

**Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Protocol**

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**About this Protocol**

This guidance should be read alongside [Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2) which continues to provide statutory guidance covering the legislative requirements on services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

A child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. Throughout this protocol the terms 'child' and 'children' are used to refer to all those under the age of 18.

This protocol applies to all staff who are working directly or indirectly with children, young people and their families in Bath & North East Somerset Council. This advice also applies to Bath & North East Somerset Council children in care placed outside of the area.

This Protocol is to be read together with the overarching Youth @ Risk Strategy, a multi-agency commitment to work together to prevent all exploitation of children and young people in Bath and North East Somerset. The shared vision is for all children and young people and their families and communities to be safe from exploitation and the values and approaches set out in the Youth @ Risk Strategy fully apply here. This is one of six Protocols that underpin the Youth @ Risk Strategy.

**Part 1** is for everyone whose work brings them into contact with children and families, including those who work in early years, children's social care, health, education (including schools), the police, adult services and youth offending teams. These parts set out first the background to the nature of child criminal exploitation, followed by a series of guiding principles. It is relevant to those working in the statutory, voluntary or the independent sectors, and applies in relation to all children and young people irrespective of whether they are living at home with their families and carers or away from home.

**Part 2** explains what to do if you are worried **about a child or young person.**

Introduction

This protocol aims to:

* Provide all agencies with clear local guidance in relation to children who are at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), or who are currently being exploited.
* Ensure that a coordinated approach across all agencies is taken when considering the risks involved for children who may be sexually exploited.
* Ensure that there is an effective plan in place to manage and reduce the risk to these vulnerable children and that role and responsibilities within this are identified and clearly defined.
* Ensure effective monitoring of young people's safeguarding processes.
* Promote information sharing across all agencies and a joined up approach to risk reduction.
* Provide appropriate management oversight of these vulnerable children.

**Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**

CSE is a form of child sexual abuse that affects both boys and girls. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (e.g. rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside 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 watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

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.

*Department of Education, February 2017. Child sexual exploitation: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation, available at:* [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/statutory-definition-of-child-sexual-exploitation](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/statutory-definition-of-child-sexual-exploitation)

**The purpose of this protocol is:**

* To identify and coordinate support to those young people that meet the criteria of being at risk of or being sexually exploited
* To promote the need to take action against those intent on abusing and exploiting children and young people
* To provide awareness raising and preventative education for the welfare of children and young people who are or may be sexually exploited
* To provide timely and effective interventions with children and families to safeguard those vulnerable to sexual exploitation
* To recognise the links between children missing from home and care and sexual exploitation, and the importance of effective multi-agency procedures in relation to missing children
* The multi-agency partnerships will seek to work with young people to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation in accordance with the policies, procedures and guidance of the B&NES Local Safeguarding Children Board and the South West Child Protection Procedures

**Aims**

There is a wealth of expertise in Bath & North East Somerset, and many examples of excellent practice. Our ambition is to do even more to understand the prevalence of child sexual exploitation and provide a strategic framework to achieve maximum impact**.** This will be achieved through effective inter-agency working and having clear shared priorities and protocols for tackling concerns.

In Bath & North East Somerset we are determined to work together across agencies to identify those vulnerable to sexual exploitation, build resilience, and prevent exploitation taking place. We will work with young people, their family, professionals, and communities to raise awareness of the issue, and ensure our early help services are well placed to provide effective prevention and develop a virtual CSE team to provide effective support.

Across the partnership, we are committed to making a difference for children and young people up to the age of 18 (24 for looked after children) by:

* Enabling children and young people to make safe choices through a concerted campaign of awareness raising and education**.**
* Providing accessible, early support, to target vulnerable groups**,** build resilience and prevent exploitation occurring.
* Remodelling support to victims, making it accessible and designed around their needs.

**We will:**

* Ensure there is greater consistency of support from trusted adults, drawing on innovative practice to help young people to regain control and break free from exploitation.
* Develop a targeted approach for young people at high risk of CSE and involved in CSE, ensuring a longer term, enduring relationship is developed with victims of CSE.
* Work proactively across the partnership to identify, disrupt and prosecute perpetrators of this crime, to reduce the duration of abuse and minimise the impact on the victim.

