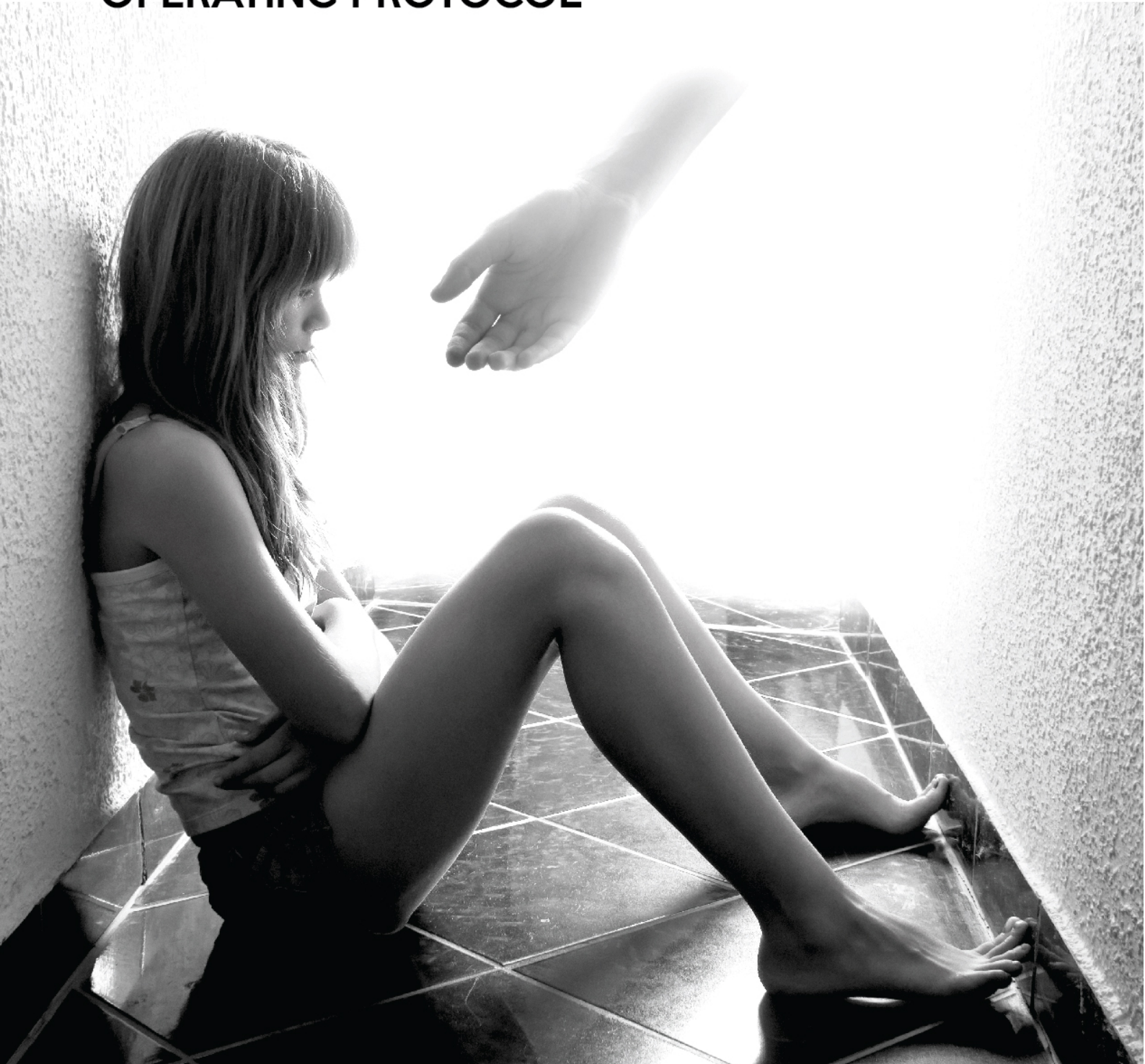


2018 - 2020

PAN CHESHIRE

CHILD EXPLOITATION

OPERATING PROTOCOL



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INTRODUCTION

All agencies across Cheshire are fully committed to safeguarding children and young people from being exploited in any way. This includes sexually and criminally including modern slavery, whilst disrupting and prosecuting individuals who have exploited them. This Protocol provides a set of multi-agency principles for tackling Child Exploitation across Cheshire. An overarching term of Child Exploitation will be used throughout this Protocol to encompass both criminal and sexual exploitation of children in our area.

This protocol aligns with local arrangements to safeguard children, and sets out a clear pathway by which to ensure all organisations work together to provide the best service possible for children and young people either at risk of exploitation or who have experienced exploitation in Cheshire.

There are many developments in each of the Cheshire Local Authority areas in respect of exploitation and therefore practitioners should ensure that they follow their own individual local processes which can be located on the relevant safeguarding websites.

PROTOCOL OBJECTIVES

This Pan Cheshire Multi-Agency Protocol seeks to unify a process of recognition, risk assessment, referral and discussion amongst professionals utilising a single process and document set for all. This Protocol aligns with local geographical area arrangements to safeguard children and sets out a clear pathway by which to ensure all organisations work together to provide the best service possible for all children and young people who are at risk of being exploited across Cheshire. Together we will:

- Identify those who are at risk of being exploited by sharing information at an early stage and assessing risk using a consistent Child Exploitation Screening Tool.
- Ensure partnership agencies work collaboratively including early help to ensure timely and effective interventions to safeguard children who are being, or are at risk of being exploited.
- Work within the community to support families, parents and carers to care for their child and reduce harm where the child's exploitation is contextual.
- To investigate, prosecute and disrupt perpetrators.
