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CHILD SEXUAL AND CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION		

'Children are being sexually exploited here and now and this form of child abuse is more prevalent than most people could ever imagine.' (Tim Laughton Minister for children & families) Nov 2011

The following definition of child sexual exploitation was created by the UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG) and is used in statutory guidance in England:

'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 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.'

Barnardo's describe sexual exploitation as:

'Sexual exploitation is when someone under 18 is groomed, coerced or manipulated into sexual activity. A young person may have sex because they are tricked into it by someone, often older than them, who promises them love and security or who buys them lavish gifts. Often the young person trusts their exploiter because of their age, but this trust is abused, and the young person left hurt and vulnerable.'

The following is the definition of grooming used by the NSPCC:

'Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation.'

Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional.

Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age.'

Many children and young people do not understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Grooming

How Grooming Happens

Grooming happens both online and in person. Groomers will hide their true intentions and may spend a long time gaining a child's trust. They may also try to gain the trust of the whole family so they can be alone with the child.

Groomers do this by:

- pretending to be someone they are not, for example saying they are the same age online
- offering advice or understanding
- buying gifts
- giving the child attention
- using their professional position or reputation
- taking them on trips, outings, or holidays

Using Secrets and Intimidation to Control Children

Once they have established trust, groomers will exploit the relationship by isolating the child from friends and/or family making the child feel dependent on them. They will use any means of power or control to make a child believe they have no choice but to do what they want.

Groomers may introduce 'secrets' as a way to control or frighten the child. Sometimes they will blackmail the child, or make them feel ashamed or guilty, to stop them telling anyone about the abuse.

Online Grooming

Groomers can use social media sites, instant messaging apps including teenage dating apps, or online gaming platforms to connect with a young person or child.

They can spend time learning about a young person's interests from their online profiles and then use this knowledge to help them build up a relationship.

It's easy for groomers to hide their identity online - they may pretend to be a child and then chat and become 'friends' with children they are targeting.

Groomers may look for:

- usernames or comments that are flirtatious or have a sexual meaning
- public comments that suggest a child has low self-esteem or is vulnerable

Groomers do not always target a particular child. Sometimes they will send messages to hundreds of young people and wait to see who responds.

Groomers no longer need to meet children in real life to abuse them. Increasingly, groomers are sexually exploiting their victims by persuading them to take part in online sexual activity.

It is accepted that it may be difficult to recognise these signs, particularly if they happen in isolation so it is essential that staff record every event, no matter how insignificant it may appear, so any emerging pattern can quickly be identified and acted upon. Keywork sessions must include discussion of the risks inherent in using social media sites and the need to report any unsolicited or disturbing messages that a young person may receive.

The 'older 'boyfriend or girlfriend scenario is now well known and if this situation should arise staff should immediately be concerned but of equal concern may be a sudden 'new' friendship with an apparently appropriate young person. A number of young people who are being groomed themselves may be persuaded to 'recruit' others so if a child's behaviours change from what had been their previous norm, then this should also ring alarm bells.

Young people present three major challenges to services attempting to intervene in their lives. First, they do not acknowledge their own exploitation. Second, they are extremely 'needy' for attention, 'love' and of belonging somewhere - and are reliant on abusive adults to meet these needs. Third, they have little previous experience of positive adult support and believe they are better off looking after themselves rather than relying on parents or professionals.

If a member of staff has concerns about a particular child, this should be discussed with the placement Manager who will decide whether or not the allocated social worker/personal advisor should be requested to convene a strategy meeting in which ways to keep the child safe can be determined.

Grooming can continue for a considerable period of time and a young person may appear to be increasingly happy and contented with life. Compliance with boundaries may actually increase as the groomer will not wish to arouse suspicion in the minds of carers before they have gained a complete need of dependence upon them by the child, and they will encourage the child to 'behave'. Therefore, an increase in positive behaviours may be a cause of concern. New friends should always be welcomed into the Home by staff and attempts should be made to establish a positive relationship with them so an opinion can be formed as to the suitability of the friendship and of the power balance.

Where the new friendship is with a person older than the child staff should also endeavour to meet and speak with them with a view to forming an opinion as to whether the age differential is appropriate. Where this not considered to be the case, the placement Manager should be informed without delay so the necessary steps to ensure the child is safe can be taken. If the 'friend' drops off or collects the young person in a car, staff should attempt to identify the make and colour of the vehicle and if possible, make a note of the registration number.

If staff are addressing concerns with a young person, it is important that they do not make negative or dismissive remarks about their friends or associates as this is likely to make the child defensive and reluctant to disclose any information. The preferred approach should be to enable the young person to question the motivation behind the attention/gifts etc. they are being provided with, particularly if they are not being asked for anything in return.

