

Healthwatch North Tyneside policies and procedures

Tackling child exploitation policy and Briefing

January 2024

1. Policy

Healthwatch North Tyneside staff and volunteers must be alert to what child exploitation is, the signs and indicators, and what action to take if they suspect a child may be subject to exploitation.

2. Briefing

This procedure and practice guidance has been designed to assist staff and volunteers in identifying what is Child Exploitation (CE), including sexual and criminal (this includes county lines).

The guidance outlines how staff and volunteers can support children and young people to prevent, protect, disrupt and to prosecute those who abuse children and young people through sexual and criminal exploitation.

Evidence has shown that parents/carers/relatives and those professionals (such as teachers, family workers, health professionals, social workers, GPs, Police Officers and the voluntary sector) who have regular contact with children and young people are well placed to notice changes in behaviour and physical signs, which may indicate involvement in child exploitation.

The earlier that child exploitation, or likelihood of it, can be identified, the more opportunities there are to prevent or minimise the harm suffered by a child or young person.

Definition of 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.”

Online Sexual Exploitation includes:

- Befriending through online chat rooms/messaging services
- Online grooming techniques, e.g. stalking, identity pretence, false promises e.g. meeting
- celebrities, tickets, gifts
- Asking children to take and share indecent images of themselves
- Leverage for further demands, e.g. threat to show other people recorded sexual acts by child or young person
- Arranging offline meeting for purpose of sexually abusing child
- Contact from perpetrators in other countries, and abused online
- Speed of grooming can be very quick – leaving little ‘thinking time’. The restrained influencing of a child over several months has been largely replaced by rapid escalation to threats, intimidation and coercion.

Definition of 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.”

“When someone you trusted makes you commit crimes for their benefit.”

Vulnerabilities, possible signs and indicators:

ALL children and young people, including those from supportive families can be vulnerable to exploitation. However, some children and young people are known to be at greater risk. For example, those that:

- Have a chaotic home/family life
- Have a history of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of ‘honour’-based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect)
- Have experienced loss/bereavement
- Are associated with gangs through relatives/peers, or are living in a gang neighbourhood
- Have friendships with children/young people who are being sexually exploited

- Have learning difficulties
- Live in residential care, or hostel/bed & breakfast accommodation
- Have low self-esteem/confidence
- Are Young Carers (e.g. have caring responsibilities for parents/family members with mental or physical health problems, or who are misusing substances)

Warning signs:

Children and young people who are being exploited may be:

- Going missing from home or care
- Absent from school
- Increasing their use of social media, dating sites, image sharing apps etc.
- Involved in risky online relationships including new contacts with people out of the area
- Sharing inappropriate/indecent online images with peers, or with people only met online
- Becoming isolated/estranged from family and friends
- Meeting people befriended online
- Involved in offending behaviour
- Misusing drugs or alcohol
- Experiencing sexual cyber-bullying
- Changing their physical appearance
- Experiencing repeated sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations
- In poor mental health and/or self-harming, having thoughts of, or attempting, suicide
- Receiving money and gifts, such as mobile phones, from unknown sources

Risk assessment and consent:

In assessing whether a child or young person is a victim of exploitation, or at risk of becoming a victim, careful consideration should be given to the issue of consent. It is important to bear in mind that:

- a child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex (it is statutory rape) or any other type of sexual touching;
- sexual activity with a child under 16 is also an offence;
- it is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old if they hold a position of trust or authority in relation to them;

- where sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old does not result in an offence being committed, it may still result in harm, or the likelihood of harm being suffered;
- non consensual sex is rape whatever the age of the victim; and if the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or his or her family has been subject to violence or the threat of it, they cannot be considered to have given true consent and therefore offences may have been committed.
- Child sexual exploitation is therefore potentially a child protection issue for all children under the age of 18 years and not just those in a specific age group.
- Weapons may be involved in cases of criminal exploitation

3. What to do if you have a concern

Any member of staff or volunteer who suspects or receives information that a child or young person may be involved in exploitation (including suspicion that they are being groomed online), should refer their concerns to the Director or Board Safeguarding lead in the first instance. If unavailable, contact the Front Door on 03450 2000 109 **or if you think a child is in immediate danger, call 999.**

Further information can be found at: [Child Sexual Exploitation | North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership \(northtynesidescp.org.uk\)](http://northtynesidescp.org.uk)

4. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless changes are deemed necessary.

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