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Kent Police

Department for education. Child sexual exploitation Feb 2017

Working together to Safeguard children

Information Sharing: guide for practitioners

The children's Act 2004

Child Sexual Exploitation

Information and Guidance

Policy and Procedures

Cobtree Playschool for Special Children

Maidstone Mencap Charitable Trust Ltd

Updated March 2022

Policies and procedures- Safeguarding

Introduction

Child Sexual exploitation is a crime with devastating and long -lasting consequences for all its victims and their families. Childhoods and family life can be ruined, and this is compounded when victims, or those at risk from abuse do not receive appropriate, immediate and on-going support.

The first response to children and support for them to access help, must be the best it can be from social workers, police, health practitioners and others who work with children and their families.

In partnership with multi- agency networks Maidstone Mencap strives to support the Government ambition in Putting Children First, to help vulnerable children to lead safe and positive lives, to become successful adults and to have the kind of happy childhood that we want for our children.

We want children and families to have confidence in turning to us as practitioners for help and protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Our help and protection will be given in a timely enduring and flexible manner to be the best that it can possibly be. We will work together to reduce the immediate risk of harm to children and collaborate to develop long term strategies to improve children's life chances.

This applies as much to child sexual exploitations as to any other forms of abuse or neglect.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault from penetration (rape or oral sex) or non- penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. It may include non-contact activities such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or to watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.

The definition of child sexual exploitation is as follows: 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.

Like all forms of child sexual abuse, 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.

Child sexual exploitation is a complex form of abuse, and it can be difficult for those working with children to identify and assess. The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly, and appropriate support is given. Even where a young person is old enough to legally consent to sexual activity, the law states that consent is only valid where they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they don't comply (all of which are common features in cases of child sexual exploitation) consent cannot legally be given whatever the age of the child.

Child sexual 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.

One of the key factors found in most cases of child sexual exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something); for the victim and/or perpetrator or facilitator.

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 alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection). It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a child/young person 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 child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

Whilst there can be gifts or treats involved in other forms of sexual abuse (e.g. a father who sexually abuses but also buys the child toys) it is most likely referred to as child sexual exploitation if the 'exchange', as the core dynamic at play, results in financial gain for or enhanced status of, the perpetrator. Where the gain is only for the perpetrator/facilitator, there is most likely a financial gain (money, discharge of a debt or free/discounted goods or services) or increased status as a result of the abuse. If sexual gratification, or exercise of power and control, is the only gain for the perpetrator (and there is no gain for the child/young person) this would not normally constitute child sexual exploitation, but should be responded to as a different form of child sexual abuse

How common is child sexual exploitation?

The signs and indicators of all forms of abuse can be difficult to detect and child sexual exploitation is no exception. A variety of factors can make it difficult to accurately assess how

prevalent child sexual exploitation is. Many children who are sexually exploited may have been victims of other forms of abuse; the grooming methods that may be used can mean that children who are sexually exploited do not always recognise they are being abused, which can also affect detection rates. What is clear is that child sexual exploitation can occur in all communities and amongst all social groups and can affect girls and boys. All practitioners should work on the basis that it is happening in their area.

Who is vulnerable to child sexual exploitation?

Any child, in any community:

Child sexual exploitation is occurring across the country but is often hidden so prevalence data is hard to ascertain. However, areas proactively looking for child sexual exploitation are uncovering a problem. All practitioners should be open to the possibility that the children they work with might be affected.

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.

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.

Ethnicity:

Child sexual exploitation affects all ethnic groups.

Heightened vulnerability factors: Working Together makes clear the requirements for holistic assessment. Sexual exploitation is often linked to other issues in the life of a child or young person, or in the wider community context. Practitioners should be alert to the fact that child sexual exploitation is complex and rarely presents in isolation of other needs and risks of harm (although this may not always be the case, particularly in relation to online abuse). Child sexual exploitation may be linked to other crimes and practitioners should be mindful that a child who may present as being involved in criminal activity is actually being exploited.

