around the roles and responsibilities of corporate parents with regard to the sexual activities of children in their care. However, there is often a danger that behaviour, which could be part of child sexual exploitation is sometimes not checked and challenged quickly enough in residential houses or foster placements.

Vulnerabilities of accommodated children

Looked after children and young people, especially those who are accommodated are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Perpetrators will often target residential homes because they know the young people there will have existing vulnerabilities, which have led to them being accommodated. Residential workers must be able to recognize the signs of sexual exploitation and have a good understanding of what to look for, such as going missing, disengagement from education, appearing with unexplained gifts, and changes in temperament or mood. Staff should take positive action to clarify and record any concerns, and minimise the child's involvement in child sexual exploitation. If suspicions are confirmed, the following steps should be taken:

- **ALWAYS** treat as a child protection response;
- View the child as a victim;
- Ensure that all relevant information is recorded concerning adults and identifying information, e.g. appearance, street names, car registration details, telephone activity, the child's patterns of going missing, together with decisions and action;
- Make every effort to dissuade the child from leaving by talking to them, involving them in alternative activities, and ensuring they have the resources to attend those activities, including escorting where necessary;
- Ensure the child is aware of the legal issues involved, for example that those exploiting them are committing a range of offences;
- Monitor telephone calls, text messages and other correspondence, clarifying the possibility of police downloading information from young person's mobile phone (this is a measure Police Scotland may implement to evidence an enquiry). Reasons for intercepting letters and calls (for example, they relate to a dangerous adult) should be included and agreed as part of the care plan;
- Monitor callers to the home or adults collecting children by car. This may involve turning visitors away, or passing information directly to the police; monitor any suspicious activity in the vicinity of the home and inform the police;
- Where efforts fail, and the child leaves, staff need to decide whether to follow them and continue to encourage them to return;
- If they will not return, staff should inform the local police that the child is missing and pass on all relevant information;
- Liaise with any outreach agencies, so they can look out for a child who has gone missing;
- Offer sensitive and welcoming responses to children returning home;

- Identify or be able to describe the adults who are spending time with the young person.

Education Services

Any concerns that a child is at risk of sexual exploitation should be raised with the relevant designated member of staff, who should share that information with social work, in line with the school's child protection procedures.

Many victims of child sexual exploitation are disengaged from education and may be either permanently or temporarily excluded from school, not attending school and not in employment.

Staff in schools, further education colleges and other education establishments are well placed to recognise and refer children who are exposed to the risk of sexual exploitation. Disengagement from education is a strong indicator of involvement in child sexual exploitation. Staff are also in a position to support children to reduce vulnerability and risk of sexual exploitation and to support abused children to recover.

- School staff should be alert and competent to identify and act upon concerns that a child is vulnerable to, at risk of, or experiencing abuse through child sexual exploitation. They should be familiar with vulnerability and risk factors and appropriate associated actions in relation to each level of risk;
- Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenthood studies (RSHPE) within curriculum for excellence provides a sound platform through which to explore ideas around healthy relationships and to provide children and young people with a sense of control about their bodies and selves. This also needs to include opportunities for children and young people to understand the very real risks involved in staying out late and going missing from school, home or care;
- Staff should be aware of the importance of sharing any concerns related to children and young people who go missing during the school day and reporting information that perpetrators may be targeting the school;
- Any concerns should be passed to the school's 'designated member' of staff for child protection. They should monitor information to identify when more than one child in the school or community may be being targeted for child sexual exploitation. These lead individuals should have or develop a level of expertise in relation to child sexual exploitation. They should be able to advise within their school or service on identifying and referring a child at risk and how their agency can contribute to risk reduction work and a protection plan;
- All schools and educational facilities should ensure that staff receive appropriate training to ensure they are competent to identify a child who may be vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and act accordingly.
- Concerns raised by other pupils should be taken seriously;
- Any information related to adults loitering outside the school or children being collected by strangers should be recorded and passed to the police.

Health Services

Any health professional with concerns that a child is at risk of, or is being abused through child sexual exploitation (based on vulnerability and risk factors set out in the sexual exploitation risk assessment framework) has an individual responsibility to share concerns with the on-call paediatrician for child protection, the NHS Lothian child protection advisor, police or social work, in line with child protection procedures. There should be no delay in sharing concerns.

Health professionals, and especially those working in sexual health clinics, are on the frontline when it comes to child sexual exploitation. Health provision is a universal service and staff may have opportunities to spot indicators that a child or young person is being abused in this way.

Sexual health workers are in a position to communicate with young people and encourage disclosure if they suspect sexual exploitation. Health professionals in sexual health clinics may not be viewed in the same way as other professionals in a young person's life. Young people may feel less likely to be judged because staff deal with sexual health issues on a daily basis. It is important therefore that they and other health professionals who come into contact with children and young people are able to recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation and can ask questions in a sensitive manner.

Health professionals are in a prime position to gather information and build trusting relationships with young people. These can result in positive outcomes in both meeting the needs of young people and identifying the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation.

Health professionals should be familiar with vulnerability and risk factors and appropriate associated actions in relation to each level of risk.

Signs to look out for in young people include:

- pregnancy, termination or miscarriage;
- pregnancy in very young girls;
- young people asking for contraception;
- young people engaging in sexual activity at a young age;
- young people disclosing rape and sexual assault;
- young people presenting multiple times at Accident and Emergency, particularly for sexual or physical assault;
- sexually transmitted infections.

Relevant information **MUST** always be shared when there is suspicion of child sexual exploitation or any form of abuse.

The National Guidance: Under-age Sexual Activity: Meeting the Needs of Children and Young People and Identifying Child Protection Concerns (2010) provides direction.

“The needs of each child and young person are the primary consideration when professionals decide upon the relevant and proportionate sharing of information... confidentiality does not prevent information sharing where there is the risk of significant harm to the young person or others.”