- Promote positive physical and emotional health and well-being of individuals identified as being at risk of child exploitation.
- Apply pro-active problem solving to address the risks associated with victims, perpetrators and locations and to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children who are or may be at risk from exploitation.
- Take proactive action against those who are intent on sexually or criminally abusing and exploiting children and young people.
- To develop a shared picture of child exploitation intelligence across Cheshire.

WHAT IS CHILD EXPLOITATION?

Exploitation is a changing picture. Children and young people may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. These threats can take a variety of different forms, including: sexual, physical and emotional abuse; neglect; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, practitioners should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take. Cheshire organisations are aware of the issues around exploitation, but criminals are constantly finding different ways to exploit young people and it is important that partners are alert to this and can demonstrate flexibility when it comes to protecting vulnerable children and young people and tackling offenders.

Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation

The Cheshire LSCB's have adopted the definition of sexual exploitation that is set out in statutory guidance:

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. (The Department of Education, February 2017)

Young People's definition of Child Sexual Exploitation

"Someone taking advantage of you sexually, for their own benefit. Through threats, bribes, violence, humiliation, or by telling you that they love you, they will have the power to get you to do sexual things for their own, or other people's benefit or enjoyment (including: touching or kissing private parts, sex, taking sexual photos). You find out, it isn't OK and they were just pretending to care about you just so they could use you. And you're just a kid and they are abusing you and they shouldn't. It's against the law, if you're under 18. Giving your phone credit, or gifts or making you feel great, it isn't enough, it's just abuse and they are hurting you." (Cheshire young people 2017)

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.

