



phoenix
NURTURE > FLOURISH > GROW

SAFEGUARDING

Recognising concerns.
Responding safely.
Protecting Children.

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Categories and Signs of Abuse



1.1 Categories



PHYSICAL ABUSE



EMOTIONAL ABUSE



SEXUAL ABUSE



NEGLECT

1.2 Signs of Abuse in Children:

The following non-specific signs may indicate something is wrong:

- significant change in behaviour
- extreme anger or sadness
- aggressive physical behaviour
- verbally aggressive language
- increased attention-needing behaviour
- suspicious bruises with unsatisfactory explanations
- lack of self-esteem
- self-injury
- depression and/or anxiousness
- age-inappropriate sexual behaviour
- criminality
- substance abuse
- mental health problems
- poor attendance
- unexplainable and/or persistent absences from education

1.3 Risk Indicators

The factors described in this section are frequently found in cases of Child abuse. Their presence is not proof that abuse has occurred, but:

- must be regarded as indicators of the possibility of significant harm.
- justifies the need for careful assessment and discussion with Designated Safeguarding Lead/Person (DSP) as per policy
- may require consultation with and/or referral to Local Authority Children's Services

The absence of such indicators does not mean that abuse, neglect or exploitation has not occurred.

In an abusive relationship the Child may:

- appear frightened of the Parent(s)/Carers
- act in a way that is inappropriate to their age and development (though full account needs to be taken of different patterns of development and specific needs.

The Parent or Carer may:

- persistently avoid Child health promotion services and treatment of the Child's episodic illnesses
- have unrealistic expectations of the Child.
- frequently complain about/to the Child and may fail to provide attention or praise (high criticism/low warmth environment)
- be absent
- misusing substances.
- persistently refuse to allow access on home visits.
- be involved in domestic abuse.

Team Members should be aware of the potential risk to Children when individuals, previously known or suspected to have abused Children, move into the household.

Physical Abuse



2.1 What is Physical Abuse?

Physical abuse is when someone hurts or harms a Child or young person on purpose. It includes:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking
- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning.

It's important to remember that physical abuse is any way of intentionally causing physical harm to a Child or young person. It also includes making up the symptoms of an illness or causing a Child to become unwell.

2.2 Recognising Physical Abuse

The following are often regarded as indicators of concern:

- an explanation which is inconsistent with an injury
- several different explanations provided for an injury.
- unexplained delay in seeking treatment.
- the Parents/Carers are uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury.
- Parents/Carers are absent without good reason when their Child is presented for treatment.
- repeated presentation of minor injuries (which may represent a “cry for help” and if ignored could lead to a more serious injury)
- family use of different doctors and A&E departments
- reluctance to give information or mention previous injuries.

2.3 Bruising

Children can have accidental bruising, but the following must be considered as non-accidental unless there is evidence, or an adequate explanation provided:

- any bruising to a pre-crawling or pre-walking baby
- bruising in or around the mouth, particularly in small babies which may indicate force feeding.
- two simultaneous bruised eyes, without bruising to the forehead, (rarely accidental, though a single bruised eye can be accidental or abusive)
- repeated or multiple bruising on the head or on sites unlikely to be injured accidentally.

-
- variation in colour possibly indicating injuries caused at different times.
 - the outline of an object used e.g., belt marks, handprints, or a hairbrush.
 - bruising or tears around, or behind, the earlobe/s indicating injury by pulling or twisting
 - bruising around the face
 - grasp marks on small Children.
 - bruising on the arms, buttocks and thighs may be an indicator of sexual abuse.

2.4 Bite Marks

Bite marks can leave clear impressions of the teeth. Human bite marks are oval or crescent shaped. Those over 3 cm in diameter are more likely to have been caused by an adult or older Child.

A medical opinion should be sought where there is any doubt over the origin of the bite.

2.5 Burns and Scalds

It can be difficult to distinguish between accidental and non-accidental burns and scalds and will always require experienced medical opinion. Any burn with a clear outline may be suspicious e.g.:

- circular burns from cigarettes (but may be friction burns if along the bony protuberance of the spine)
- linear burns from hot metal rods or electrical fire elements
- burns of uniform depth over a large area
- scalds that have a line indicating immersion or poured liquid (a Child getting into hot water is their own accord will struggle to get out and cause splash marks)
- old scars indicating previous burns/scalds which did not have appropriate treatment or adequate explanation.
- scalds to the buttocks of a small Child, particularly in the absence of burns to the feet, are indicative of dipping into a hot liquid or bath.