Sexual exploitation can have links to other types of crime. These include:

- Child trafficking.
- Domestic abuse.
- Sexual violence in intimate relationships.
- Grooming (including online grooming).
- Abusive images of children and their distribution.
- Drugs-related offences.
- Gang-related activity.
- Immigration-related offences; and
- Domestic servitude.

The following vulnerabilities are examples of the types of things children can experience that might make them more susceptible to child sexual exploitation:

- 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.
- Social isolation or social difficulties.
- Absence of a safe environment to explore sexuality.
- Economic vulnerability.
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status.
- Connections with other children and young people who are being sexually exploited.
- Family members or other connections involved in adult sex work.
- Having a physical or learning disability.
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories); and
- Sexual identity.

Not all children and young people with these vulnerabilities will experience child sexual exploitation. Child sexual exploitation can also occur without any of these vulnerabilities being present.

Potential indicators of child sexual exploitation

Children rarely self-report child sexual exploitation so it is important that practitioners are aware of potential indicators of risk, including:

- Acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones etc without plausible explanation.
- Gang-association and/or isolation from peers/social networks.
- Exclusion or unexplained absences from school, college or work.
- Leaving home/care without explanation and persistently going missing or returning late.
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls.
- Returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour for age/sexually transmitted infections.
- Evidence of/suspicious of physical or sexual assault.
- Relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups.
- Multiple callers (unknown adults or peers).
- Frequenting areas known for sex work.
- Concerning use of internet or other social media.
- Increasing secretiveness around behaviours; and
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.

Practitioners should also remain open to the fact that child sexual exploitation can occur without any of these risk indicators being obviously present. Practitioners should also be alert to the fact that some risk assessments have been constructed around indicators of face-to-face perpetration by adults and may not adequately capture online or peerperpetrated forms of harm. It is also important to remember that risk assessments only capture risk at the point of assessment and that levels of risk vary over time, and that the presence of these indicators may be explained by other forms of vulnerability rather than child sexual exploitation.

The first step for practitioners is to be alert to the potential signs of abuse and neglect and to understand the procedures set out by local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Those working with children and families should access training through those multi-agency

arrangements to support them in identifying vulnerability, risk and harm. This will help practitioners to know what action to take and to develop a shared understanding about what best practice looks like.

How are children sexually exploited?

Child sexual exploitation takes many different forms. It can include contact and noncontact sexual activities and can occur online or in person, or a combination of each.

Most child abuse occurs within the home. In cases of child sexual exploitation the risk of harm is generally external or in the community.

Child sexual exploitation may occur without the child being aware of events or understanding that these constitute abuse. Online exploitation includes the exchange of sexual communication or images and can be particularly challenging to identify and respond to. Children, young people and perpetrators are frequently more familiar with, and spend more time in, these environments than their parents and carers. Those who work with and care for children can struggle to remain up to date with the latest sites and potential connection points, so practitioners should always seek specialist support if unsure about online environments. Online child sexual exploitation allows perpetrators to initiate contact with multiple potential victims and offers a perception of anonymity, with children and young people, and perpetrators, potentially saying and doing things online they wouldn't do offline. Where exploitation does occur online, the transfer of images can be quickly and easily shared with others. This makes it difficult to contain the potential for further abuse

Children can be perpetrators as well as victims

Children can be both experiencing child sexual exploitation and perpetrating it at the same time. Examples might include a child who is forced to take part in the exploitation of another child under duress, or a child who is forced to introduce other children to their abuser under threats to their family's safety. These situations require a nuanced approach that recognises and engages with the young person's perpetration within the context of their own victimisation.

Children who perpetrate child sexual exploitation require a different response to adult perpetrators. Responses may involve criminal justice pathways at times, however every child who displays harmful sexual behaviour should also have their safeguarding and welfare needs actively considered in line with Working Together.

Different agencies should work together to: (a) identify any prior victimisation and understand how this has contributed to the perpetration; and (b) map the environments and contexts in which peer-perpetrated child sexual exploitation occurs, looking at the social norms or power dynamics at play which may have influenced the perpetration of abuse. Dependent on the issues emerging, this will likely need both an individually based response and wider work to address harmful social norms or power dynamics that enable the abuse to occur.

