



Leeds Safeguarding  
Children Partnership



# Child Exploitation Risk Identification Tool for Partner Agencies

## Practice Guidance

### **Children's Services contacts:**

Duty and Advice Team Tel: 0113 3760336

Child Exploitation Hub Tel: 0113 3789630

### **For specialist advice, information and support:**

CCE – Youth Justice Service : [Leeds.Yos.Admin@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Leeds.Yos.Admin@leeds.gov.uk)

CSE – Basis Tel: 0113 2430036 [www.basisyorkshire.org.uk/youngpeople](http://www.basisyorkshire.org.uk/youngpeople)

CSE parent support - PACE: [www.paceuk.info](http://www.paceuk.info)

CSE parent and sibling support – The SAFE project tel: 0113 3784216

## What is the Child Exploitation Risk Identification Tool?

This is a tool that you can use to help you decide whether a child or young person may be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE) or more than one form of child exploitation (CE).

This tool will help you to make an initial judgement about the level of risk of exploitation for the child or young person and what actions are required. The tool is to help you identify the risk of exploitation and to assist in follow on planning, it is **not** a referral form.

When making a referral to the Children's Service Duty and Advice team or sharing your concerns with the child's allocated social worker, the tool should form the basis of those discussions.

Refer to the table at the end of the tool to help you decide how to proceed and discuss this with your manager.

**Child exploitation is never the victim's fault, even if there is some form of exchange: all children and young people under the age of 18 have a right to be safe and should be protected from harm.**

## What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. *Department of Education, 2017 Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation*

Child Sexual Exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
- can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
- can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
- can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example);
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and

- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

## What is Child Criminal Exploitation?

Child Criminal Exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines, and includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft. *Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance. Home Office, September 2018*

Child Criminal Exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years;
- can still be abuse even if the activity appears consensual;
- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and
- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

## What is County Lines?

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

One of the key factors found in most cases of county lines exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something). Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or clothes) and

intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection). It is important to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a young person or vulnerable adult does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange, for example a young person who engages in county lines activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

## Who is vulnerable to Child Exploitation?

**Any child, in any community:** Child exploitation is occurring across the country. All practitioners should be open to the possibility that the children they work with might be affected. Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation can often be interlinked, with young people at risk of or experiencing both forms of abuse.

**Age:** Children aged 12-15 years of age are most at risk of child sexual exploitation although victims as young as 8 have been identified, particularly in relation to online concerns. Equally, those aged 16 or above can also experience child sexual exploitation, and it is important that such abuse is not overlooked due to assumed capacity to consent. Account should be taken of heightened risks amongst this age group, particularly those without adequate economic or systemic support.

Children of any age can be criminally exploited. The age of criminal responsibility in the UK is 10 years. 15-16 years is the most common age range for criminal exploitation.

**Gender:** Though child sexual exploitation may be most frequently observed amongst young females, boys are also at risk. Practitioners should be alert to the fact that boys may be less likely than females to disclose experiences of child sexual exploitation and less likely to have these identified by others.

Both males and females are at risk of criminal exploitation, though it may most frequently be observed amongst young men.

**Ethnicity:** Child exploitation affects all ethnic groups.

### Heightened vulnerability factors:

- Having a prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse;
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example);
- Recent bereavement or loss;
- Being excluded from mainstream education;
- Social isolation or social difficulties;
- Absence of a safe environment to explore sexuality /sexual identity;
- Economic vulnerability;
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status;
- Connections with other children and young people who are being sexually or criminally exploited or with other people involved in gangs;
- Family members or other connections involved in adult sex work;

- Having mental health or substance misuse issues;
- Having a physical or learning disability;
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories);

It is important to remember that **young people are not abused/exploited because they are vulnerable**, but because someone is prepared to take advantage of their vulnerability and at that moment there is insufficient protection around them.

It is important to note that perpetrators of exploitation may themselves be children who are exploited and that victims of exploitation may also be at risk of becoming perpetrators.

### Who should you use the tool with?

This tool is to be used when working with children and young people under the age of 18 years. You should be aware that:

Young people aged over 16 can still be at risk of/or experience child exploitation.

Where a child is under the age of 13 years old, and/or has a learning disability and there are concerns regarding exploitation, a referral to Children's Social Work Services must be made.

### Using the risk identification tool

In order to identify children at risk of or experiencing exploitation consider the risk indicators and then score each as no, low, medium or high risk.

Where possible you should involve the child/young person in completing the tool.

When completing the tool, consider use of social media and online risks throughout.

The indicators are only a guide to inform your professional judgement; one tick against a high risk box may indicate a serious risk of harm /child exploitation, alternatively this might be an indication of other concerns not related to CE that require addressing.

The listed indicators are examples only, not a checklist. Use your judgement in each of the risk areas.

When undertaking an assessment of the risk of exploitation, frequently there will be a lack of 'hard' evidence relating to the level of risk. Therefore it is important to gather information from as many sources as possible.

The tool is to assist with assessing **only** if a child or young person is at risk of exploitation. Therefore when reflecting on each of the individual risk indicators, each risk indicator needs to be considered only in terms of how it relates to a risk of Child Exploitation.

### What Next

If in the process of completing the tool you have gained information about potential perpetrators / crimes / concerning places / vehicle details etc, this information should be shared with the police either using the non-emergency 101 number, or by email to West Yorkshire Police at [leeds.safeguarding@westyorkshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:leeds.safeguarding@westyorkshire.pnn.police.uk).

**Low Risk outcome:** The indicators raise some concerns that the child may be at risk of being targeted or groomed.

Seek advice / guidance from your designated safeguarding lead / team.

Child may require a referral to specialist services or early help support.

Consider referral to MACE bronze meeting.

A discussion could be held with the Children's Services Duty and Advice Team.

If the child/young person has an allocated social worker, a discussion should be held with them and the tool shared with them.

If the decision is no further action, or to offer advice, support, guidance, intervention within the home agency and not to contact Children's Services Duty & advice or the child's social worker, this must be recorded in child's record /file.

Review the risk identification tool in three months.

**Medium Risk outcome:** Indicates that the child/young person is vulnerable to being exploited. They may be at risk of opportunistic abuse.

Seek advice / guidance from your designated safeguarding lead / team.

The practitioner must contact Children's Services Duty and Advice Team if there is not an allocated social worker.

Review the risk identification tool in three months if there is no Children's Social Work Service Involvement.

**High Risk outcome:** Indicators /Assessment /Evidence /Disclosure denote that the child is at immediate risk of, or is experiencing exploitation.

Seek advice / guidance from your designated safeguarding lead / team.

The practitioner must contact Children's Services Duty and Advice Team if there is not an allocated social worker.

If it is felt that a child is at immediate risk of harm the Police must be contacted on 999.