2.6 Fractures

Fractures may cause pain, swelling and discolouration over a bone or joint. Non-mobile Children rarely sustain fractures.

There are grounds for concern if:

- the history provided is vague, non-existent, or inconsistent with the fracture type.
- there are associated old fractures.
- medical attention is sought after a period of delay when the fracture has caused symptoms such as swelling, pain or loss of movement.
- there is an unexplained fracture in the first year of life.

2.7 Scars

A large number of scars or scars of different sizes or ages, or on different parts of the body, may suggest abuse.

Emotional Abuse



3.1 What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a Child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a Child.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other kinds of abuse, which means it can be difficult to spot the signs or tell the difference, though it can also happen on its own.

Emotional abuse includes:

- humiliating or constantly criticising a Child
- threatening, shouting at a Child or calling them names
- making the Child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a Child
- blaming and scapegoating
- making a Child perform degrading acts
- not recognising a Child's own individuality or trying to control their lives
- pushing a Child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- exposing a Child to upsetting events or situations, like domestic abuse or drug taking
- failing to promote a Child's social development
- not allowing them to have friends
- persistently ignoring them
- being absent
- manipulating a Child
- never saying anything kind, expressing positive feelings or congratulating a Child on successes
- never showing any emotions in interactions with a Child, also known as emotional neglect.

3.2 Recognising Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse may be difficult to recognise, as the signs are usually behavioural rather than physical. The manifestations of emotional abuse might also indicate the presence of other kinds of abuse. The indicators of emotional abuse are often also associated with other forms of abuse.

The following may be indicators of emotional abuse:

- developmental delay
- insecure or Indiscriminate attachment between a Child and Parent/Carer or failure to attach
- physically or verbally aggressive behaviours towards others
- scapegoated within the family.
- frozen watchfulness, particularly in pre-School Children
- low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- withdrawn or seen as a "loner" – difficulty relating to others.

Sexual Abuse



4.1 What is Sexual Abuse?

When a Child or young person is sexually abused, they're forced, tricked or manipulated into sexual activities. They might not understand that what's happening is abuse or that it's wrong for the abuser to do this to them. They might be afraid to tell someone or behave as though this is normal for them to experience, both are valid for the Child to be displaying. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online.

It's never a Child's fault they were sexually abused – it's important to make sure Children know this.

There are two types of sexual abuse – contact and non-contact abuse. Sexual abuse can happen in person or online.

4.2 Contact abuse

Contact abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a Child or forces the Child to make physical contact with someone else. This includes:

- sexual touching of any part of a Child's body, whether they're clothed or not
- using a body part or object to rape or penetrate a Child
- forcing a Child to take part in sexual activities
- making a Child undress or touch someone else.

Contact abuse can include touching, kissing and oral sex – sexual abuse isn't just penetrative.

4.3 Non-contact abuse

Non-contact abuse is where a Child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and includes:

- exposing or flashing
- showing pornography
- exposing a Child to sexual acts
- making them masturbate
- forcing a Child to make, view or share Child abuse images or videos
- making, viewing or distributing Child abuse images or videos
- forcing a Child to take part in sexual activities or conversations online or through a smartphone.

4.4 Recognising Signs of Sexual Abuse

Children of all ages may be sexually abused and are frequently scared to say anything due to guilt and/or fear. This is particularly difficult for a Child to talk about, and full account should be taken of the cultural sensitivities of any individual Child/family.

Recognition can be difficult unless the Child discloses and is believed. There may be no physical signs and indications are likely to be emotional/behavioural.

Some behavioural indicators associated with this form of abuse are:

- language or behaviour of a sexual nature that you wouldn't expect them to know
- sexually explicit behaviour, play or conversation, inappropriate to the Child's age.
- continual and inappropriate or excessive masturbation
- self-harm (including disordered eating), self-mutilation and suicide attempts.
- an anxious unwillingness to remove clothes e.g., for sports events (but this may be related to cultural norms or physical difficulties)

Some physical indicators associated with this form of abuse are:

- pain or itching of genital area.
- bleeding or discharge
- pregnancy in a younger girl where the identity of the father is not disclosed.
- physical symptoms such as injuries to the genital or anal area, bruising to buttocks, abdomen and thighs, sexually transmitted disease, presence of semen on vagina, anus, external genitalia, or clothing.
- difficulty in walking/sitting that are not usual for the Child.