In addition, the Scottish Government Child Protection Guidance for Health Professionals 2013 states that:

“When it is recognised that a child or young person’s safety is compromised and/or that they are likely to experience significant harm, health care staff have a responsibility to follow local procedures for reporting and sharing these concerns”.

Other Services

Everyone has a responsibility to act if they suspect a child is being harmed or abused in any way. The role of staff in relation to children abused through child sexual exploitation is in the prevention, recognition and referral stages.

Key frontline workers include, shopping centre security, concierges, CCTV operatives and staff in pubs, clubs or hotels. Most sexual exploitation takes place in private. However, public places such as cafes, hotels, B&Bs, cars, parks or taxis can be used to meet, groom and abuse children.

All staff must be vigilant – from landlords to security staff, and from petrol station attendants to takeaway workers. People working in the night time economy are particularly well placed to notice whether exploitation is occurring in their area and pick up valuable information.

If concerns are raised, they should be progressed in accordance with the Edinburgh and Lothians Inter-Agency Child Protection Procedures.

Signs to look out for include, but are not limited to a young person:

- being taken into a hotel room by one or more adults who do not seem to be family members;
- being in a hotel room which is visited or requested by a number of additional adults;
- going by taxi to a hotel or other venue to meet a group of adults who do not seem to be family members;
- being out late with older adults who do not seem to be family members;
- being bought alcoholic drinks by adults although they are already intoxicated;
- being in the company of adults who are known or suspected of being involved in adult prostitution;
- being bought food or drinks by a much older adult whom they seem to see as a boyfriend/girlfriend;
- showing indications of sexual activity with one or more adult who is significantly older than the young person;

- showing indications of sexual activity when they are known or suspected to be under 16;
- being moved around for the purposes for sexual exploitation (trafficking).

Hotels, B&Bs and local authority tenancies can be central to the process of child sexual exploitation. Staff therefore must be aware of the signs and alert to groups of older men frequenting rooms with young people. The authorities should be contacted immediately if any illegal activity is suspected.

Housing staff may have important information regarding families or individual tenancies to contribute to a child protection investigation or assessment. They should be prepared to share this information and to attend case conferences, as required. Housing services often play a key role in the management of risk posed by dangerous offenders. Where the local authority does not provide the housing service, independent housing organisations and associations should play an active role in supporting and identifying vulnerable children.

Voluntary Sector and Community Groups

Many young people are reluctant to engage with statutory services and might find voluntary agencies more approachable sources of help. By working in partnership with statutory bodies, voluntary agencies are able to offer services that help young people understand the grooming process, and raise awareness of risks and the implications of risk taking behaviour.

There is a wide range of specialist and other voluntary and community agencies and groups (youth clubs, sport, drama groups, faith groups, etc.), which may be well placed to identify children who are at risk of, or are being exploited. Voluntary and community sector agencies often have a close relationship with their local communities and can develop trusting relationships and maintain a link to the children or young person if they disengage from statutory services. Outreach agencies are often the first point of contact for children in risky situations, and specialist voluntary agencies often have the opportunity to provide vital support to reduce the risk.

- Staff should be alert and competent to identify and act upon concerns that a child is vulnerable to, at risk of, or experiencing abuse through child sexual exploitation;
- Agencies and services should pass any information or concerns to the designated child protection officer. These lead individuals should have or develop a level of expertise in relation to child sexual exploitation. They should be able to advise their team or service on identifying and referring a child at risk and how their agency can contribute to risk reduction and a protection plan;
- Any concerns that a child is at risk of sexual exploitation should be raised with their designated lead for child protection, who should share their concerns in line with the agency's child protection procedures;
- All agencies should ensure that their child protection procedures include reference to the responsibilities outlined in this guidance;
- It is essential that voluntary agencies and community groups operate as multi-agency partners in order to provide children with access to the widest possible range of intervention and support services.

Missing from home or care

Children who go missing or run away regularly are at risk of becoming involved in sexual exploitation. Going missing may also be an indicator that sexual exploitation is occurring.

The entrapment of children and young people in sexual exploitation does not occur overnight. They may become more vulnerable if they are spending a lot of time away from home, from their care placement or from school because they are running away. Each time a young person is reported missing the police should assess their level of risk. If a young person goes missing regularly, there is a danger that professionals become complacent, believing the young person will return as usual or that they can somehow manage. This is when they are at greatest risk and we know that the people who exploit children in this way are all too aware of how the system works.

Running away or going missing should not be seen as normal teenage behaviour, it should not be assumed that they will be okay if they are 'streetwise' and will return when they are ready. Unhappy, lonely young people are flattered and seduced by the attention of adults who will appear to sympathise with their situation. In short, they become highly vulnerable to the well-rehearsed grooming techniques of abusing adults.

The Public Protection Committee will ensure that relevant agencies know what to ask a child or young person when they go missing, ensuring that the response and support are appropriate, sensitive and timely. Key questions are set out below:

- **Where have they been staying?** Have they been sleeping rough or staying with 'friends'? Perpetrators often offer accommodation to runaways as part of the grooming process;
- **In what locations have they been staying?** Internal trafficking of young people is an increasing problem. If a young person goes missing regularly and for several days at a time, they may have been taken to other towns or locations as part of the exploitation;
- **Who have they been with?** Those intending to exploit children sexually may specifically target and befriend young runaways by offering gifts and friendship. Other young people already involved in child sexual exploitation might be persuaded to draw in other vulnerable young people on the street;
- **Have they been drinking or taking drugs?** Substance misuse is a common facet of child sexual exploitation. Perpetrators may lure young runaways to 'parties' with the promise of drink and drugs to facilitate exploitation;
- **What problems led them to run away?** Finding the root cause is key to preventing the young person from going missing again.