Sexual exploitation is often linked to other issues in the life of a child or young person, or in the wider community context. It should not be regarded as an isolated

issue. This is why a child who may be being sexually exploited should be the subject of a holistic assessment of their needs, like any other child who may be in need, including those who may be suffering significant harm. Similarly where a child has been identified as being at risk of significant harm and/or faces a complex range of difficulties, it is important that professionals consider whether they are also being sexually exploited. Sexual exploitation has links to other types of crime, this includes:

- child trafficking (into, out of and within the UK)
- domestic violence
- sexual violence in intimate relationships
- grooming (both online and offline)
- abusive images of children and their distribution (organised abuse)
- organised sexual abuse of children
- drugs-related offences (dealing, consuming and cultivating)
- gang-related activity
- immigration-related offences
- domestic servitude

There is an imbalance of power within the relationship which marks out an exploitative situation. Technology can play a part in sexual exploitation through its use to record abuse and share it with other likeminded individuals or as a medium to access children and young people in order to groom them. Research has shown that where children and young people have been coerced or tricked into sharing self-generated images, blackmail has been used as a strategy by perpetrators to continue the abuse. This has led to incidences of child suicides. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 introduced a range of new offences that recognised grooming, coercion and control of children.

In 2015 a new offence of sexual communication with a child was introduced, under the Serious Crime Act, to strengthen the powers of the authorities to prosecute cases of grooming.

Definition of Child Criminal Exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of a person under the age of 18 and may coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under that age into any 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 and/or (c) Through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may be exploited even if the activity appears consensual (i.e. moving drugs or the proceeds of drugs from one place to another). Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. (Home Office 2018)

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is that which involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child, (or a third person or persons), receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them completing a task on behalf of another individual or group of individuals; this is often of a criminal nature.

Children are criminally exploited often without the child's immediate recognition, with the child believing that they are in control of the situation. 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.

As with children who are sexually exploited, gangs and networks will often target the most vulnerable young people, including those who are looked after by local authorities, who have a history of going missing, or who have chaotic or traumatic lives. Indicators of child criminal exploitation include:

- 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.

Children are criminally exploited through a combination of:

Pull factors: children performing tasks for others resulting in them gaining accommodation, food, gifts, status or sense of safety, money or drugs; often the hook is through the perpetrator supplying drugs and alcohol to the child or young person.

Push factors: Children escaping from situations where their needs are neglected and there is exposure to unsafe individuals, where there is high family conflict or the absence of a primary attachment figure.

Control: grooming, violence and threats of violence by those exploiting the child particularly when the child or young person is identified by the police, they are expected to take full responsibility for the offences for which they are charged – i.e. possession and supply of illegal substances.

County Lines

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 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 Voluntary and Community sector organisations.

Organised/Networked 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' 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 exploitation and this can occur anywhere within the UK, across local authority boundaries and across international borders.

Practitioners should look to their own safeguarding procedures for information on Trafficked Children and Modern Slavery and the National Referral Mechanism.

On-Line Exploitation

New technologies and social networking tools and platforms, chat rooms, dating sites or online gaming, present further opportunities for social interaction. They also bring new risks and increase the opportunity for offenders to target vulnerable young people. Offender's access social media platforms, for example, live gaming streams Facebook, snapchat and Twitter to identify young people who they can groom.

Technology can facilitate exploitation of children. Where abusive images have been posted on, or shared via, the internet, there is little control over who can access them. This can lead to repeat victimisation.

Exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child realising it. For example, a child or young person is persuaded to post images of themselves on the internet and/or mobile phones. In some cases, the images are subsequently used as a bargaining tool by the perpetrators and threats of violence and intimidation are used as methods of coercion.

Offenders may use technology to exploit children and young people in the following ways:

- Harassment and bullying through text messaging.
- Purchasing mobile phones for victims and sharing their numbers among group or gang members.

- Randomly contacting children via social networking and gaming sites.
- Using 'friends' lists on networking sites of known victims to target children and young people.
- Viewing extreme or violent pornography and discussing it during sexual assaults.
- Posting images of victims with rival gang members to invite a sexual assault as punishment.
- Filming and distributing incidents of rape and sexual violence.
- Distributing lists of children for the purpose of exploitation.

The Child Exploitation On-line Protection (CEOP) Thinkuknow website www.thinkuknow.co.uk provides information for children and young people on how they can protect themselves online. Parents, carers and teachers can also use the website to understand how they can help to protect children in their care while they are using the internet.