4.5 Signs of being sexually abused online

If a Child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- behaving as though they have to be online at a certain time, or rushing to get on their phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet
- expressing the need for money, this may be used if they are being blackmailed.

Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse.

Neglect



5.1 What is Neglect?

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a Child's basic needs and the most common form of Child abuse. A Child might be left hungry or dirty, or without proper clothing, shelter, supervision or health care. This can put Children and young people in danger. And it can also have long term effects on their physical and mental wellbeing.

Neglect can be a lot of different things, which can make it hard to spot. But broadly speaking, there are 4 types of neglect.

- physical neglect - A Child's basic needs, such as food, clothing or shelter, are not met or they aren't properly supervised or kept safe.
- educational neglect - A Parent doesn't ensure their Child is given an education.
- emotional neglect - A Child doesn't get the nurture and stimulation they need. This could be through ignoring, humiliating, intimidating or isolating them.
- medical neglect - A Child isn't given proper health care. This includes dental care and refusing or ignoring medical recommendations.

5.2 Recognising Neglect

Evidence of neglect is built up over a period of time and can cover different aspects of Parenting. Indicators include:

- failure by Parents or Carers to meet the basic essential needs e.g., adequate food, clothes, warmth, hygiene, and medical care.
- housing and family issues that may include living in unsuitable home environment, being left alone for a long time or a Child taking on the role of a Carer of other family members.
- a Child seen to be listless, apathetic, and unresponsive with no apparent medical cause.
- failure of Child to grow within normal expected pattern, with accompanying weight loss.
- Child thrives away from home environment.
- Child frequently absent from education
- Child left with adults who are intoxicated or violent.
- Child abandoned or left alone for excessive periods.

Bullying



6.1 What is bullying?

Bullying is intentional behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone.

It can happen anywhere – at School, at home or online. It's usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a Child both physically and emotionally.

Bullying can take different forms. It could include:

- physical bullying: hitting, slapping or pushing someone
- verbal bullying: name calling, gossiping or threatening someone
- non-verbal abuse: hand signs or text messages
- emotional abuse: threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone
- exclusion: ignoring or isolating someone
- undermining, constant criticism or spreading rumours
- controlling or manipulative behaviour
- making silent, hoax or abusive calls.

The following types of bullying are also hate crimes:

- racial, sexual, transphobic or homophobic bullying
- bullying someone because they have a disability

6.2 What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online. Unlike bullying offline, online bullying can follow the Child wherever they go, via social networks, gaming and mobile phone. A person can be bullied online and offline at the same time.

Cyberbullying can include:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
- trolling – the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- excluding Children from online games, activities or friendship groups
- shaming someone online
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular Child
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
- pressuring Children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations.

6.3 Signs of bullying

No single sign will indicate for certain that your Child's being bullied, but watch out for:

- belongings getting 'lost' or damaged
- physical injuries, such as unexplained bruises
- being afraid to go to School, being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping School
- a change in how they are doing at School, including a dip in grades or not handing homework in
- asking for, or stealing, money (to give to whoever's bullying them)
- a change in behaviour, including being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed and withdrawn
- a change in eating or sleeping habits
- bullying others.

6.4 Effects of bullying

The effects of bullying can last into adulthood. At its worst, bullying has driven Children and young people to self-harm and even suicide.

Children who are bullied:

- may develop mental health problems like depression and anxiety
- have fewer friendships
- aren't accepted by their peers
- are wary and suspicious of others
- may experience difficulties with education, attendance, relationships and engagement in daily activities.

All Children who are affected by bullying can suffer harm – whether they are being bullied, bully others or witness bullying. It's important all Children get support if they are being bullied, or if they are displaying bullying behaviours towards others.

Grooming



7.1 What is grooming?

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a Child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them.

Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked.

Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender or race. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time – from weeks to years. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative.

7.2 Types of grooming

Children and young people can be groomed online, in person or both – by a stranger or someone they know. This could be a family member, a friend or someone who has targeted them eg. a teacher, faith group leader or sports coach.

