

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The following procedure reflects national guidance and current thinking regarding children below the age of 18 years who are found to be or are at risk of being sexually exploited. Such children, both boys and girls, should be dealt with in all circumstances as being at risk of significant harm.

2.0 Definitions

2.1 The sexual exploitation of children and young people is a form of sexual abuse. *Working Together to Safeguard Children*¹ (2006) defines sexual abuse as follows:

'Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.'

2.2 While there is no universally agreed definition of sexual exploitation, this guidance uses the following definition:²

'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 the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without 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.'

¹ *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* (HM Government 2006), paragraph 1.32.

² This definition arises from joint work between project members of the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG) 2008

3.0 Risks

- a) Children and young people involved in any form of sexual exploitation face immense risks to their physical, emotional and psychological health. The environment in which sexual exploitation takes place tends to have close links with criminal behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse and violence. Children drawn into this kind of sexual abuse therefore become exposed to these risks.
- b) Sexual exploitation results in children and young people suffering harm. The extent of the harm can range from situations where the exploitation is short lived and the young person is effectively supported to recover, to situations which lead to serious life-long impact and on occasions to the death of the young person, including through suicide and murder.
- c) Other risk factors are common to child sexual abuse generally, and can include physical injuries, non-attendance at school and/or underachievement, depression, self-mutilation and attempted and actual suicide.
- d) The risks to children from sexual exploitation can be seen to be extremely high and can be life-threatening.

4.0 Indicators

4.1 There are certain factors which may lead children to become more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, e.g.

- a) Homelessness can lead to children being sexual exploited as a method of survival: they may exchange sex for a bed for the night, or food.
- b) Financial necessity, especially when combined with homelessness, can play a large part in sexual exploitation.
- c) Drug and alcohol abuse: children may be lured into sexual exploitation to pay for a drug or alcohol habit. They may have been introduced to drugs/alcohol by a boyfriend/coercer (pimp) in order to disinhibit them initially in order to subject them to the abuse.
- d) Experience of previous abuse.
- e) Estrangement from family.
- f) Low self-esteem
- g) Children in care may be especially vulnerable because of a number of factors, which could involve a history of previous abuse, low self-esteem, searching for a loving relationship, being targeted by sex offenders and the prevalence of running away.

5.0 Patterns of behaviour

5.1 An unsubstantiated allegation that a child has established associations with adults known to sexually exploit children should be considered carefully. None of the following indicators, whether singly or in combination, should be

viewed as conclusive proof of sexual exploitation, but a combination of them may be taken as suggestive of the possibility.

- a) Links with older men
- b) The forming of a close relationship with an older boyfriend, who may in fact be or become a coercer. Adults who exploit young people in this way are adept at the 'grooming' process and target those who are vulnerable. They may offer them the affection they crave and/or material gifts, may introduce them to drugs/alcohol and inspire intense loyalty. Parents and social workers may find that convincing the young person to return home or to end the relationship is extremely difficult to achieve. The young person may not view themselves as a victim and may not be prepared to make any complaint to the Police, for example if it is thought that unlawful sexual intercourse is taking place between the young person and the older male.
- c) Secretiveness and hostility in relationships – especially noticeable if previously the young person was open in their relationship with their parents/carers.
- d) Defensiveness: the young person may become angry and hostile if any suspicions or concerns about their activities are expressed.
- e) Running away and staying out at night
- f) There may be an increase in health problems due to sexual activity and/or misuse of drugs/alcohol.
- g) Possession of money without plausible explanation and acquisition of clothing or other possessions without adequate explanation.
- h) Possession of excessive numbers of condoms.
- i) Reports that the child has been seen frequently in locations known to be used by the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation.
- j) Association with other children or adults who are known to be associated with the sexual exploitation of children and young people.
- k) Physical symptoms, e.g. sexually transmitted infections, bruising, abdominal pain, urinary tract infections or unwanted pregnancy suggestive of physical or sexual assault.

6.0 Procedure (See flow diagram on page 7)

6.1 Children who are the victims of abuse through sexual exploitation can only be safeguarded by the concerted effort of all agencies involved to tackle both the coercer (pimp) and the abuse, whilst working positively to protect the victim.

6.2 When an agency suspects that a young person is at risk of sexual exploitation because of some of the behaviour patterns detailed above, but there is no concrete evidence, a referral should be made to Children's Social Care, who will undertake an Initial Assessment which will include a discussion with the Police and the Safeguarding Children's Unit.

7.0 The Children Act 1989, Section 31(2) (ii)

7.1 There will be some circumstances where it will become apparent in the course of the assessment that there is reasonable cause to suspect the young person is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm which is attributable to a lack of adequate parental care or control, and in these cases a Child Protection enquiry must be undertaken under Section 47 of the Children Act, in accordance with Part 6 of these procedures. The decision about whether to proceed to a Child Protection Conference will depend upon the risks identified, in particular whether a parent is knowingly failing to protect the young person or actively encouraging their sexual exploitation.