**Types of Child Sexual Exploitation**

It is accepted that the methods that perpetrators use to sexually exploit young people do change and may not neatly fit into any of the models outlined below.

These examples are provided in order to gain a better understanding of some of the challenges young people face and the way offenders operate.

**Peer-on-peer exploitation**

Young people can be sexually exploited by people of a similar age as well as adults.

Research is increasingly demonstrating that a significant number of sexually exploited young people have been abused by their peers and a London Councils report in 2014 found that peer-on-peer exploitation was the most frequently identified form of CSE in London. Young people can be exploited by their peers in a number of ways. In some cases, young women and young men who have been exploited themselves, by adults or peers, will recruit other young people to be abused. In other instances, sexual bullying in schools and other social settings can result in the sexual exploitation of young people by their peers. Sexual exploitation also occurs within and between street gangs, where sex is used in exchange for safety, protection, drugs and simply belonging.

For 16 and 17-year-olds who are in abusive relationships, what may appear to be a case of domestic abuse may also involve sexual exploitation. In all cases of peer-on-peer exploitation, a power imbalance will still inform the relationship, but this inequality will not necessarily be the result of an age gap between the abuser and the abused.

**Relationship model**

Here the offender befriends and grooms a young person into a ‘relationship’ and then coerces or forces them to have sex with friends or associates. The abuser may be significantly older than the victim, but not always.

**Bait Out Groups**

Bait Out groups have become a widespread problem as the groups are used for the purpose of

humiliating people; like a form of bullying. Sexual imagery is taken in a consensual relationship which the victim has agreed to in good faith and thinks it will just be used by the boyfriend or girlfriend in the relationship.

Young people then use a “bait out” strategy, where they launch social media pages and only grant access to users once a sexual image, video or gossip has been shared, to the group.

**Online CSE**

Children and young people have grown up in a digital world which has improved people’s lives in many ways, such as giving us multiple methods to communicate and share information. It is a constantly changing and dynamic world that is now an essential part of a young person’s life. However, these freedoms also create new risks – according to the Child Exploitation and Online

Protection Centre (CEOP), a significant number of CSE offences take place online. These offences include deceiving children into producing indecent images of themselves and engaging in sexual chat online or sexual activity over a webcam.

Children and young people at risk of harm online may not have any previous vulnerabilities that are often associated with being victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. This means that they are less likely to be identified as they might not be previously known to the authorities.

Due to the nature of online activity, the currently accepted indicators of possible sexual exploitation, such as going missing or school absence, may not be displayed, and the first parents may know that their child has been a victim of sexual exploitation is when the police contact the family. Children and young people often do not see the dangers of sharing intimate images of themselves to strangers. The internet creates a false feeling of security and diminishes inhibitions that would exist offline. The anonymous nature of the internet allows perpetrators to adopt false personas and build trust via online conversations. Children and young people can fail to realise that they lose control of uploaded images, falsely believing the properties of social media applications will protect them. This leads to risks of blackmail and coercion against the child. Additionally, the Global Positioning System coordinates of where a digital image was created can be identified using free-to-download software packages, potentially leading a perpetrator to a child. These factors can lead to any and all of the following risks:

online grooming and child abuse; access to age-inappropriate content; bullying and cyberbullying; personal information being obtained by perpetrators; and talking to strangers or people who misrepresent themselves.

**Youth-produced sexual imagery identified in schools**

Sharing photos and videos online is part of daily life for many people, enabling them to share their experiences, connect with friends and record their lives. The increase in speed and ease of sharing imagery has led to concerns about young people creating and sharing sexual imagery of themselves. This can expose them to risks, particularly if the images are shared further, including embarrassment, bullying and an increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

If a young person has shared imagery consensually, such as when in a romantic relationship or as a joke, or there is no intended malice, it is usually appropriate for the school to manage the incident internally. In contrast, any incident with aggravating factors, such as a young person sharing someone else’s imagery without consent and with malicious intent, should generally be referred to the police and Social Care.

**Gangs and groups**

Young people associated with gangs are at a high risk of sexual exploitation. Sexual violence among peers is commonplace and it is used as a means of power and control over others, most commonly young women. Young people affected by, or associated with, gangs are at high risk of sexual exploitation and violence, and require safeguarding.

