**Action for Children Fostering: Safeguarding children and young people in foster care from Child Sexual Exploitation: Policy, Guidance and Procedures**

**Policy**

Action for Children fostering services aim to ensure children and young people living in our foster placements are safe from Child Sexual Exploitation either through prevention if there are risk factors identified or through action and support if a child or young person is being, or has been, sexually exploited.

Action for Children fostering services will support children and young people who are at risk of or involved in CSE to:

- maintain their foster home
- improve their mental, physical and sexual health and emotional well-being
- build trusting relationships with safe carers, family and other adults
- develop skills around keeping safe on the internet and in real life and understand the concept of consent and coercion
- make peer friendships that are positive and safe, not based on sex, drug taking, drinking and criminality
- address self esteem and shame issues caused by the abuse
- get back an interest in life and an abuse free future - to include education, employment and training
- access additional therapeutic input as necessary

This will be achieved through proactive and regular liaison with key agencies to ensure a robust multi agency response to meet the child or young person’s needs and protection from CSE.

**Guidance**

**Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and key principles**

The sexual exploitation of children is defined as: “exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people receive (or a third person or persons) ‘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” (Office of Children’s Commissioner Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs or Groups, November 2012).

Children involved in any form of sexual exploitation should be treated primarily as victims of abuse and their needs carefully assessed. The aim should be to protect them from further harm and they should not be treated as criminals. The primary law enforcement response should be directed at perpetrators who groom children and young people for sexual exploitation.
The government guidance requires agencies to work together to:

- Develop local preventions strategies
- Identify those at risk of sexual exploitation
- Take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of particular children and young people who may be sexually exploited; and
- Take action against those intent on abusing and exploiting children and young people in this way

**Key principles**

- Adopt a **child centred approach**, focusing on the child’s needs, including consideration of children with particular needs or sensitivities, and the fact that children do not always acknowledge what may be an exploitative or abusive situation.
- Adopt a **proactive approach** which is focused on prevention, early identification and intervention as well as disrupting activity and prosecuting perpetrators.
- Focusing on **parenting, family life** (including foster family) and **services** in deciding how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and young people.
- Focusing on the **rights of children and young people** who are entitled to be safeguarded from sexual exploitation.
- Recognising **responsibility for criminal acts**, understanding that children and young people are victims of child sexual abuse and the focus must be on those who coerce, exploit and abuse them.
- Adopt an **integrated approach**, based on Working Together to safeguard Children which sets out a tiered approach to safeguarding; universal, targeted and responsive. Within this, sexual exploitation requires a three pronged approach tackling prevention, protection and prosecution.
- Taking **shared responsibility** through effective joint working between different agencies and professionals underpinned by a strong commitment from managers and a shared understanding of the problem of sexual exploitation and effective coordination by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

**Overview**

**The child or young person:**

- Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background or circumstances.
- Sexual exploitation results in children and young people suffering harm, and causes significant damage to their physical and mental health. It can also have profound and damaging consequences to the child’s family. Parents and carers are often traumatised and under severe stress. Siblings can feel alienated and their self-esteem affected. Family members can themselves suffer serious threats or abuse, intimidation and assault at the hands of perpetrators.
- There are strong links between children involved in sexual exploitation and other behaviours such as running away from home or care, bullying, self-harm, teenage pregnancy and substance misuse. In addition, some children are particularly vulnerable, for example, children with special needs, those in...
residential or foster care., those leaving care, migrant children,
unaccompanied asylum seeking children, victims of forced marriage and
those involved in gangs.

- The majority of sexually exploited children are hidden from public view. They
are unlikely to be loitering or soliciting on the streets. Research and practice
has helped to move the understanding away from a narrow view of seeing
sexual exploitation as ‘a young person standing on the street selling sex’
(DCSF 2009).
- There is also often a presumption that children are sexually exploited by
people they do not know. However evidence shows that this is not the case
and children are often sexually exploited by people with whom they feel they
have a relationship e.g. a boyfriend/girlfriend. Typically they are encouraged
to become isolated from their friends and families and to place trust in the
abusive relationship.
- Due to the nature of the grooming methods used by their abusers, it is very
common for children and young people who are sexually exploited not to
recognise that they are being abused. Practitioners should be aware that
particularly young people aged 16-17 may believe themselves to be acting
voluntarily and will need practitioners to work with them so they can recognise
that they are being sexually exploited.

Important information about sexual exploitation

- CSE is a form of child sexual abuse. It can take many forms from seemingly
‘consensual’ relationship where sex is exchanged for attention,
accommodation or gifts, to serious organised crime and child trafficking.
- What marks out exploitation is an imbalance of power within the relationship
and it is important to recognise this when considering cases of potential CSE.
The perpetrator always holds some kind of power over the victim, increasing
the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops.
- Technology can play a part in sexual exploitation, for example, through its
capability to record abuse and share it with other like- minded individuals or
as a medium to access children and young people in order to groom them. A
common factor in all cases is the lack of free economic or moral choice.
- Sexual exploitation has strong links with other forms of crime, for example,
domestic violence, on line and off line grooming, the distribution of abusive
images of children and child trafficking. Many adults involved in prostitution
describe traumatic childhood experiences that include domestic violence,
neglect, emotional abuse, disrupted schooling and low educational
attainment.
- The perpetrators of sexual exploitation are often well organised and use
sophisticated tactics, such as targeting areas where children and young
people gather without much adult supervision e.g. parks, shopping centres or
sites on the Internet.