When a Child is groomed online, groomers may hide who they are by sending photos or videos of other people. Sometimes this'll be of someone younger than them to gain the trust of a "peer". They might target one Child online or contact lots of Children very quickly and wait for them to respond.

The relationship a groomer builds can take different forms. This could be:

- a romantic relationship
- as a mentor
- an authority figure
- a dominant and persistent figure.

A groomer can use the same sites, games and apps as young people, spending time learning about a young person's interests and use this to build a relationship with them. Children can be groomed online through:

- social media networks
- text messages and messaging apps
- email
- text, voice and video chats in forums, games and apps.

Whether online or in person, groomers can use tactics like:

- pretending to be younger
- giving advice or showing understanding
- buying gifts
- giving attention
- taking them on trips, outings or holidays.

Groomers might also try and isolate Children from their friends and family, making them feel dependent on them and giving the groomer power and control over them. They might use blackmail to make a Child feel guilt and shame or introduce the idea of 'secrets' to control, frighten and intimidate.

It's important to remember that Children and young people may not understand they've been groomed. They may have complicated feelings, like loyalty, admiration, love, as well as fear, distress and confusion.

7.3 Signs of grooming

It can be difficult to tell if a Child is being groomed – the signs aren't always obvious and may be hidden. Older Children might behave in a way that seems to be "normal" teenage behaviour, masking underlying problems.

Some of the signs you might see include:

- being very secretive about how they're spending their time, including when online
- having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- having money or new things like clothes and mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- underage drinking or drug taking
- spending more or less time online or on their devices
- being upset, withdrawn or distressed
- behaviour of a sexual nature, language or an understanding of sex that's not appropriate for their age
- spending more time away from home or going missing for periods of time.

A Child is unlikely to know they've been groomed. They might be worried or confused and less likely to speak to an adult they trust.

7.4 Radicalisation

Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies. It is in itself a form of harm.

In 2024, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published a new definition of extremism for England (DLHC, 2024). Extremism is defined as the support or promotion of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance that aims to:

- deny or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others
- undermine or overturn the UK's system of democracy and democratic rights
- intentionally create an environment that permits or enables others to achieve either of the above.

Most extremist materials and activities do not meet a terrorism threshold. All organisations that work with Children and young people have a responsibility to protect Children from being harmed by radicalisation and exposure to extremist views.

The process of radicalisation may involve:

- being groomed online or in person
- exploitation, including sexual exploitation
- psychological manipulation
- exposure to violent material and other inappropriate information
- the risk of physical harm or death through extremist acts.

It happens gradually so Children and young people who are affected may not realise what it is that they are being drawn into.

Anyone can be radicalised but there are some factors which may make a young person more vulnerable. These include:

- being easily influenced or impressionable
- having low self-esteem or being isolated
- feeling that rejection, discrimination or injustice is taking place in society
- experiencing community tension amongst different groups
- being disrespectful or angry towards family and peers
- having a strong need for acceptance or belonging
- experiencing grief such as loss of a loved one.

These factors will not always lead to radicalisation.

If a Child or young person is being radicalised their day-to-day behaviour may become increasingly centred around an extremist ideology, group or cause. For example, they may:

- spend increasing amounts of time talking to people with extreme views (this includes online and offline communication)
- change their style of dress or personal appearance
- lose interest in friends and activities that are not associated with the extremist ideology, group or cause
- have material or symbols associated with an extreme cause
- try to recruit others to join the cause.

Domestic Abuse



8.1 What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people who are or have been in a relationship. It can also happen between adults related to one another. It can seriously harm Children and young people, and experiencing domestic abuse is Child abuse.

It's important to remember that domestic abuse:

- can happen inside and outside the home
- can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites
- can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended
- anyone can experience domestic abuse or be a perpetrator of abuse, regardless of sex, gender identity, age, ethnicity, disability or sexuality.

Domestic abuse can be emotional, physical, sexual, economic, coercive or psychological, such as:

- kicking, hitting, punching, cutting or throwing objects
- rape (including in a relationship)
- controlling someone's finances by withholding money or stopping someone earning
- controlling behaviour, like telling someone where they can go and what they can wear
- not letting someone leave the house
- reading emails, text messages or letters
- threatening to kill someone or harm them
- threatening to another family member or pet.