7.2 Where there is no evidence to suggest a Child Protection enquiry is necessary, the young person's needs should be responded to in accordance with the 'Children in Need' framework. Where the Initial Assessment reinforces concerns, a Core Assessment should be completed. A multi-agency 'child in need' planning meeting should be convened within 10 working days of the referral.

8.0 The multi-agency 'Child in Need' Conference

8.1 The following agencies should attend the meeting:

- Children's Social Care
- Police services
- Education welfare services
- School
- Youth service
- Health, e.g. school nurse, youth clinic
- Housing
- Other agencies already involved with the young person

8.2 The purpose of the meeting is to agree:

- A joint approach to the investigation of offences against the young person
- To develop a strategy to encourage and support the sexually exploited young person
- To identify services necessary to support the young person and address any health or therapeutic needs they may have.

9.0 Admission to accommodation

9.1 The available evidence suggests that admission to Local Authority accommodation is unlikely to break an established pattern of sexual exploitation on its own. However, where a decision is taken regarding accommodation, the following additional factors should be taken into account:

- The length of involvement with known perpetrators of sexual exploitation
- The frequency of being missing from home
- The need for protection which cannot be provided elsewhere
- The young person's motive for involvement with sexually exploitive adults and their understanding of this
- The nature of the specific sexual activities and the degree of risk of infection or injury
- The resources available, the likely effect on other residents of the admission and their likely response to the young person

10.0 Young people found by Police officers to be soliciting or loitering for the purposes of prostitution or associating with known perpetrators of child sexual exploitation

10.1 Every effort should be made by agencies to ensure that intervention into young people's lives is planned. However, there will be some circumstances where young people are found in high risk situations which necessitate an immediate response to ensure their safety

11.0 Police response

- a) When a child or young person is found in these circumstances they will be taken to their home address for the purpose of checking the safety of their home circumstances. If the officers assess their home circumstances to be safe enough, and there are not grounds to suspect that the child will suffer significant harm by remaining there, then they will be left there. Either that day or the following morning, officers will telephone the Safeguarding Children's Unit (Telephone 01226 772400) to inform the Safeguarding Children's Unit of the circumstances. A short written report should be sent as soon as possible afterwards, confirming the information given.
- b) If the child's home circumstances cause officers to suspect the child is at risk of significant harm if they are left there, or if the child is of no fixed abode and may suffer significant harm because of the circumstances in which they are found, then the officers should take a Police Protection Order under Section 46 of the Children Act 1989. Children's Social Care should be contacted – see Key Contacts, Appendix 2, Barnsley Child Protection Procedures, with a view to appropriate accommodation being found. Officers should telephone the Safeguarding Children's Unit as soon as possible, and follow up their verbal report to them in writing.
- c) As a young person comes to the attention of the Police under these circumstances, a Police database record will be made of the individual and the circumstances in which they are found. This record will be updated on each occasion the individual is found in similar circumstances. The object is to monitor the vulnerable person and to provide officers with the

information necessary to give support to the young person to exit this dangerous lifestyle.

- d) The individual circumstances of each case must be considered, and if officers are in any doubt as to the appropriate course of action they should seek advice from the Safeguarding Children's Unit within office hours, or from the emergency duty social work team.

12.0 Children's Social Care response

- a) Children's Social Care need to respond quickly to a notification from the Police that they have a young person in the Police station under Section 46 of the Children Act who they believe has been sexually exploited. It is inappropriate to leave a young person in a Police station, and arrangements will have to be made to look after the young person pending completion of a Child Protection enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act.
- b) There are occasions when young people move between authorities, particularly into large urban authorities, and become involved in child sexual exploitation. It is possible therefore, that notifications and requests for assistance could come from other Police forces and/or other Local Authorities. Despite the practical difficulties of returning the young person to their home area, the aim should be to minimise the length of time that the young person is left in a Police station. Requests should not be made for the young person to be placed on public transport to return on their own.
- c) Social Care must convene a strategy meeting and undertake Child Protection enquiries as part of a Core Assessment, in accordance with Part 6 of the Barnsley Child Protection Procedures. However, the decision regarding proceeding to a Child Protection Conference needs to be informed by the attitude of the parent/carer. In particular, there must be some indication that the sexual exploitation is encouraged by a parent/carer, or is exacerbated by a failure to prevent it, before a Child Protection Conference is convened. If a Child Protection Conference is not to be convened, then a multi-agency 'child in need' planning meeting should be convened as above.

BARNSLEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD
Safeguarding Children & Young People from Sexual Exploitation
Flow Diagram