What should all practitioners be doing?

Looking past the behaviours being displayed to find the root causes.

A case review in Torbay following an incident of child sexual exploitation noted that:
"Action that was taken was often focused on addressing the immediate presenting concerns, such as offending behaviour, drugs and alcohol misuse and sexual activity, rather than identifying and addressing the underlying reasons why the young persons were presenting as they were. Their behaviour was often justified or excused as 'their choice' and as 'adolescent behaviour', and was not considered to be a reaction to longer term deeper issues or current abusive relationships"

What can I do as a practitioner?

As a practitioner working with children and young people, you may have opportunities to identify issues early, so it is important to familiarise yourself with the signs that a child or young person is being exploited and to share this information with your colleagues or practitioners in other agencies.

Some of the steps you can take to help protect young people are set out below.

- Stay alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse and investigating these further;
- Ensuring you know the child protection lead in your work place and that you are aware of the procedure to follow if you have concerns about a young person;
- Thinking about ways that you might be able to support and help young people more effectively to share information if they are worried about their own or another young person's situation;
- **Identifying opportunities to educate** young people and their parents about healthy relationships and about sexual exploitation.

The four As

Barnardo's has developed a model of practice called the 4 As for adults working with children. Following this model may encourage children and young people to disclose any abuse or exploitation they are experiencing. This is more likely to result in the appropriate support being provided.

- **Access:** services for children and young people should be provided in a safe, attractive environment; they should support young people on their own terms and most of all build trust.
- **Attention:** give young people time and positive attention, focusing on what matters to them. Often, victims of child sexual exploitation will have been drawn to their exploiter through a need for love and attention that they may not have been receiving elsewhere.
- **Assertive Outreach:** make consistent and persistent efforts to contact the young person through a range of methods. Victims of child sexual exploitation are often targeted because of their existing vulnerabilities. These children and young people may be seen as hard to reach or 'troubled'. In addition, many victims will be reluctant to disclose or may not even realise they are a victim. It is therefore all the more important to persevere and not give up if the child or young person is not receptive to help initially.
- **Advocacy:** support young people to get the services they need. It is very important to advocate on behalf of the child and not stigmatise them for their involvement in sexual exploitation. Sign-posting young people to the appropriate services will enable them to get the support they need. Additional stigmatisation or criminalisation may push them further into exploitation.

Working with children and young people

Working with children and young people for whom sexual exploitation is an issue requires a holistic approach and the investment of time and resources in long-term intervention. An important aspect of the work is maintaining contact and being available to children and young people until they reach a point where they are ready to think about their situation and accept support. The process and effort spent by a worker on relationship building are important factors in their reaching this stage. When these windows of opportunity present, they should be capitalised on fully, providing the right support at the time it is required by the young person. This can only be achieved through the cooperation and joint working of an established network of appropriate agencies.

Establishing a positive trusting relationship with vulnerable children and young people takes time. A relationship needs to be developed, which offers something tangible to the child or young person. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that workers are not providing friendship, but a professional support and protection service. Change needs to happen at a pace that is set by the young person; provide real choices; and promote a sense of positive control for the young person. Working with children and young people who are exposed to risk and experiences of sexual exploitation requires a non-judgmental approach.

- Intervention should begin with relationship building, and assessment of risks and vulnerabilities with the child or young person;
- Honest discussions and inclusion in assessment and planning processes will assist the child or young person to feel included, and will create a sense of ownership and connection with the plan;
- The plan should address each of the identified areas of risk. Workers need to be realistic about expectations and to understand that this is long-term, intensive work, where progress will not always be consistent.

If the child is in a residential home, staff should be asked to take positive action to clarify and record any concerns and minimise the child's involvement in sexual exploitation.

If the child is in foster care, the social worker and family placement team worker should meet with the carer to decide which of the above steps could reasonably be taken as part of the multi-agency plan.

The child's behaviour and attitude may be extremely challenging, and carers and staff will require ongoing support, advice and training to allow them to respond appropriately and effectively. These needs must be considered and resources identified, either by the manager of the residential unit, or the fostering link worker. Social Care Emergency Team (SCET) should be made aware of how to respond out-of-hours.

Young people aged 18 years and over

In cases where a young person is entitled to receive services under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014 is assessed as at medium or high risk of abuse through sexual exploitation, the actions above should be followed.

The pathway planning should specifically identify their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, and address the factors known to impede successful recovery, e.g. homelessness, poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities and lack of supportive social contacts.

Information, awareness raising, and where necessary, work to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation should be included in the pathway planning process. Risk should be assessed and addressed on an ongoing basis. For children and young people under the age of 18, liaison between social services and the Police Public Protection Unit is also required.

A young person who has been subject to negative life experiences, including sophisticated grooming, which have brought them to a point where they are at risk of, or are abused through, sexual exploitation will continue to need support and protection when they reach the age of 18 years. They remain vulnerable, with ongoing needs. A person's vulnerability will depend on their circumstances and environment, and each case must be judged on its merits. Consideration should always be given to the need for Adult Protection interventions.

Individuals with a learning disability, cognitive impairment and/or mental health problems are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. Reasons for this include:

- society's attitudes and assumptions, which often devalue individuals with disabilities;
- prejudice and misconceptions regarding people with learning disabilities (e.g. belief that they are insensitive to pain);
- communication difficulties may make it difficult for individuals to be heard or understood;
- failure by professionals to recognise the signs of exploitation and the misidentification of behaviour as symptoms of illness or impairment (e.g. self harm);
- the individual may be isolated and prone to grooming via the internet and social media sites;
- an impaired capacity to avoid or resist abuse;
- a tendency to show affection easily to strangers and acquaintances;
- the individual may have learned to be compliant, by having to fit in around others whose approval is essential for well-being or survival;
- lack of sexual knowledge and understanding about sexuality;
- the individual may have no other frame of reference and may not recognise that they are being exploited.

