

ORGANISED/LARGE SCALE CHILD EXPLOITATION PROCEDURE



Contents

Introduction	2
1. What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?	2
2. What is Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)?	3
3. Who does Exploitation affect?	3
4. Identification	3
5. Procedure	3
6. Purpose of Strategy Meeting	4
7. Roles and Responsibilities	5
8. Outcome of Initial Strategy Meeting.....	5
9. Exploitation Enquiry	5
10. The Strategic Lead	6
11. Information Sharing.....	6
12. End of Enquiry.....	6
Appendix 1	7
Agenda for Initial Strategy Meeting.....	7
Agenda for Review Strategy Meeting.....	7
Appendix 2 Minute of Initial Strategy Meeting Template	8
Appendix 3 Review Exploitation Strategy Meeting Minute Template	10

Introduction

1. What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?

[National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 updated 2023](#) defines Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) as **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 excuse or mitigate the abusive nature of the act.**

**A CHILD IS A PERSON UNDER THE AGE OF 18
EXPLOITATION IS ABUSE AND A CHILD PROTECTION MATTER**

Like other forms of sexual abuse, CSE:

- Is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse;
- Can involve coercion and/or enticement-based methods of compliance;
- Can still be abuse even if it is claimed the child consented or assented – where the age of the child means they cannot legally give consent or the circumstances mean that agreement is not freely given.

The key factor that distinguishes cases of CSE from other forms of sexual abuse is the additional requirement for some form of exchange; the fact that the child and/or someone else receives something in return for the sexual activity:

- Where the gain is on the part of the child, this can take the form of tangible or intangible rewards (for example: money, drugs, alcohol, status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection). Fear of what might happen if they do not comply can also be a significant influencing factor; in such situations the 'gain' for the child could be prevention of something negative, for example a child who engages in sexual activity in order to avoid harm to other friends or family.
- Where the gain is solely on the part of the perpetrator/facilitator, it must be something more than sexual gratification to fall within the sub-category of CSE. This could be money, other financial advantage (reduced cost drugs/alcohol or discharge of a debt for example), status or power.

Sexual exploitation can take many forms from the seemingly consensual relationship where sex is exchanged for attention, affection, accommodation or gifts to serious organised crime and child trafficking. What defines exploitation is an imbalance of power within the relationship. The abuser always holds some kind of power over the victim, increasing the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops. The abuse does not always have to be physical and can be perpetrated through the use of technology.

Child sexual exploitation can take many different forms including:

- Exploitation by family members, including being "sold for sex";
- Sexually exploitative relationships with older adults;
- Organised crime
- Sexually exploitative relationships with peers (including in 'gang' settings);
- Sexual exploitation through technology including grooming through social media and the taking and circulation of sexually explicit images of the child

2. What is Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)?

CCE is a cause of significant harm and should trigger child protection processes and consideration of relevant preventative action. Child criminal exploitation takes a variety of different forms. It can include children being forced to work in cannabis factories, being coerced into moving drugs or money across the country, forced to shoplift or pickpocket, or forced to threaten other young people. Any child being forced or coerced to commit crime must be seen as a victim of exploitation.

CCE is often unrecognised and this can mean children are more likely to be prosecuted for offending behaviour, rather than being recognised as victims of exploitation. Children may fear arrest and prosecution. They may be drawn in to CCE through other children.

3. Who does Exploitation affect?

Any child under the age of 18 can be exploited. While younger children can be exploited, this form of abuse is most frequently documented amongst those of post-primary age, with the average age at which concerns are first identified being 12-15 years of age.

Children of any sex, sexual orientation, colour, ethnicity, ability/disability, religion can be exploited. Exploitation can, and does, affect children from all walks of life, with no obvious pre-identified vulnerabilities. No child is immune from this form of abuse.

There are, however, particular experiences that can heighten vulnerability. These include:

- A history of abuse, neglect and/or disadvantage;
- Being looked after, or formerly looked after;
- Disrupted family life, including family breakdown, domestic abuse and/or parenting difficulties;
- Disengagement from education and isolation from other support mechanisms;
- Going missing from home or care environments;
- Drug or alcohol misuse;
- Poverty or homelessness;
- Poor health and wellbeing, social isolation, bullying or low self-esteem;
- Having a disability.