If a young person is being groomed the situation will inevitably change and will become exploitative in nature.

Sexual Exploitation

This will occur once the 'groomer' has decided they want a return upon their 'investment.' In the majority of cases, where the victim is female the demand will be for sexual services. These will not necessarily include engaging in full sexual intercourse and any sexual act - even kissing- can be viewed as exploitative if the young person is being coerced into the act. It is however important to be aware that boys as well as girls can be victims of sexual exploitation and are less likely to disclose any information due to the stigma of being thought to be 'gay'.

A common scenario will be where the young person is told by the exploiter that they are being threatened/owe money etc. and the victim can prevent or remove any threats by entering into a sexual act with another person. Staff should immediately be alerted if a young person starts going missing or being absent without authority, is missing school or college or is simply not where they are meant to be or starts being evasive about their whereabouts. It is important to remember that exploitation can take place at any hour of the day or night.

If a young person's clothing is noted to have changed between them going out and returning to the Home this may indicate exploitation, particularly if the 'new' clothes are provocative in nature, or, the young person is dressing as though they were a much younger child. e.g. as a schoolgirl. Staff should ensure they record what a young person is wearing when they go out and note any changes to the clothing when they young person returns.

An increase in the number of mobile phones owned by a young person or, frequent changes of phone should alert staff to giving consideration as to whether a young person is being exploited as the exploiter will often want to have a dedicated 'hot line' to their victim which no one else can use as this increases the power and control, they have over the young person.

Inviting a young person to a party, where they will be supplied with alcohol and/or drugs and then 'gang raped' also occurs and may leave the victim severely traumatised and/or physically injured so staff need to ensure they have sight of a young person when they return to the placement and be alert to any signs of distress or discomfort displayed by the young person.

Where a dependency on drugs has been developed the signs are likely to become obvious in a relatively short period of time. Weight loss and a deterioration in the condition of the skin, particularly if these are combined with a change in presenting behaviours and/or moods should be a cause for concern. A refusal to eat or periods of bingeing food may also be noticed as may an obsession with obtaining money and attempts to steal items they can sell or exchange.

The recording and sharing of information are absolutely crucial in attempting to keep a young person safe and staff must ensure they carry out these tasks without fail. The Manager or on-call Manager should always be alerted if staff have concerns so the appropriate advice and support can be given.

Child Criminal Exploitation

Whilst the majority of exploitation will be sexual in nature, young people can also fall prey to other types of exploitation which are criminal in nature. This is more prevalent in the case of boys, although girls can also fall prey and may be used as 'mules' to transport drugs or firearms without being suspected of doing so or, be used to carry out basic painting and decorating tasks for which they will not be paid. Girls can also be used to transport illegal items or to work in domestic situations with both genders being threatened with physical violence if they do not comply. Particularly vulnerable to this type of exploitation are asylum seeking young people who may also be threatened with deportation or with the police.

Of increasing concern is the prevalence of using vulnerable young people in running drugs through 'county lines.'

The Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance/ Home Office/ July 2017 states:

'County lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or 'deal lines. It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as "cuckooing".'

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations.

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing, and misuse have a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults, and local communities. Like other forms of abuse and exploitation, county lines exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years
- can affect any vulnerable adult over the age of 18 years.
- can still be exploitation 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 young people or adults; and
- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.

Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources. 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.

The national picture on county lines continues to develop but there are recorded cases of:

- Children as young as 12 years old being exploited by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area — 15-16 years is the most common age range.
- Both males and females being exploited.
- White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade police detection.
- The use of social media to make initial contact with children and young people.
- Class A drug users being targeted so that gangs can take over their homes (known as 'cuckooing').

It is known that county lines exploitation is widespread, with gangs from big cities including London, Manchester and Liverpool operating throughout England, Wales, and Scotland. Gangs are known to target vulnerable children and adults; some of the factors that heighten a person's vulnerability include:

- Having 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)
- Social isolation or social difficulties.
- Economic vulnerability.
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status.
- Connections with other people involved in gangs.
- Having a physical or learning disability.
- Having mental health or substance misuse issues.
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories).

A young person's involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs. A young person might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in a young person's lifestyle should be discussed with them. Some indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and/ or being found out-of-area.
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls
- Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- Leaving home/ care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries
- Parental concerns
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results/ performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks

- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

The overwhelming priority is for staff to be aware, suspicious, and alert to any seemingly innocuous changes in a young person's behaviour or presentation and to share any concerns with Managers. Recording must be accurate and contemporaneous.

To help a young person accept that they are being exploited can be a long and difficult process but the earlier an intervention can be made the more likely a positive outcome can be achieved.