Information sharing

The key to good multi-agency working is information sharing. This is central to any multi-agency meeting. Successful exchange of information supports both the identification of victims and the development of appropriate responses.

A Practitioner Guide to Information Sharing, Confidentiality and Consent to Support Children and Young People's Wellbeing 2014 assists staff in promoting, supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing of all children, young people and their families.

Guidance from the Information Commissioner's office on this matter states that:

Where a practitioner believes, in their personal opinion, that there is risk to a child or young person that may lead to harm, proportionate sharing of information is unlikely to constitute a breach of the (Data Protection) Act in such circumstances.

Barnardo's Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF)

The risk assessment tool SERAF was developed by Barnardo's to enable the identification of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. It was developed in response to issues raised by practitioners. It is an additional tool, specific to child sexual exploitation, to be used alongside the National Risk Assessment Framework.

The development of the framework, which includes four categories of risk, is intended to inform

appropriate responses in relation to protecting children and young people. Providing an appropriate response requires a protective network for children and young people. Effectiveness depends heavily on a multi-agency response. This response is delivered most effectively in the structure offered by local protocols. Different responses are required in relation to each level of risk. Each of the four categories of risk has an associated action.

Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF)

Category of Risk	Indicators of risk	Description	Associated actions
Category 1 Not at risk	No risk indicators but may have one or more vulnerabilities present.	A child or young person who may be 'in need' but who is not currently at risk of being groomed for CSE.	Educate to stay safe. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 2 Mild risk	Multiple vulnerabilities. One or two risk indicators may also be present.	A vulnerable child or young person who may be at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Consider multi-agency meeting to share information and agree a plan to address risk and/or need. Work on risk awareness and staying safe should be undertaken with this child/young person. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 3 Moderate risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators present.	A child or young person who may be targeted for opportunistic abuse through exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc.	Convene multi-agency meeting under local CSE procedures to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree safety plan. At least one review meeting to be convened. Work should be undertaken with this child/ young person around risk reduction and keeping safe.
Category 4 Significant risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators. One or more significant risk indicators also likely.	Indication that a child or young person is at significant risk of or is already being sexually exploited. Sexual exploitation is likely to be habitual, often self-denied & coercion/control is implicit.	Convene multi-agency meeting under local CSE procedures to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree safety plan, including regular review meetings. Protection plan should include long-term intensive direct work with the child or young person.
Moderate or Significant risk	As above	Young person aged 16 years or above.	Where a young person is aged 16 years or over and not subject to statutory measures, the associated action in relation to Moderate and Significant risk: sexual exploitation should be addressed as an issue in relation to this young person through liaison between Social Work and Police Public Protection Unit to address the young person's protection.

Category 1 – Not at risk of sexual exploitation

Children and young people in Category 1 do not have indicators of risk in relation to sexual exploitation. The majority of children and young people will not be at risk. However, children and young people in contact with support agencies, such as social work are likely to have some vulnerability.

Children and young people assessed as being in this category need access to basic information, which will enable them to develop an awareness of the risks that can lead to a situation in which they may be exposed to sexual exploitation. They need access to information that will equip them to avoid risky situations and to protect themselves. Social workers are well placed to deliver such information as part of their interaction with the children and young people with whom they are in contact.

The school Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE) curriculum provides a sound platform through which to deliver basic information, to explore ideas around 'healthy' sexual relationships and to provide children and young people with a sense of control about their bodies and selves. This also needs to include opportunities for children and young people to understand the very real risks involved in staying out late and going missing from school, home or care.

Health professionals, such as school health nurses, practitioners in young persons' advisory/sexual health clinics and GPs have a role in promoting the young person's health, which includes identification of immediate and ongoing health needs (including sexual health and emotional needs). As a universal service, health is well placed to offer support, counselling and information to enable young people to understand the risks and develop strategies for staying safe.

Category 2 – Mild Risk

A child identified as at mild risk is likely to have multiple vulnerabilities, such as problematic parenting and childhood experiences. One or two risk indicators may also be present. These vulnerabilities increase the risk of children and young people being groomed for sexual exploitation. Early intervention and preventative work are needed to protect children and young people who have multiple vulnerabilities.

A practitioner or agency view that a child is at mild risk (Category 2) may be inaccurate, and sharing information about that child may reveal them to be at moderate or significant risk – and in need of protection. Interventions to interrupt abuse and support children to recover a healthy lifestyle are more likely to be successful if a child who is at risk can be identified and concerns shared within a multi-agency support network as early as possible.

Consideration should be given to convening a multi-agency meeting to ensure all information is shared and to agree a child's plan to address risk and need. The plan should include a programme of direct work with the child to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and to provide tools for the child to self protect. The programme should raise risk awareness, provide information on keeping safe and address specific identified issues that pose a threat to safety. It should be delivered by a practitioner who has a good working relationship with the child or young person. It should include opportunities for the child to understand the very real risks involved in activities such as staying out late and going missing from school, home or care.

Risk must be reassessed regularly as part of the planned work undertaken with a child or young person. Any significant change in circumstances that might increase vulnerability, or any incidence of behaviour associated with risk should result in an immediate reassessment of risk using the sexual exploitation risk assessment.

Category 3 – Moderate Risk

A child or young person identified as at moderate risk is likely to have multiple vulnerabilities present as well as one or more indicators of risk. Children and young people at moderate risk may be groomed or targeted for opportunistic abuse and/or exploitative relationships by abusing adults.