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner has defined CSE in gangs and groups in its 2013 report. This includes:

* **Gangs** – mainly comprising men and boys aged 13 to 25, who take part in many forms of criminal activity (e.g. knife crime or robbery) who can engage in violence against other gangs, and who have identifiable markers, e.g. a territory, a name, or (sometimes) clothing.
* **Groups** – involves people who come together in person or online for the purpose of setting up, coordinating and/or taking part in the sexual exploitation of children in either an organised or opportunistic way.

Sexual exploitation is used in gangs to: exert power and control over members; initiate young people into the gang; exchange sexual activity for status or protection; entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women; and inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

* **County lines**

County lines typically involve an inner-city criminal gang travelling to smaller locations to sell drugs. The group will use a single telephone number for customers ordering drugs, operated from outside the area, which becomes their ‘brand’. The gangs tend to use a local property, generally belonging to a vulnerable person, as a base for their activities. This is often taken over by force or coercion, and in some instances victims have left their homes in fear of violence. Perpetrators employ various tactics to evade detection, including rotating gang members between locations (Commonly referred to as clean skins) so they are not identified by law enforcement or competitors, and using women and children to transport drugs in the belief that they are less likely to be stopped and searched. CSE can also be seen in these types of cases and every effort should be taken to identify those young people that are also being sexually exploited as well as being coerced into other criminal behaviour. This could constitute an offence of trafficking either for sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation, and a crime report and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral should be made and investigated.

<https://www.safeguarding-bathnes.org.uk/children/local-safeguarding-children-s-board/4-lscb-multi-agency-policy-and-procedures>

**Organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking**

Young people (often connected) are passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities, where they may be forced/ coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. Often this occurs at ‘parties’ or brothels, and young people who are involved may recruit others into the network. Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised ‘buying and selling’ of young people by offenders.

Organised exploitation varies from spontaneous networking between groups of offenders, to more serious organised crime where young people are effectively ‘sold’. Children are known to be trafficked for sexual exploitation, and this can occur across and within local authority (LA) boundaries, regions and across international borders.

**Familial**

Children can be exploited by their parents and/or other family members.

Parents or other family members may also arrange the abuse of the child and/ or control and facilitate exploitation.

Where one child is being exploited, siblings or other child relatives are at increased risk of suffering exploitation.

**Opportunistic**

This may occur quickly and without any form of grooming. Typically, older males identify vulnerable young people who may already have been groomed or sexually abused. The perpetrator will offer a young person a ‘reward’ or payment in exchange for sexual acts. The perpetrator is often linked with a network of abusive adults.

**Key principles, when responding to child sexual exploitation are:**

* **A child centred approach** which focuses on the child’s needs and involves the young person in decision making, whilst recognising that they may not see themselves as being in an exploitative or abusive situation.
* **Support to parents and families** to make their own plans for the protection of their children, as long as this is consistent with the child’s safety and welfare.
* **The responsibility for criminal acts is with the perpetrator**. Sexual exploitation of children and young people should not be regarded as a criminal act by the child or young person, but as child sexual abuse, where the responsibility lies with the exploiter.
* **The response to CSE is a shared responsibility** among agencies and organisations, including education providers, health services including sexual health services, youth services, children’s services, criminal justice agencies, housing providers, licensing teams and voluntary sector services supporting children and families.
* **An integrated approach** is required at an individual and strategic level. Individual plans for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children so that plans are based on a wide ranging assessment of the needs of each child, the parents’ capacity to care for them in the context of family and wider community circumstances. Strategic work should be underpinned by committed leadership, shared understanding, improved and effective communication, joined up multi-agency working and the effective co-ordination of work by B&NES LSCB.
* **Prevention and early intervention** should be regarded as a key part of agencies’ approaches to sexual exploitation.
* **An emphasis on “engagement” with children and young people.** Our contact with young people must be based on the principle that discussion of risk and the building of trust within a professional relationship will be one of the key ways to reduce risk. We need to recognise that within this that children and young people at risk of CSE will be amongst our most difficult to engage and among the least trustful of professionals.

**Working with Parents/Carers**

Parents and carers play the most crucial role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their children. If a child or young person is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm through sexual exploitation by someone outside the family, this may not necessarily be as a result of parents or carers having difficulties in meeting their child’s needs. Involving parents/families early in interventions can be a significant way forward in protecting and supporting their children.