4. Identification

Early identification of exploitation is critical to the implementation of effective and timely interventions. All agencies and the wider community should be aware of the key indicators of potential sexual exploitation. (Further information can be found in the CPC's [CHILD EXPLOITATION GUIDANCE](#))

Careful consideration should be given to whether relationships which are presented as consensual by children actually are, or whether exploitation is taking place. Professionals should be alert to the ways in which perpetrators can operate, especially where there is a large age-gap between the individuals involved.

5. Procedure

- 5.1 Any concern that a child is at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation or has suffered sexual or criminal exploitation should be referred to one of the core agencies (Social Work, Police, Health)
- 5.2 [Child Protection Procedures](#) must be followed

- 5.3 In addition to the usual IRD decision making, participants **must** consider a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) if this has not already been done by a First Responder, for a decision to be made about whether the young person has been trafficked (it is important to remember that UK nationals can also be the victims of trafficking. A trafficking victim **does not** have to cross international borders. They can be moved from one place to another within the UK for the purpose of exploitation). See Section 8 of the [CPC & APC Human Trafficking Procedure](#)
- 5.4 Where there are a number of children identified as victims of the same perpetrator(s), **in addition** to individual CPPMs or CPMs, consideration should be given to holding an Exploitation Strategy meeting to identify links between victims, links between perpetrators and other potential victims and plan how victims will be supported by a multi-agency team throughout a large-scale investigation.
- 5.5 An Initial Strategy Meeting will be arranged and chaired by Police Scotland (Detective Inspector or above) within 28 days of the IRD.
- 5.6 The following professionals **will** attend the meeting:

Group Manager, Children and Families
 Child Protection Officer, Education Services (if the young person attends school)
 Consultant Paediatrician for Child Protection/NHS Child Protection Advisor
 Manager, Housing Services
 Detective Sergeant, CAPU
 Group Manager Justice Services

A record of the meeting will be taken by Public Protection Admin. Assistant

- 5.7 Consideration should be given to inviting any of the following professionals where their service's involvement is known with either the children or the alleged perpetrator(s):

Manager of voluntary agency
 Manager of sexual health service
 Senior Solicitor, Licensing Section, West Lothian Council
 Group Manager responsible for West Lothian Children's Houses
 Group Manager responsible for C&F Support Services
 Clinical Nurse Manager for School Nursing
 Manager of out of authority residential school or establishment
 Psychiatrist/Psychologist/CAMHS
 Group Manager Mental Health
 Social Work Managers from other local authorities
 Police personnel from other divisions
 Lead Officer for Child and/or Adult Protection
 Head Teacher or DMS from relevant school(s)
 Group Manager Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Team
 Any other manager as appropriate

6. Purpose of Strategy Meeting

- Identify those who are being or are at risk of being exploited by sharing information and assessing risks;
- Consider whether certain locations are problematic and consider how risks can be addressed by proactive problem solving;

- To work collaboratively to ensure the safety and welfare of children who are being or are at risk of being exploited;
- To take effective action against those intent on abusing and exploiting children in this way;
- To develop a shared picture of intelligence on all threats;
- To investigate, prosecute and disrupt perpetrators;
- Ensure relevant and timely access to appropriate health services/supports.
- Ensure that a referral to the NRM has been made where appropriate.
- Ensure that appropriate referrals have been made to ASP if a vulnerable adult is involved (e.g. as a victim of “cuckooing” or exploitation)

Individual risks and needs will be addressed in the CP or Child's Plan and involve the child/young person and their family.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

The Chair will ensure:

- All members are offered equity with regard to opportunities to contribute to the meeting;
- The efficient administration of the meeting;
- The information shared is accurately recorded and disseminated;
- That the Chief Social Work Officer and the Chair of the CPC is informed via the Lead Officer for Child Protection
- Scrutinise minutes of previous strategy meetings to ensure that previously gathered intelligence is considered.

Participants in the Strategy Meeting will ensure that they:

- Prepare a report for the Strategy Meeting detailing: risks; vulnerabilities; known associates; family background; attendance at school; episodes of missing from home, care or school; health information re STIs, terminations; intelligence (e.g. concerns from other pupils; “hotspots”; what is known of the perpetrator(s); patterns of perpetrator behaviour; car number plates; links between victims and perpetrators;)
- Attend meetings as required;
- Contribute to information sharing which enables the meetings to fulfill their purpose;
- Disseminate appropriate levels of information shared at the meetings to enable further integrated working with other frontline partners;
- Contribute to the actions agreed during the meetings and provide timely reports on progress and outcomes;
- Identify additional resources if required;
- Represent and act as a communication link with their organisation.