It is in this category that any missing information can have the greatest effect on the accuracy of assessment and information sharing. A multi-agency strategy meeting for children at risk of abuse should always be convened in relation to child or young person assessed as at moderate risk. Multi-agency strategy meetings enable the effective exchange of information between representatives of key agencies. The meetings should include the individual who has identified the risk or raised concerns in relation to the child or young person and representatives from social work, police, health, education, placements and any specialist child sexual exploitation services. Multi-agency strategy meetings should respond to the needs of children and young people for whom risk of sexual exploitation is indicated but not known, as well as responding to cases where evidence of sexual exploitation is available.

The multi-agency strategy meeting should agree a protection plan and action to include direct work with the individual child or young person. The focus of any safeguarding plan and of direct interventions should be the reduction of specific risks that are causing concern. In particular, where staying out late and/or going missing from school, home or care are identified, these should be addressed as a priority. The safeguarding implications of staying out late and going missing should not be underestimated by any agencies. The length of intervention required will be different in each case and is reliant on the specific circumstances of the child or young person and the nature of the risks that are being addressed. Individual children and young people may respond to intervention in different ways and this will also impact on the length of that intervention.

A change of circumstances, such as a placement change, may support the reduction of risks in a relatively short time. Conversely, a placement change could escalate risk. At least one review meeting by the multi-agency strategy group should be conducted to ensure that actions have been taken, and to assess progress, consider the impact of interventions, share further information and reassess the level of risk. Risks should be monitored carefully and reviewed over time in relation to children and young people for whom there have been concerns.

Risk should be reassessed regularly as part of the planned work undertaken with a child or young person. Any significant change in circumstances that might increase vulnerability, or any incidence of behaviour associated with risk should result in an immediate reassessment of risk using the sexual exploitation risk assessment.

The approach to working with children and young people at significant risk or who have been abused set out below can also be applied to children and young people in Category 3.

Category 4 – Significant Risk

This category is where a child is assessed as being at significant risk of sexual exploitation or where they are already being abused. This is likely to include cases where abuse is habitual, denied, and where coercion and control are strong factors.

A multi-agency strategy meeting for children at risk should always be convened in relation to a child or young person assessed as at significant risk. As with Category 3, multi-agency strategy meetings should ensure the effective exchange of information between representatives of key agencies. The meetings should include the individual who has identified the risk or raised concerns in relation to the child or young person, and representatives of social work, police,

health, education, placements and any specialist child sexual exploitation services. Participants in the meeting should agree a protection plan and action to include long-term intensive direct work with the individual child or young person.

Review meetings should be conducted regularly to ensure that agreed actions are implemented, and to assess the progress and impact of agreed interventions. Risk should be monitored closely and reassessed regularly, as part of the risk management plan.

A coordinated and synchronised approach by all agencies maximises the effectiveness of interventions and the impact of planned actions. All agencies should agree and adopt a consistent approach, which does not shy away from or collude with risky behaviour. All agencies and professionals need to be aware of the intensive and long-term nature of the approach required. The presence of multiple vulnerabilities and risks in the lives of children and young people at significant risk often means that they are difficult to engage and that positive outcomes take time.

The use of a fit-for-purpose sexual exploitation risk assessment framework should allow for the identification of vulnerability and risk in relation to the majority of children and young people at an earlier stage. Over time, routine assessment, early identification and appropriate interventions should reduce the number of children and young people who are exposed to significant risk of sexual exploitation.

In all cases where CSE or risk of CSE is identified refer to the West Lothian CSE procedure.

Further Reading

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South East Wales Executive Group for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (2003) *South East Wales Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults*

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The Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012) 'Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation In Gangs and Groups – Interim report – I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world'

Welsh Assembly Government (2011) 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary guidance to Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under The Children Act 2004'

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION RISK ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (SERAF)

Child sexual exploitation is a hidden form of abuse and is not visible until we recognise some of the signs and begin to enquire further. Staff should be professionally curious when there is any indication of a child or young person being exploited.

Children and young people who are the victims of sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited. This makes it very hard to identify victims. It is therefore essential that we are able to recognise the signs and provide an appropriate response or intervention.

Children at risk of sexual exploitation may find themselves in high risk situations, isolated from protective, nurturing adults. Of particular relevance is the impact of those who may have groomed and conditioned children in order to coerce and abuse them. Children may be under very strong pressure, intimidated, afraid or dependent on those who have exploited them, especially where substance misuse is a factor. Children may therefore reject offers of help and support, and we need to work creatively with them to address this.

There are a number of signs that a child may be being groomed for sexual exploitation. Practitioners who have regular contact with children and young people have a key role in understanding the connections between these behaviours and the wider context of the young person's life.

Vulnerabilities include:

- **A disrupted family life:** young people who get drawn into child sexual exploitation often have a chaotic or disrupted home life. This can include parental breakdown or separation and being looked after by the local authority;
- **A history of abuse and disadvantage:** this can include emotional, physical and sexual abuse as well as neglect;
- **Problematic parenting:** an evaluation of several child sexual exploitation services in the UK found that there was a huge deficit in the parenting capabilities of many parents of children who were exploited sexually. Fathers were often absent. Some young people move into adult life prematurely;
- **Disengagement from education:** school plays an important safeguarding role in a young person's life; if they disengage from education, they can be left vulnerable. They may become disconnected from their peers and lose sense of a regular routine;
- **Learning difficulties:** a young person with learning disabilities may be less able to recognise the risky situations they may be getting themselves into and they may be more susceptible to exploitation;
- **Going missing:** many young people have a history of going missing from home or care for various reasons. This leaves them susceptible to exploitative adults who may offer them a place to stay or somewhere to pass the time;
- **Poor health and well-being:** low self-esteem in adolescence may leave some young people vulnerable to older people who compliment them and make them feel good about themselves by offering them gifts and giving them attention;
- **Drug and alcohol misuse:** alcohol and drugs are frequently used in the grooming process. For young people who already have problems with substance misuse, this makes them easier targets for exploitation. They are more likely to be lured into risky situations by the incentive of drink or drugs.