In some cases, parents and carers will be complicit in the exploitation of their children.

**Identifying Child Sexual Exploitation**

Sexually exploited young people rarely approach the police or social workers directly and disclose that they are being exploited. It is a shared responsibility for all to identify young people vulnerable to, at risk of, or experiencing CSE. It is important that everyone working with young people are aware of the vulnerabilities and risk indicators that can make a young person more vulnerable of coercions and control is significant.

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|  | **S** | **exual identity, wellbeing and choice**Sexually transmitted infections (particularly repeat infections); pregnancy; terminations; changing or out of character sexual behaviour; exploring sexual relationships in an unsafe context or environment; unable to disclose sexual orientation and fearful of societal response. |
|  | **A** | **bsence, truancy and going missing**Truancy from school, including during the school day; missing from home or care, and repeat incidents; travelling outside borough/town when missing; unexplained absences. |
|  | **F** | **amily and home**Sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect; risks of forced marriage or so called honour based violence; female genital mutilation; domestic violence; substance misuse; parental mental health concerns; bereavement; parental sibling criminality; experiences of homelessness or sofa surfing; living in care or temporary accommodation; immigration status. |
|  | **E** | **motional and physical health**Suicidal thoughts, plans and attempts; self harm; low self esteem/confidence/worth; learning difficulties; changing emotional wellbeing and signs of poor mental health; unexplained injuries and changes in physical appearance. |
|  | **G** | **angs, groups, age gaps and crime**Involvement in gangs or gang affected family, peers or siblings; concerns of abusive peer groups; involvement with older individuals or groups; lacking friends in the same age groups; other ‘boyfriends’; sudden changes in peer groups; bullying, both on and offline; friends of young people experiencing CSE. |
|  | **U** | **se of technology and sexual bullying**Sexting, both sending and receiving; being listed on social network pages in relation to sexual activity and, or named in videos; secretive use of the internet/phones/social networking sites; sudden behaviour changes when using the phone or internet; control via phone or internet; multiple or secretive social networking profiles. |
|  | **A** | **lcohol and substances**Reliance on and changing use of substances, both legal and illegal. |
|  | **R** | **eceipt of unexplained gifts or money**Unexplained money, mobile phones, phone credit, items, clothes, money; new nails; travel in taxis; gifts where payment is required at a later date; worries about having debt. |
|  | **D** | **istrust of authority figures**Resistance to communicating with parents, carers, teachers, social workers, health, police and others. |

**London CSE Operating Protocol (June 2017)**

**What to do if you’re worried about a child or young person**

**Using the screening Tool for CSE**

The new screening tool for CSE has been developed to support professionals’ thinking around children who may be at risk or or currently being sexually exploited. The tool has been created to support, rather than replace professional’s judgement. Professional curiosity and professional judgement re key to understanding a child’s live experience and to understand the nature and level of risks they are facing at any given time. The screening tool should initiate debate and discussion. It should support practitioners in considering the specific risks a child is facing, to support their thinking around whether the current plan addresses the child’s needs and if not what areas need to be explored/ covered further.

The new screening tool should be completed when there are some thoughts/concerns that a child may be at risk of or be subject to sexual exploitation or a RHI has been undertaken. You can refer to the Willow Project upon completion of the screening tool when the child/young person needs some additional support. <https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/early-help-services/child-sexual-exploitation>

**The Willow Project**

The Willow project is a service that offers young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) support. A member of the Willow team will work with the young person on a one to one basis to help raise their awareness of CSE and reduce the risk of this form of abuse.

This may entail engaging the young person in work around:-

\* Healthy Relationships and the power dynamics that exist within them.

\* Consent

\* Staying safe online

\* The grooming process

\* Appropriate behaviour

\* Criminal behaviour and the potential consequences of this.

**Making a referral to duty**

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| *Any practitioner* working with a child who they think may be at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation should follow the guidance set out in *Working Together 2018* and share this information with Bath & North East Somerset Council Social Care. You should refer any concerns about a child's welfare to Bath & North East Somerset Council Children's Services [www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/child-protection](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/child-protection). If you believe a child is in immediate risk of harm, you should contact the police. |