8.2 How does it affect Children?

Children can be victims of domestic abuse. They may see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse at home and/or suffer domestic abuse in their own intimate relationships (teenage relationship abuse). All of which can have a detrimental and long-term impact on their health, well-being, development, and ability to learn. In some cases, Children may blame themselves for the abuse or may have had to leave the family home as a result. Children who witness domestic abuse are at risk of significant harm.

8.3 What are the signs to look out for?

It can be difficult to tell if domestic abuse is happening and those carrying out the abuse can act very different when other people are around. Children and young people might also feel frightened and confused, keeping the abuse to themselves.

Signs that a Child has experienced domestic abuse can include:

- aggression or bullying
- anti-social behaviour, like vandalism
- anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts
- attachment difficulties
- bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia
- constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers
- drug or alcohol use
- eating disorders
- problems in School or trouble learning
- difficulty in managing their emotions beyond what is age appropriate
- withdrawal.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)



9.1 What is Child Sexual Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. It happens when a Child or young person is coerced, manipulated or deceived into sexual activity in exchange for things that they may need or want like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they're in a loving and consensual relationship so the sexual activity may appear consensual. This is called grooming and is a type of abuse. They may trust their abuser and not understand that they're being abused. CSE does not always involve physical contact, and can also occur through the use of technology.

Children and young people can be trafficked into or within the UK for sexual exploitation. They're moved around the country and abused by being forced to take part in sexual activities, often with more than one person. Young people in gangs can also be sexually exploited.

Sometimes abusers use violence and intimidation to frighten or force a Child or young person, making them feel as if they've no choice. They may lend them large sums of money they know can't be repaid or use financial abuse or blackmail to control them.

Anybody can be a perpetrator of CSE, no matter their age, gender or race. The relationship could be framed or viewed as friendship, someone to look up to or romantic. Children and young people who are exploited may also be made to 'find' or coerce others to join groups.

It's important to recognise that although the age of consent is 16 years old, Children and young people over 16 can be exploited. Child Sexual Exploitation is a very complex form of abuse. It can be difficult for Parents and Carers to understand and hard for the young person to acknowledge that they are being exploited.

9.2 Types of Child Sexual Exploitation

CSE can happen in person or online. An abuser will gain a Child's trust or control them through violence or blackmail before moving onto sexually abusing them. This can happen in a short period of time.

When a Child is sexually exploited online they might be persuaded or forced to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- film or stream sexual activities
- have sexual conversations.

Once an abuser has images, video or copies of conversations, they might use threats and blackmail to force a young person to take part in other sexual activity. They may also share the images and videos with others or circulate them online.

Gangs use sexual exploitation:

- to exert power and control
- for initiation
- to use sexual violence as a weapon.

Children or young people might be invited to parties or gatherings with others their own age or adults and given drugs and alcohol. They may be assaulted and sexually abused by one person or multiple perpetrators. The sexual assaults and abuse can be violent, humiliating and degrading. It's important to remember an intoxicated person cannot give consent to sexual activity.

9.3 Signs of CSE and grooming

Signs of CSE and Grooming might be

- unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- being frightened of some people, places or situations.
- being secretive.
- sharp changes in mood or character.
- a sudden change in their family relationships/dynamics.
- having money or things they can't or won't explain, such as hotel key cards or unexplained gifts.
- physical signs of abuse, like bruises or bleeding in their genital or anal area.
- sudden change in physical appearance including clothes and hygiene levels.
- alcohol or drug misuse.
- sexually transmitted infections.
- a sudden and urgent request to go onto contraception or to obtain the 'morning after pill'.
- pregnancy.

Other things that we might notice are:

- having an older person they view as their boyfriend or girlfriend.
- staying out late or overnight.
- having a new group of friends.
- missing from home or care, or stopping going to School or college.
- hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups.
- involved in a gang.
- involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting

Child Trafficking



10.1 What is Child Trafficking?

Trafficking is where Children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for:

- sexual exploitation
- benefit fraud
- forced marriage
- domestic slavery like cleaning, cooking and Childcare
- forced labour in factories or agriculture
- committing crimes, like begging, theft, working on cannabis farms or moving drugs.