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CSE Checklist

The following list is not exhaustive but highlights indicators of risk and vulnerabilities associated with sexual exploitation. Information known about any of these issues should be shared when a referral is made. Significant risk indicators are highlighted.

Health	Present
Physical injuries such as bruising suggestive of either physical or sexual assault	Yes / No / Possibly
A sexually transmitted infection, particularly if it is recurring or there are multiple STIs	Yes / No / Possibly
Pregnancy / abortion / miscarriage	Yes / No / Possibly
Sexually risky behaviour	Yes / No / Possibly
Self-harming	Yes / No / Possibly
Thoughts of or attempted suicide	Yes / No / Possibly
Eating disorder	Yes / No / Possibly
Change in appearance including losing weight, putting on weight,	Yes / No / Possibly
Evidence of misuse of drugs/alcohol, including associated health problems	Yes / No / Possibly
Learning disability	Yes / No / Possibly
Children under 13 years asking for sexual health advice	Yes / No / Possibly
Numerous sexual partners	Yes / No / Possibly
Behaviour	
Sexually offending behaviour	Yes / No / Possibly
Truancy/disengagement with education, or considerable change in performance at school	Yes / No / Possibly
Volatile behaviour exhibiting extreme array of mood swings or abusive language which is unusual for the child	Yes / No / Possibly
Aggressive or violent, including to pets/animals	Yes / No / Possibly
Becoming angry, hostile if any suspicions or concerns about their activities are expressed	Yes / No / Possibly
Physical aggression towards parents, siblings, pets, teachers or peers	Yes / No / Possibly
Detachment from age-appropriate activities	Yes / No / Possibly
Secretive behaviour	Yes / No / Possibly
Known to be sexually active	Yes / No / Possibly
Low self-image, low self-esteem	Yes / No / Possibly
Young offender or anti-social behaviour	Yes / No / Possibly
Sexualised language	Yes / No / Possibly
Hostility in relationship with parents / carers and other family members	Yes / No / Possibly
Getting involved in petty crime such as shoplifting or stealing	Yes / No / Possibly
Disclosure of abuse and then retraction	Yes / No / Possibly
Grooming	
Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults	Yes / No / Possibly
Inappropriate use of the Internet and forming relationships, particularly with adults, via the Internet. Note adults may pose as peers to entrap the child.	Yes / No / Possibly
Mobile phone being answered by unknown adult	Yes / No / Possibly
Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding	Yes / No / Possibly
Having keys to premises other than those they should have	Yes / No / Possibly

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Possession of money with no plausible explanation	Yes / No / Possibly
Acquisition of expensive or sexual clothes, mobile phone or other possession without plausible explanation	Yes / No / Possibly
Having new mobile phone, several mobile phones, especially Blackberry or I phone – (because messages cannot be traced).	Yes / No / Possibly
Always have credit on their mobile phones, despite having no access to money or having no credit so phone can only be used for incoming calls.	Yes / No / Possibly
Excessive use of mobile phones including receiving calls late at night	Yes / No / Possibly
Reports that the child / young person has been seen in places known to be used for sexual exploitation or prostitution	Yes / No / Possibly
Unexplained relationships with older adults	Yes / No / Possibly
Being taken to flats, houses or hotels and engaging in sexual activity	Yes / No / Possibly
Associating with other young people who are known to be sexually exploited, including in school	Yes / No / Possibly
Sexual relationship with a significantly older person	Yes / No / Possibly
Phone call, texts or letters from unknown adults	Yes / No / Possibly
Recruiting others into sexual exploitation	Yes / No / Possibly
Seen at public toilets known for cottaging or adult venues (pubs and clubs)	Yes / No / Possibly
Adults loitering outside the child/young person's usual place of residence or school	Yes / No / Possibly
Leaving home/care setting in clothing unusual for the individual child (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older young people)	Yes / No / Possibly
Wearing an unusual amount of clothing (due to hiding more sexualised clothing underneath or hiding their body)	Yes / No / Possibly
Persistently missing, staying out overnight or returning late with no plausible explanation	Yes / No / Possibly
Returning after having been missing, looking well cared for in spite of having no known home base	Yes / No / Possibly
Returning after having been missing looking dirty, dishevelled, tired, hungry, thirsty	Yes / No / Possibly
Missing for long periods, with no known home base and/or homeless	Yes / No / Possibly
Possession of excessive numbers of condoms	Yes / No / Possibly
New contacts with people outside of town	Yes / No / Possibly
Looked after children	
Living in residential care	Yes / No / Possibly
Frequently missing from placement	Yes / No / Possibly
Multiple Placement breakdown	Yes / No / Possibly
Going missing with other children	Yes / No / Possibly
Family and Social	
A family member or known associate working in the adult sex trade	Yes / No / Possibly
Unsure about their sexual orientation, or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their family	Yes / No / Possibly
History of physical, sexual and / or emotional abuse; neglect	Yes / No / Possibly
Witness to or involved in domestic violence at home	Yes / No / Possibly
Parental difficulties; drug and alcohol misuse, mental health problems, physical or learning difficulty. Being a young carer.	Yes / No / Possibly

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Pattern of street homelessness or sofa surfing	Yes / No / Possibly
Living in hostel or B & B accommodation	Yes / No / Possibly
Conflict at home around boundaries, including staying out late.	Yes / No / Possibly
Recent bereavement or loss	Yes / No / Possibly
Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships	Yes / No / Possibly
Lacking friends their own age	Yes / No / Possibly
Lack of positive relationship with a protective or nurturing adult	Yes / No / Possibly
Living in a gang neighbourhood	Yes / No / Possibly
Presence of an older boyfriend or relationship with a controlling adult	Yes / No / Possibly
Abuse by boyfriend or controlling adult	Yes / No / Possibly
E-safety	
Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through internet or social networking sites	Yes / No / Possibly
Concern that inappropriate images of a young person are being circulated via the internet/phones	Yes / No / Possibly
Exchanging inappropriate images for cash, credits or other items	Yes / No / Possibly
Receiving gifts through the post from someone the young person does not know	Yes / No / Possibly
Concern that a young person is being coerced to provide sexually explicit images	Yes / No / Possibly
Concern that a young person is being bribed by someone because of their inappropriate online activity	Yes / No / Possibly
Concern that a young person is selling sexual services via the Internet	Yes / No / Possibly
Accessing dating agencies via mobile phones (for example - 2 flirt line)	Yes / No / Possibly
Unexplained increased mobile phone / gaming credits	Yes / No / Possibly

What prevents young people disclosing sexual exploitation?