How does child sexual exploitation affect children?

The long-term consequences of any form of child abuse can be devastating and early identification and providing support as soon as problems emerge is critical. Child sexual exploitation damages children and like any form of abuse it can have longlasting consequences that can impact on every part of a child's life and their future outcomes.

Child sexual exploitation has been shown to affect:

- Physical (including sexual) and mental health and well-being.
- Education and training and therefore future employment prospects.
- Family relationships.
- Friends and social relationships, current and as adults; and
- Their relationship with their own children in the future.

Child sexual exploitation is complex, and children are often reluctant to disclose experiences of exploitation due to misplaced feelings of loyalty and shame. Many may not recognise what they are experiencing as abuse or that they require support or intervention, believing they are in control or in a healthy consensual relationship.

RESPONDING TO CHILD EXPLOITATION

Reporting:

Maidstone Mencap recognises that all children and young people have a right to be safe and should be protected from harm.

We will follow our safeguarding policies and procedures, ensuring that we have effective procedures in place for sharing information, providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers. Wherever appropriate we will share confidential personnel information with consent. However, where there are concerns that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, we will disclose information without consent, where the public interest served by protecting the child from harm, outweighs the duty of confidentiality.

Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. All staff within all provisions at Maidstone Mencap acknowledge that in the course of their work with children and young people, they may encounter those at risk from sexual exploitation.

Staff will seek advice and guidance from our Designated Lead for Safeguarding (DSL). Local multi- agency safeguarding procedures will be followed for referring any concerns about the welfare of children, to the Local authority children's social care team.

If a child is considered to be in immediate danger we will call the Police.

We will respond in ways that are:-

- Child centred- recognising children and young people rights to participate in decisions about them in line with their maturity, focusing on the needs of the child
- Understanding that a referral is the beginning of a process of inquiry, not an accusation.
- Developed and informed by the involvement of a child's family and carers wherever safe and appropriate to do so- we will take a holistic approach to our assessment with the wishes and feelings of the child taken into account
- Responsive and pro-active, all staff will have a basic understanding of their safeguarding duty of care to be alert to the potential signs and indicators of child sexual exploitation as well as other forms of abuse.

- Relationship based- staff will establish and maintain trusting caring relationships with the children and young people in our care

Staff will have an understanding that it is important to avoid language or actions that may lead to the child or young person feeling as if they are not deserving of support or are in some way to blame for their abuse.

Staff will maintain relationships with the children and young people and continue to exercise professional curiosity and will create safe spaces for disclosure. Continued contact with perpetrators will be seen as part of the complex power dynamic of the abusive relationship. Staff will continue to reach out to victims and not make the offer of our support dependent on formal disclosure.

Where assessment shows that it is safe and appropriate to do so, parents and families will be regarded as part of the solution, working together not only to assess the risks of harm faced by the young person or child but to help them in understanding what their child has experienced, the risks they face and how they can be supported and protected. We understand that parents may need direct support and help to improve family relationships and keep their child safe.

Removing explicit images

we will take steps to report and remove evidence of online child sexual exploitation, such as explicit images.

We will report the image to the site or network hosting it

We will contact the Internet Watch Foundation - IWF

Young people under the age of 18 who are worried that a sexual image or video of them may have been shared online will be referred to or supported in using the Childline and IWF's report remove tool to see if it can be taken down.

Assessment:

We will take a collaborative and supportive approach, with our local authority multi- agency "working together"

We understand and recognise that the victim is not to blame

We will use our professional judgment

We will gather as much narrative information as is possible in helping to see the bigger picture and understand risk and protective factors

We will include all potential indicators of risk such as, online, social media communications, gaming, drug or alcohol abuse, gang involvement, poverty, sexual interests/attitudes or disability

We will focus on factors that may put a child at risk of harm,

Operation Willow is the Kent and Medway awareness raising campaign around child sexual exploitation if you are worried about yourself or someone you know

Call 101 and quote Operation willow or

Call the "Say Something" helpline anonymously on 116 000