Within Cheshire we have developed a dedicated website www.knowandsee.co.uk This includes stories from young people and key messages for children and parents.

ROLE OF MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERS IN IDENTIFYING AND CHALLENGING EXPLOITATION

Multi-Agency Partners come together from the statutory, voluntary, community and faith sectors. They should follow recognised principles to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and young people. Identifying the early warning signs associated with exploitation is vital in reinforcing these principles.

Multi-agency partners will ensure that there are robust processes in place for relevant dissemination of information throughout their organisation, in order that practitioners can receive advice and guidance at the earliest opportunity.

Multi-Agency Partners will be involved in meetings/discussions to share all relevant intelligence and information in all cases where exploitation is suspected. This is to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach which could include instigating interventions or to disrupt and prosecute perpetrators.

The multi-agency meetings/discussions will call upon the diverse skills and experience available from its members to manage the threat posed by exploitation. Members should challenge partners, when appropriate, to ensure the best outcomes for the child or young person.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Work to tackle child exploitation should be grounded in a number of key principles:

- **A child centred approach** – focussing on the child's needs and involving them in decision making whilst acknowledging that they may not recognise they are in a situation of exploitation or abuse
- **Parenting, family life and services** – where interventions are necessary, they should support families in making their own plans for the welfare and protection of their children, as long as this is consistent with the safety and welfare of the child
- **The rights of children and young people** – the UK Government is a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of Children against Exploitation and Abuse
- **Responsibility for criminal acts** – activities undertaken by a child or young person as a result of exploitation should not be regarded as a criminal act by that child or young person
- **An integrated approach** – plans for safeguarding and promoting each child's welfare should be based on a wide ranging assessment of the needs of the child and their family and wider circumstances, and local work to address the issue of exploitation should be integrated into wider work such as through the Strategic Plans.
- **A shared responsibility** –Leadership from relevant boards to ensure a shared understanding and effective co-ordination across partners.
- **Prevention and early intervention** – prevention strategies should be regarded as a key part of agencies' approaches to exploitation.
- **Sharing Information** - To proactively share information with partner agencies in order to act in a timely manner
- **Voice of the Child** - To engage with children and young people to understand local concerns and issues, to develop our prevention, tactical and strategies responses.
- **Work within the schools, colleges and wider community** to make them a safe place for families, parents and carers to care for their child and reduce harm where the child's exploitation is contextual.

PROCESS FOR NEW CASES

Agencies must take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people who may be exploited.

Where a worker becomes aware or concerned that a child is being exploited they should make a record of their observations and concerns and discuss their concerns with their line manager or the agencies person who has safeguarding children / child protection responsibilities or the agencies child exploitation co-ordinator / lead professional.

A child or young person who is suspected of suffering or being at risk of suffering exploitation will be a child in need as per Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and may also be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm. The local continuum of need should be referenced in threshold decisions.

Advice can be sought from Children's Social Care and / or the police, this does not necessarily mean that those agencies will consider this contact as a referral and such contact can be undertaken without directly naming the child or young person.

Anyone who suspects that a child is being exploited, or is at risk of being exploitation should use the child exploitation screening tool. (See local practice guidance for further information).

Exploitation Operational meetings will run alongside the safeguarding process to ensure all information in relation to exploitation is collated at a central point. Practitioners must also consider making direct contact with the police if there are immediate concerns using 101 or 999.