Young people rarely self-disclose directly, sometimes because they **do not recognise** the exploitation. Other inhibiting factors may be:

- Loss of supply of alcohol or drugs;
- Loss of "boyfriend" – love and attention;
- Fear of retribution from other young people;
- Fear of domestic abuse from "boyfriend";
- Shame – family, friends and workers finding out;
- Fear of letting everybody down;
- Fear of being labelled a prostitute or gay;
- Fear of not being believed;
- Fear of separation from family or change of placement;
- Threat of secure accommodation;
- Fear of loss of control following disclosure;
- The perceived benefits of the exploitation appear to outweigh risks;
- Fear that the situation will get worse.

16 and 17 year olds

It is important to remember that just because a young person is over the age of 16 – irrespective of whether they are subject to a statutory order – it does not mean they cannot be victims of child sexual exploitation. A young person who has been subject to a complex pattern of life experiences, including sophisticated grooming, does not stop needing support and protection

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when they reach the age of 16. They remain a vulnerable young person with ongoing needs. A person's vulnerability will depend on their circumstances and environment, and each case must be judged on its merits.

Vulnerabilities of accommodated children

Looked after children and young people, especially those who are accommodated are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Perpetrators will often target residential homes because they know the young people there will have existing problems and vulnerabilities, which have led to them being accommodated. Residential workers must be able to recognise the signs and have a good understanding of what to look for, such as going missing, disengagement from education, appearing with unexplained gifts, and changes in temperament or mood. Staff should take positive action to clarify and record any concerns, and minimise the child's involvement in child sexual exploitation. If suspicions are confirmed, the following steps should be taken:

Barnardo's has developed a model of practice called the 4 As for adults working with children.

Following this model may encourage children and young people to disclose any abuse or exploitation they are experiencing. This is more likely to result in the appropriate support being provided.

Access: services for children and young people should be provided in a safe, attractive environment; they should support young people on their own terms and most of all build trust.

Attention: give young people time and positive attention, focusing on what matters to them. Often, victims of child sexual exploitation will have been drawn to their exploiter through a need for love and attention that they may not have been receiving elsewhere.

Assertive Outreach: make consistent and persistent efforts to contact the young person through a range of methods. Victims of child sexual exploitation are often targeted because of their existing vulnerabilities. These children and young people may be seen as hard to reach or 'troubled'. In addition, many victims will be reluctant to disclose or may not even realise they are a victim. It is therefore all the more important to persevere and not give up if the child or young person is not receptive to help initially.

Advocacy: support young people to get the services they need. It is very important to advocate on behalf of the child and not stigmatise them for their involvement in sexual exploitation. Sign-posting young people to the appropriate services will enable them to get the support they need. Additional stigmatisation or criminalisation may push them further into exploitation.

Barnardo's Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF)

The risk assessment tool SERAF has been developed by Barnardo's to enable the identification of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. It was developed in response to issues raised by practitioners. It is an additional tool, specific to child sexual exploitation, to be used alongside the National Risk Assessment Toolkit.

The development of a framework, which includes four categories of risk, is intended to inform appropriate responses in relation to protecting children and young people. Providing an appropriate response requires a protective network for children and young people. Effectiveness depends heavily on a multi-agency response. This response is delivered most effectively in the structure offered by local protocols. Different responses are required in relation to each level of risk. Each of the four categories of risk has an associated action.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION RISK ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (SERAF)

Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF)

Category of Risk	Indicators of risk	Description	Associated actions
Category 1 Not at risk	No risk indicators but may have one or more vulnerabilities present.	A child or young person who may be 'in need' but who is not currently at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Educate to stay safe. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 2 Mild risk	Multiple vulnerabilities. One or two risk indicators may also be present.	A vulnerable child or young person who may be at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Consider multi-agency meeting to share information and agree a plan to address risk and/or need. Work on risk awareness and staying safe should be undertaken with this child/ young person. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 3 Moderate risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators present.	A child or young person who may be targeted for opportunistic abuse through exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc.	Refer to one of the core agencies for IRD. IRD participants should consider the need for an Initial Strategy meeting (West Lothian CSE procedures) to ensure effective multi-agency information sharing, planning and reviewing. Work should be undertaken with this child/young person around risk reduction and keeping safe.
Category 4 Significant risk	Multiple vulnerabilities & risk indicators. One or more significant risk indicator also likely.	Indication that a child or young person is at significant risk of or is already being sexually exploited. Sexual exploitation is likely to be habitual, often self-denied and coercion/control is implicit.	Refer to one of the core agencies for IRD. IRD participants should consider the need for an Initial Strategy meeting (West Lothian CSE procedures) to ensure effective multi-agency information sharing, planning and reviewing. Protection plan should include long-term intensive direct work with the child or young person.
16 - 18 Moderate or Significant risk	As above	Young person aged 16 years or over.	Refer to one of the core agencies for IRD. IRD participants should consider the need for an Initial Strategy meeting (West Lothian CSE procedures) to ensure effective multi-agency information sharing, planning and reviewing.