8. Outcome of Initial Strategy Meeting

- No further strategy meetings required; (an individual's needs will be addressed by a multi-agency CP or Child's Plan)
- Exploitation Enquiry.

9. Exploitation Enquiry

If an Exploitation Enquiry is initiated the Chair of the Initial Strategy Meeting should:

- Consider minutes of any previous strategy meetings to identify any patterns of behavior by perpetrators; “hot spots” in the community; links between victims or perpetrators previously identified;
- Specify the terms of reference for the enquiry/investigation;
- Identify the strategic lead (Police Officer) in the investigation;

- Agree a communications strategy including the handling of political and media issues, and communication as necessary with the Care Inspectorate;
- Ensure that records are kept safely and securely stored and a high level of confidentiality is maintained at all times;
- Hold regular strategic meetings and reviews, which must be recorded, to consider progress, including the effectiveness of the joint working, the need for additional resources and next steps.

10. The Strategic Lead

- Will bring together a team of people with the necessary training, expertise and objectivity to manage and conduct the criminal investigation on a day to day basis plus a multi-agency team to support the investigation and the victims and their families. NB: Line managers or colleagues of any person implicated in the investigation must not be involved and the involvement of any person from a work place under investigation must be considered with particular care;
- Decide the terms of reference and accountability for the investigating team, including the parameters and timescales of their enquiries/investigation;
- Ensure that appropriate resources are deployed to the investigation including access to legal and other specialist advice, resources and information;
- Ensure that appropriate resources are available to meet the needs of the children and families or adult survivors, including any specific health issues arising from the abuse;
- Ensure the members of the multi-agency team are themselves supported by their agencies and that issues of staff safety are addressed;
- Ensure that suitable accommodation and administrative support are available for the investigation;
- Liaise as necessary with the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service at an early stage before arranging services for a child in need of counseling or therapeutic help so that the help can be given in a way which is consistent with the conduct of the criminal investigation;
- Identify how young people and their families are to be involved/informed;
- Report back to Review Strategy meetings.

11. Information Sharing

There is nothing in Scottish, UK or European Law that prevents practitioners from sharing personal information, and in some cases sensitive personal information, where they are worried or concerned about a child's safety.

12. End of Enquiry

At the conclusion of the enquiry/investigation, the Chair of the Strategy Meeting will:

Evaluate the investigation, identify the lessons learned and prepare an overview report for the Child Protection Committee, highlighting any practices, procedures or policies which may need further attention and require either multi-agency or single agency action plans.

Ensure that the minutes of the meetings are an accurate reflection of discussion and contain any intelligence that may be useful in future Exploitation enquiries.

Appendix 1

Agenda for Initial Strategy Meeting

1. Introductions and Apologies
2. Information sharing
3. Consider each child – links, issues in common, ensure that a CPPM or CPM has been arranged;
4. Consider each alleged perpetrator – patterns of behavior, access to children/young people, links, issues in common
5. Any immediate actions required
6. Decision – a) No further strategy meeting required or b) Exploitation Enquiry;
7. Is a communication strategy required?
8. If an Exploitation Enquiry is agreed - identification of a Strategic Lead plus multi-agency group of professionals (with the authority to dedicate or direct resources as required) to advise and support.
9. Date of review meeting (if required).

Agenda for Review Strategy Meeting

1. Introductions and Apologies
2. Progress of Exploitation Enquiry (Consider whether additional victims, perpetrators or locations have been identified; whether the multi-agency team is still required; whether additional/different supports are required)
3. Decision – a) No further strategy meeting required or b) date for next review;
4. Is a communications strategy required (if one is not already in place)?
5. Date of review meeting (if required).

Date of Birth				
Gender				
Ethnic Origin				
Home Address				
Current Address				
Involved professionals				

Are any other adults potentially involved? (Consider siblings, relatives, friends, associates)	YES/NO
Details	

Summary of discussion & decision making (Consider known facts, intelligence from police, community, education, agency sources; risky locations or properties; contextual safeguarding, relationships/links between children, between children & perpetrators, between perpetrators; disruption of perpetrator activity)

Immediate Action	Responsibility	Timescale

Decision	
No further strategy meeting required	Yes/No
Exploitation Enquiry	Yes/No
Is a communication strategy required?	Yes/No

Strategic Lead and Multi-agency Team (if required)

Name	Designation	Agency
	Lead:	

Chair	
Minute Taker	
Date of Review Meeting (if required)	