Action is:

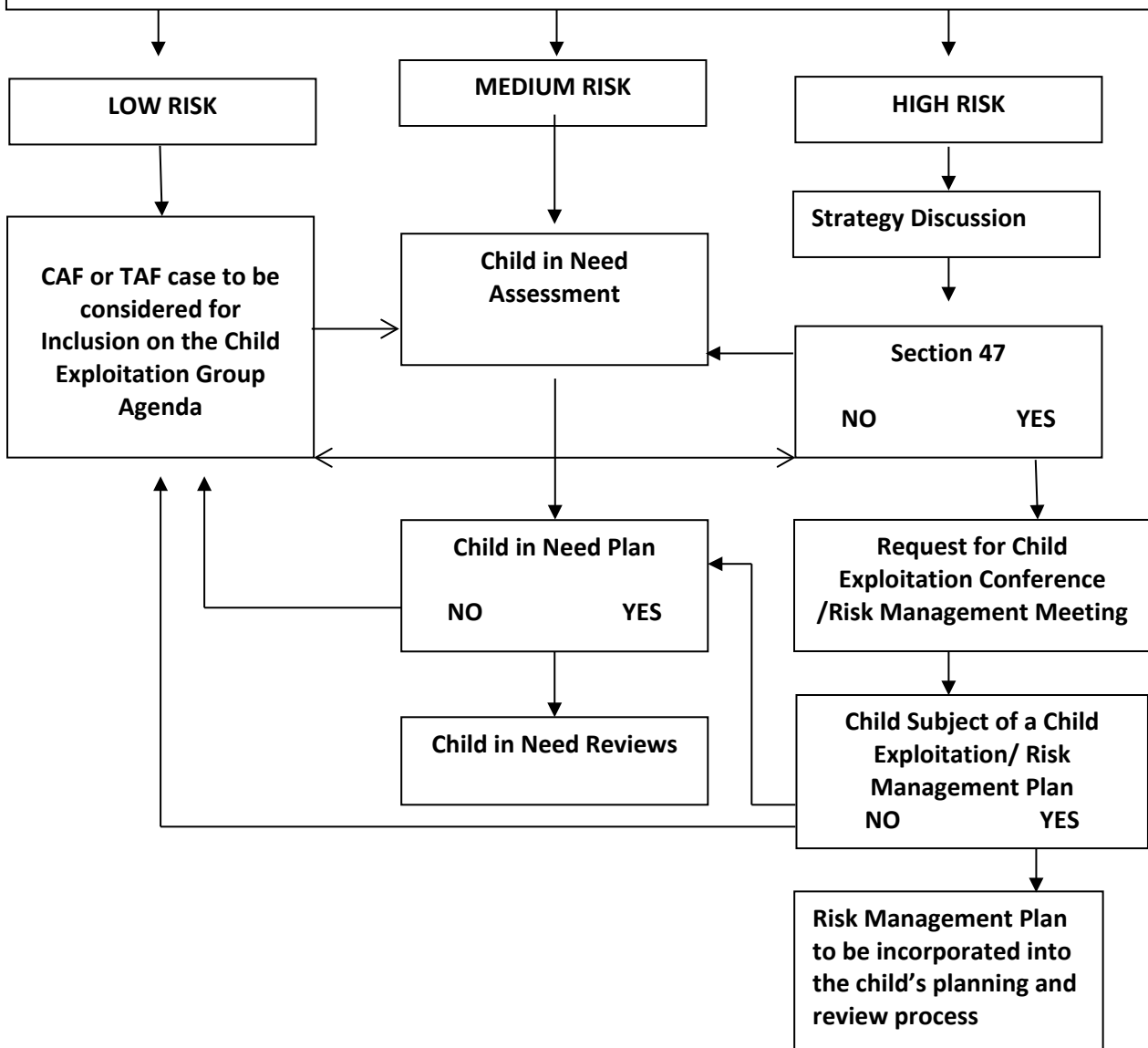
Acknowledge concerns, record observations, complete the tool, talk to your manager, and seek advice from social care and / or the police, in an emergency dial 999.