Trafficked Children experience many types of abuse and neglect. Traffickers use physical, sexual and emotional abuse as a form of control. Children and young people are also likely to be physically and emotionally neglected and may be sexually exploited.

10.2 Types of Child Trafficking

Traffickers often groom Children, families and communities to gain their trust. They may also threaten families with violence or threats. Traffickers often promise Children and families that they'll have a better future elsewhere.

Trafficking is also an economic crime. Traffickers may ask families for money for providing documents or transport and they'll make a profit from money a Child "earns" through exploitation, forced labour or crime. They'll often be told this money is to pay off a debt they or their family "owe" to the traffickers.

Traffickers may:

- work alone or in small groups, recruiting a small number of Children, often from areas they know and live in
- be medium-sized groups who recruit, move and exploit Children and young people on a small scale
- be large criminal networks that operate internationally with high-level corruption, money laundering and a large numbers of victims.

10.3 Signs of Child Trafficking

Knowing the signs of trafficking can help give a voice to Children. Sometimes Children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Or they might be scared to speak out.

It may not be obvious that a Child has been trafficked but you might notice unusual or unexpected things. They might:

- spend a lot of time doing household chores
- rarely leave their house or have no time for playing
- be orphaned or living apart from their family
- live in low-standard accommodation
- be unsure which country, city or town they're in
- can't or are reluctant to share personal information or where they live
- not be registered with a School or a GP practice
- have no access to their Parents or guardians
- be seen in inappropriate places like brothels or factories
- have money or things you wouldn't expect them to
- have injuries from workplace accidents
- give a prepared story which is very similar to stories given by other Children

Criminal Exploitation



11.1 What is Criminal Exploitation?

Criminal exploitation is Child abuse where Children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes.

11.2 What is a gang?

The word 'gang' means different things in different contexts, the government in their paper 'Safeguarding Children and young people who may be affected by gang activity' distinguishes between peer groups, street gangs and organised criminal gangs.

Peer group - A relatively small and transient social grouping which may or may not describe themselves as a gang depending on the context.

Street gang - Groups of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.

Organised criminal gangs - A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain (financial or otherwise). For most, crime is their occupation.

It's not illegal for a young person to be in a gang – there are different types of 'gang' and not every 'gang' is criminal or dangerous. However, gang membership can be linked to illegal activity, particularly organised criminal gangs involved in trafficking, drug dealing and violent crime.

11.3 What is County Lines?

County Lines is the police term for urban gangs exploiting young people into moving drugs from a hub, normally a large city, into other markets - suburban areas and market and coastal towns - using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines". Children as young as 12 years old have been exploited into carrying drugs for gangs. This can involve Children being trafficked away from their home area, staying in accommodation and selling and manufacturing drugs. This can include:

- airbnb and short term private rental properties
- budget hotels
- the home of a drug user, or other vulnerable person, that is taken over by a criminal gang- this may be referred to as cuckooing.
- if a Child has been trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation then they are a victim of abuse.

County lines is a form of criminal exploitation. It refers to gangs using Children and vulnerable adults to move, hold and sell drugs across the UK.

It's known as county lines because Children travel across counties and use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs.

Children might start because they get money or gifts. It could also happen because of a sexual or violent relationship with someone who's manipulating them.

Involvement in county lines can happen to any Child regardless of age, gender or class, and it happens everywhere.

Although Children might break the law while involved in county lines, it's a form of Child criminal exploitation.

11.4 Indicators that a Child May Be Involved in County Lines Activity

You may be worried about a group or individual being a negative influence on your Child. They could have met someone new online or in person, or it could be someone your Child has known for some time.

It's a cause for concern if you notice gifts, money, drugs or alcohol your Child's received and can't explain. Groomers do this as a way of gaining influence and control.

It's always worth asking where things have come from, even if you're not sure you'll get the honest answer. It shows your Child you've noticed and that you want to talk to them about what's happening. Groomers create situations where a Child 'owes' them money, forcing them to work off the debt through criminal acts.

If your Child gets in trouble with the law, it's understandable that you may feel angry or disappointed. A Child or teenager might take part in illegal activities without fully understanding the consequences. They might think that they're doing these things by choice. If they're aware that what they're doing is wrong, they may feel trapped. Threats and risk of violence against them and their family may make them too scared to speak about what's happening.