Category 1 – Not at risk of sexual exploitation

Children and young people in Category 1 do not have indicators of risk in relation to sexual exploitation. The majority of children and young people will not be at risk. However, children and young people in contact with support agencies, such as social work are likely to have some vulnerability.

Children and young people assessed as being in this category need access to basic information, which will enable them to develop an awareness of the risks that can lead to a situation in which they may be exposed to sexual exploitation. The information should equip them to avoid risky situations and to protect themselves. Social workers, teachers and residential care staff are well placed to deliver such information as part of their interaction with the children and young people with whom they are in contact.

Health professionals, such as school nurses, practitioners in young persons' advisory/sexual health clinics and GPs have a role in promoting the young person's health, which includes identification of immediate and ongoing health needs (including sexual health and emotional needs). As a universal service, health is well placed to offer support, counselling and information to enable young people to understand the risks and develop strategies for staying safe.

Category 2 – Mild Risk

A child identified as at mild risk is likely to have multiple vulnerabilities, such as problematic parenting and childhood experiences. One or two risk indicators may also be present. These vulnerabilities increase the risk of children and young people being groomed for sexual exploitation. Early intervention and preventative work are needed to protect children and young people who have multiple vulnerabilities.

A practitioner or agency view that a child is at mild risk (Category 2) may be inaccurate, and sharing information about that child may reveal them to be at moderate or significant risk – and in need of protection. Interventions to interrupt abuse and support children to recover are more likely to be successful if a child who is at risk can be identified and concerns shared within a multi-agency support network as early as possible.

Consideration should be given to convening a multi-agency meeting to ensure all information is shared and to agree a child's plan to address risk and need. The plan should include a programme of direct work with the child to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and to provide tools for the child to protect themselves. The programme should raise risk awareness, provide information on keeping safe and address specific identified issues that pose a threat to safety. It should be delivered by a practitioner who has a good working relationship with the child or young person. It should include opportunities for the child to understand the very real risks involved in activities such as staying out late and going missing from school, home or care.

Risk must be reassessed regularly as part of the planned work undertaken with a child or young person. Any significant change in circumstances that might increase vulnerability, or any incidence of behaviour associated with risk should result in an immediate reassessment of risk using the sexual exploitation risk assessment.

Category 3 – Moderate Risk

A child or young person identified as at moderate risk is likely to have multiple vulnerabilities present as well as one or more indicators of risk. Children and young people at moderate risk may be groomed or targeted for opportunistic abuse and/or exploitative relationships by abusing adults.

It is in this category that any missing information can have the greatest effect on the accuracy of

assessment and information sharing. An IRD should always be initiated for children at risk of abuse and consideration given to arranging an initial strategy meeting. Multi-agency strategy meetings enable the effective exchange of information between representatives of key agencies. The meetings should include the individual who has identified the risk or raised concerns in relation to the child or young person and representatives from social work, police, health, education, placements and any specialist child sexual exploitation services. Multi-agency strategy meetings should respond to the needs of children and young people for whom risk of sexual exploitation is indicated but not known, as well as responding to cases where evidence of sexual exploitation is available.

The initial strategy meeting should identify those who are at risk of being sexually exploited by sharing information and assessing risks;

- To address the risks associated with victims, perpetrators and locations by proactive problem solving;
- To work collaboratively to ensure the safety and welfare of children and young people who are being or are at risk of being sexually exploited;
- To take effective action against those intent on abusing and exploiting children and young people in this way;
- To carry out risk assessment;
- To develop a shared picture of intelligence on all threats;
- To grade responses to the risks identified;
- To provide early intervention to reduce the harm posed to children and young people;
- To investigate, prosecute and disrupt perpetrators;
- To adopt a collective watching brief to determine further interventions required;
- Promote positive physical and emotional health and wellbeing;
- Ensure relevant and timely access to appropriate health services.

A change of circumstances, such as a placement change, may support the reduction of risks in a relatively short time. Conversely, a placement change could escalate risk. At least one review meeting by the strategy group should be conducted to ensure that actions have been taken, and to assess progress, consider the impact of interventions, share further information and reassess the level of risk. Risks should be monitored carefully and reviewed over time in relation to children and young people for whom there have been concerns.

Risk should be reassessed regularly as part of the planned work undertaken with a child or young person. Any significant change in circumstances that might increase vulnerability, or any incidence of behaviour associated with risk should result in an immediate reassessment of risk using the sexual exploitation risk assessment.

The approach to working with children and young people at significant risk or who have been abused set out below can also be applied to children and young people in Category 3.

Category 4 – Significant Risk

This category is where a child is assessed as being at significant risk of sexual exploitation or where they are already being abused. This is likely to include cases where abuse is habitual, denied, and where coercion and control are strong factors.

An IRD should always be initiated for children at risk of abuse and an initial strategy meeting should always be convened in relation to a child or young person assessed as at significant risk of CSE. As with Category 3, multi-agency strategy meetings should ensure the effective exchange of information between representatives of key agencies. The meetings should include the individual who has identified the risk or raised concerns in relation to the child or young person, and representatives of social work, police, health, education, placements and any specialist child sexual exploitation services. Participants in the meeting should agree a protection plan and action to include long-term intensive direct work with the individual child or young person.

Review meetings should be conducted regularly to ensure that agreed actions are implemented, and to assess the progress and impact of agreed interventions. Risk should be monitored closely and reassessed regularly, as part of the risk management plan.

A coordinated and synchronised approach by all agencies maximises the effectiveness of interventions and the impact of planned actions. All agencies should agree and adopt a consistent approach, which does not shy away from or collude with risky behaviour. All agencies and professionals need to be aware of the intensive and long-term nature of the approach required. The presence of multiple vulnerabilities and risks in the lives of children and young people often means that they are difficult to engage and that positive outcomes take time.