



FACT SHEET: Sexual Exploitation

To combat Sexual Exploitation of children and young people all agencies need to adopt a collaborative multi agency approach and share information proactively. Children and young people must be safeguarded and enabled to find strategies to exit to safer alternatives. All those who seek to exploit children and young people should be investigated and prosecuted. For further details see chapter 3.23 in Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures.

Definition

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet / mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child / young person 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 being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social / economic and / or emotional vulnerability'.

Both young girls and boys can be exploited. Their choices are constrained against a back ground of social, economic and emotional vulnerability and because of their age and needs; they are unable to give truly informed consent.

The National Referral Mechanism

Some may have been trafficked and need support to access services. Practitioners should refer to the 'Designated Competent Authorities' who will assist in assessments. These are based within the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and [United Kingdom Visas and Immigration](#).

Referrals

A child or young person who is suffering, or is at risk of suffering sexual exploitation will be a Child in Need. Therefore any practitioner who is concerned or receives information, that a child or young person is involved in sexual exploitation, should contact Children's Social Care to provide information about their concerns.

Legal Age of Consent to sexual activities

The fact that a young person is aged 16 or 17 and, therefore has reached the legal age of being able to consent to sex should not be taken as a sign that they are no longer at risk of sexual exploitation. They are still defined as children under the Children Act 1989 and 2004 respectively. They can still suffer Significant Harm as a result of sexual exploitation and their right to support and protection from harm should not be ignored or de-prioritised by services because they are over the age of 16, or are no longer in mainstream education or training. They may be additionally vulnerable if they are not living in stable accommodation.

Child Protection Action

Where any professional identifies indicators of risk which suggest a child or young person may be involved in, or at risk of, sexual exploitation, they should contact the Children's Social Care screening team (Sheffield Safeguarding Hub) immediately. The referrer must be able to evidence areas of concern and clearly outline why they feel the child or young person is vulnerable in the context of the definition of child sexual exploitation (National Working Group definition).

Where insufficient evidence is provided regarding the risk of exploitation, the referrer should continue to support the young person and be vigilant of any safeguarding concerns and gather any additional information, which may evidence their concerns. The referrer should contact the Sheffield Safeguarding Hub again.

On receipt of a referral regarding a child or young person the member of staff in Children's Social Care Safeguarding hub must consider the information presented by the referrer against the child sexual exploitation screening tool. The screening social worker will be responsible for making the appropriate referral, dependent on where the child or young person referred falls within the continuum of need.

- The Lead Social Worker should contact the Manager of the Sexual Exploitation Service to consider convening a Sexual Exploitation Meeting based on the indicators of risks.
- If there are concerns about the involvement of a person in a Position of Trust a meeting under the remit of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) should take place.
- Emergency action should be preceded by a Strategy Discussion between the police, Children's Social Care, and other agencies involved. This may result in the young person remaining in a safe place, or removing them from the person who is exploiting them to a place of safety. Never underestimate the power of perpetrators to find the young person. Police Protection may be required to safeguard the young person from Significant Harm.