11.5 Signs of County Lines

There's specific behaviour related to county lines it's important to talk to a Child and support services about.

- regularly going missing from their School, home or care.
- being aware that they're travelling to unfamiliar locations.
- noticing money, clothes, accessories or mobile phones they've received and been unable to explain why or where they came from.
- having several mobile phone handsets or sim cards

11.6 How are young people recruited?

A Child or young person might be recruited into a gang because of where they live or because of who their family is. They might join because they don't see another option or because they feel like they need protection. Children and young people may become involved in gangs for many reasons, including:

- peer pressure and wanting to fit in with their friends
- they feel respected and important
- they want to feel protected from other gangs, or bullies
- they want to make money, and are promised rewards
- they want to gain status, and feel powerful
- they've been excluded from School and don't feel they have a future

Organised criminal gangs groom Children and young people because they're less suspicious and are given lighter sentences than adults.

Studies show that a Child is more at risk of being recruited if:

- they've been excluded from School
- they have special education needs
- there are problems at home like neglect, domestic abuse or sexual abuse
- they have problems with their mental health
- they live in existing gang territory

11.7 Signs of criminal exploitation

There are some signs to look out for if you're worried a Child or young person has joined a gang, or is being criminally exploited. It might be hard to spot at first, but the sooner you're able to talk to the young person the more you'll be able to help them.

- frequently absent from and doing badly in School.
- going missing from home, staying out late and travelling for unexplained reasons.
- in a relationship or hanging out with someone older than them.
- being angry, aggressive or violent.
- being isolated or withdrawn.
- having unexplained money and buying new things.
- wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours or getting tattoos.
- using new slang words.
- spending more time on social media and being secretive about time online.
- making more calls or sending more texts, possibly on a new phone or phones.
- self-harming and feeling emotionally unwell.
- taking drugs and abusing alcohol.
- committing petty crimes like shop lifting or vandalism.
- unexplained injuries and refusing to seek medical help.
- carrying weapons or having a dangerous breed of dog.

11.8 Dangers of criminal exploitation

It's important to be aware of the risks of criminal exploitation or being involved with a criminal gang. They can use different tactics to recruit and exploit Children and young people, including bribing them with rewards, befriending them, and threatening them, or coercing them.

Dangers of criminal exploitation include:

- being subject to threats, blackmail and violence
- being exploited and forced to commit crimes
- being arrested, including for crimes committed by the gang that they have not directly committed under the law of joint enterprise
- not being able to leave or cut off ties with the gang
- having their safety or the safety of friends and family threatened
- risk of physical harm, rape and sexual abuse
- risk of emotional abuse
- risk of severe injury or being killed
- abusing drugs, alcohol and other substances

Exploiting a Child into committing crimes is abusive. Children who are targeted can also be groomed, physically abused, emotionally abused, sexually exploited or trafficked. However, as Children involved in gangs often commit crimes themselves, sometimes they aren't seen as victims by adults and professionals, despite the harm they have experienced. It's important to spot the signs and act quickly if you think a Child is being groomed or is becoming involved with a gang. Read more about the signs below.

11.9 Carrying weapons

It's against the law to carry a weapon – like knives, guns or acid – even if it's meant for protection. If someone is found with a weapon they'll be arrested. The safest thing to do if there's a threat is to contact the police, not to carry weapons for self-defence.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour or Faith Based abuse & Forced Marriage



12.1 FGM

It is essential that Team Members are aware of FGM practices and the need to look for signs, symptoms, and other indicators of FGM. If a Team Member, in the course of their work, discovers that an act of FGM appears to have been carried out, the Team Member must report this to the Police.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is illegal in England and Wales under the FGM Act 2003 (“the 2003 Act”). It is a form of Child abuse and violence against women. FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons.

Section 5B of the 2003 Act 1 introduces a mandatory reporting duty which requires regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales to report ‘known’ cases of FGM in under 18s which they identify in the course of their professional work to the police. The duty came into force on 31 October 2015.

12.2 What is FGM?

It involves procedures that intentionally alter/injure the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Four types of procedure:

- type 1 Clitoridectomy – partial/total removal of clitoris
- type 2 Excision – partial/total removal of clitoris and labia minora
- type 3 Infibulation entrance to vagina is narrowed by repositioning the inner/outer labia.
- type 4 all other procedures that may include: pricking, piercing, incising, cauterising, and scraping the genital area.