EXPLOITATION REFERRAL PATHWAY

Where child exploitation, or the risk of it, is suspected, frontline practitioners should complete the Pan Cheshire exploitation Screening Tool. (Accessed via Safeguarding websites) A referral **MUST** be made to Children’s Services using the screening tool via the appropriate routes within the local authorities’ levels of need. The relevant front door will review all information and the level of risk may be amended, either higher or lower from that presented in the referral. If appropriate this will be passed on to a Child Exploitation Operational group

For concerns around locations or adults a separate referral / information sharing form should be completed (accessed via the safeguarding websites) and sent to the Child Exploitation Operational Group. A copy of the completed screening tool should also be sent.

In all cases: Social Care Front door to submit Information Sharing Form and Screening Tool to the Police PPD and Safeguarding Unit where required.



Children in Care

It can be difficult to ascertain which Exploitation team / operational group should discuss the case if a child in care is placed outside of the host authority. This protocol directs that the case should be discussed by the exploitation group where the young person is living. The child's allocated Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer must be informed.

Children in Care placed out of area / Children in Care other Local Authority

When a child is placed out of area and begins to disclose information relating to exploitation then the allocated Social Worker should consider whether a referral to the exploitation operational group is required.

When a child is placed out of area and concerns become apparent that the child may be vulnerable to or at risk of exploitation within the area they are placed, then the Social Worker should liaise with appropriate professionals/agencies local to the child, ensuring that an Exploitation Screening Tool is completed and then seek appropriate support and resources within that area.

Where agencies become aware of exploitation concerns relating to a child who is in the care of another local authority but currently placed in the Cheshire area, they should complete the exploitation screening tool and notify children's social care front door. Children's social care front door will record the concerns on a contact record, liaise with the allocated social worker to ensure that information is shared and the exploitation risks are appropriately managed to consider whether a referral to the exploitation operational group is required.

Links to other Exploitation Operational Groups

The relevant exploitation operational chair will ensure all cross border issues and appropriate information are highlighted promptly to other relevant local authority areas.

PAN CHESHIRE CHILD EXPLOITATION SCREENING TOOL

The Exploitation Screening Tool should be used by all professionals working with children aged 10+. Professionals may also decide it is appropriate to use the tool to screen younger children as nationally children as young as 8 years old have been found to be sexually or criminally exploited in this way.

The Exploitation Screening Tool will help you focus on the specific indicators of Child Exploitation and determine whether further investigations are needed. The tool could be used in supervision, in discussions with parents and carers, with other professionals and with the child.

Many of the indicators of Child Exploitation are also part of normal teenage behaviours and it is the presence of higher risk factors or multiple other factors which may be indications of child sexual or criminal exploitation. **However for younger children the presence of any one risk factor may be seen as a potential indicator of exploitation.**

Professionals need to exercise their own judgement when completing the tool. This includes capturing concerns about which they have some evidence **AND** concerns based on their “gut feelings”. Staff should differentiate between the two and explain this in the notes section.

Professionals should feel free to use the tool creatively, including as part of awareness raising work with children or in engaging parents and carers in understanding the issues.

Where Child Exploitation, or the risk of it, is suspected, frontline practitioners should **always** complete the Pan Cheshire Exploitation Screening Tool and discuss the case with a manager or the designated member of staff for child protection within their own organisation. If after discussion there remain concerns, a referral **MUST** be made to Children’s Services using the screening tool via the appropriate routes within the local authorities’ levels of need.

When practitioners have concerns that a child is linked to a perpetrator(s) or other young people at risk of exploitation or has concerns about a location or adult a separate referral to the Exploitation Operational Group (via the local information form) must also be completed and should include a copy of the completed Exploitation Screening Tool.

http://www.proceduresonline.com/pancheshire/cheshire_east/p_ch_sexual_exploit.html

http://www.proceduresonline.com/pancheshire/halton/p_ch_sexual_exploit.html

http://www.proceduresonline.com/pancheshire/cheshire_west/p_ch_sexual_exploit.html

http://www.proceduresonline.com/pancheshire/warrington/p_ch_sexual_exploit.html