Identification of risk and possible indicators

- Anyone who has regular contact with children is in a good position to notice
changes in behaviour and physical signs that may indicate involvement in
sexual exploitation.
- Relevant staff should also know how to monitor on line spaces and be
prepared to request access reports where they are suspicious that a child is
being groomed on line.
The fact that a young person is 16 or 17 years old should not be taken as a sign they are no longer at risk from sexual exploitation.

- Factors linked to sexual exploitation. This list is not exhaustive and not in itself proof of involvement in CSE. These are:
  - **Health** - physical symptoms e.g. bruising, fatigue, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and/or seeking a termination of pregnancy; drug, alcohol or substance misuse, sexually risky behaviour
  - **Education** - truancy, disengagement with education, change in performance
  - **Emotional and behavioural development** - volatile behaviour, mood swings, abusive language, petty crime, secretive behaviour, entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults.
  - **Identity** - low self-image and self-esteem, eating disorder, promiscuity
  - **Family and social relationships** - hostility in relationship with parents/carers, family members, physical aggression towards parents, siblings, family members, foster carers, teachers, peers; placement breakdown; detachment from age appropriate activities, association with others known to be sexually exploited, sexual relationships or an [unexplained relationship with a significantly older person; staying out overnight or returning late with no plausible explanation; persistently missing or missing with no known home base, being missing in area with no known links to child.
  - **Social presentation** - change in appearance, leaving home in clothing unusual for the child.
  - **Parental capacity** - family history of parental neglect or abuse.
  - **Family and environmental factors** - family history of domestic violence; pattern of homelessness
  - **Income** - possession of large amounts of money with no explanation, acquisition of expensive clothing, mobile phone or other possessions without plausible explanation; accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of source of necessary funding.
  - **Family's social integration** - reports that the child has been seen in places known to be used for sexual exploitation.

**Warning signs prior to abuse**

- Living in chaotic or dysfunctional household
- History of abuse
- Recent bereavement or loss
- Gang association through relatives, peers, intimate relationships
- Attending school or friends with others who are sexually exploited
- Learning disabilities
- Unsure about sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to families
- Homeless
- Lacking friends in same age group
- Living in gang neighbourhood
- Living in residential care
- Living in hostel, B&B accommodation or a foyer
Low self-esteem or self-confidence
Young carer

Warning signs of children already being sexually exploited

- Missing from home or care
- Physical injuries
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Involvement in offending
- Repeat sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations
- Absent from school/college
- Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet/social networking sites
- Estranged from family
- Receipt of gifts from unknown sources
- Recruiting others into exploitative situations
- Poor mental health
- Self-harm
- Thoughts of or attempts of suicide

Evidence shows that any child displaying several vulnerabilities from the above lists should be considered to be at high risk of sexual exploitation. Professionals should immediately start an investigation to determine risk, along with preventative and protective action as required.

Procedures

Expectations of Action for Children Team Managers

- To ensure the team adheres to Action for Children safeguarding policy and procedures in relation to CSE to include - being aware, recognition, early intervention, referral, extra requirements for children in placement
- To ensure Missing from Care policy and procedures are followed.
- To ensure the team follow local authority CSE operating protocols and procedures for each children and young people, using appropriate forms and missing from care protocols and to ensure foster carers are aware of these local procedures
- To be aware, through supervision, of all children and young people in placement who are at risk of, or involved in CSE. The Action for Children Risk Assessment matrix should be used to identify children and young people at potential risk.
- To ensure each child who has been identified as at risk of CSE has a risk assessment plan in place which is regularly monitored and up dated. This should be the relevant risk assessment form of the placing local authority.
- To identify and access relevant individual, team and foster carer learning and development requirements in relation to CSE

Expectations of Action for Children supervising social workers

- To identify warning signs of children and young people vulnerable to abuse and recognise behaviours and risk factor of those already being sexually abused. The Action for Children Risk Assessment matrix should be used to identify children and young people at potential risk.
To adhere to Action for Children safeguarding policy and procedures in relation to CSE to include - being aware, recognition, early intervention, referral, extra requirements for children in placement

To adhere to Action for Children Missing from Care policy and procedures

To follow local authority CSE operating protocols and procedures for each children and young people, using appropriate forms and missing from care protocols and to ensure foster carers are aware of these local procedures

To provide 24/7 support, training and regular reflective supervision to foster carers about their roles and responsibilities in working with children and young people at risk of or involved in CSE

To undertake required training in key aspects of CSE and understand their role and responsibilities

To work collaboratively with multi agency partners and specialist staff to ensure a consistent focus on children and young people’s needs and current risks of CSE

To develop strategies, in partnership with key agencies, to protect a child or young person, using relevant local authority CSE risk assessment tools

To record comprehensive chronologies and maintain electronic recordings to ensure robust and up to date information is available and be familiar with local information sharing protocols

**Expectations of foster carers:**

- To be aware of warning signs of children and young people vulnerable to abuse and monitor and report behaviours and risk factor of those already being sexually abused, including being missing from care
- To follow the guidelines in the carers e-handbook and ensure that the household safe care plan has safe internet usage included in it
- To set clear boundaries for children and young people and explain to them why boundaries are there to keep them safe
- To see beyond the child or young person’s behaviour and understand why they may not adhere to boundaries
- To build warm, trusting and open relationships with children and young people
- To contribute to multiagency meetings and ensure regular communication as required
- To be alert to safe mobile and internet usage by the child or young person and seek guidance about concerns as required
- To work closely with the supervising social worker and the whole team around the child or young person to ensure identified risks are managed and monitored
- To undertake methodical recording of information about children and young people’s lifestyle and current risk which may support criminal proceedings and inform and on going plan to ensure their safety
- To support the child or young person to achieve realistic outcomes
- To undertake required training in key aspects of CSE and Missing from Care and understand the role and responsibilities of foster carers