FGM is a form of Child abuse. It’s dangerous and a criminal offence in the UK. We know:

- there are no medical reasons to carry out FGM
- it’s often performed by someone with no medical training, using instruments such as knives, scalpels, scissors, glass or razor blades
- Children are rarely given anaesthetic or antiseptic treatment and are often forcibly restrained
- it’s used to control female sexuality and can cause long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

FGM can happen at different times in a girl or woman’s life, including:

- when a baby is new-born
- during Childhood or as a teenager
- just before marriage
- during pregnancy.

12.3 Why is it carried out?

Belief that:

- FGM brings status/respect to the girl – social acceptance for marriage.
- preserves a girl's virginity.
- part of being a woman / rite of passage
- upholds family honour.
- cleanses and purifies the girl.
- gives a sense of belonging to the community.
- fulfils a religious requirement.
- perpetuates a custom/tradition.
- helps girls be clean / hygienic.
- is cosmetically desirable.
- mistakenly believed to make Childbirth easier.

12.4 Is FGM legal?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is illegal in England and Wales under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. It is recognised as a form of Child abuse and violence against women and girls.

There is a mandatory reporting duty for regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales. Where, in the course of their professional duties, they identify that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl under the age of 18, they must make a report to the police.

The responsibility to make the report rests with the individual professional who becomes aware of the case. This duty should not be transferred to another Team Member ; however, the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Person (DSL/P) or appropriate safeguarding lead should be informed in line with local procedures.

Where there are concerns that a Child may be at risk of FGM, or concerns relating to FGM that do not meet the threshold for mandatory reporting, these should be managed through safeguarding procedures and referred to the DSL/P or appropriate safeguarding lead without delay.

Team Members should be particularly alert to indicators that a Child may be at risk of FGM, including discussions about extended travel abroad, special ceremonies, or other warning signs identified within this guidance. Consideration should also be given to the potential risk to other girls within the family or community.

Where there is an immediate risk of serious harm, concerns should be reported to the police without delay via 999. Under no circumstances should Team Members attempt to physically examine a Child to confirm suspicions of FGM.

12.5 Circumstances and occurrences that may point to FGM happening are:

- a relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.
- a special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
- a female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
- a family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
- a girl has an unexpected or long absence from School.
- a girl struggles to keep up in School.
- a girl runs away – or plans to run away – from home.

12.6 Signs that may indicate a Child has undergone FGM:

- having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
- spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
- appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
- acting differently after an absence from School or college.
- reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
- asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed.

12.7 Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities cannot) consent to the marriage but are coerced into it. Coercion may include physical, psychological, financial, sexual, and emotional pressure. It may also involve physical or sexual violence and abuse.

Forced marriage is a form of abuse and coercion that should not be tolerated. It is an unacceptable practice that infringes upon an individual's rights and freedoms. Since June 2014 forcing someone to marry has become a criminal offence in England and Wales under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

A forced marriage is not the same as an arranged marriage which is common in several cultures. The families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage but the choice of whether or not to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses.

Team Members should never attempt to intervene directly or through a third party. Contact should be made with the Local Authority Safeguarding Hub.

12.8 Honour and Faith based Abuse

Honour based and Faith based abuse can be described as a collection of practices, which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or honour. Such abuse can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honour code.

Honour based abuse might be committed against people who.

- become involved with a boyfriend or girlfriend from a different culture or religion.
- want to get out of an arranged marriage.
- want to get out of a forced marriage.
- wear clothes or take part in activities that might not be considered traditional within a particular culture.

It is a violation of human rights and may be a form of domestic and/or sexual abuse. There is no, and cannot be, honour or justification for abusing the human rights of others.

12.9 One Chance Rule

All Team Members are aware of the 'One Chance' Rule' in relation to forced marriage, FGM and HBV. Team Members recognise they may only have one chance' to speak to a Pupil who is a potential victim and have just one chance to save a life.

It is important to be aware that if the victim is not offered support following disclosure that the 'One Chance' opportunity may be lost. Therefore, all Team Members are aware of their responsibilities and obligations when they become aware of potential forced marriage, FGM and HBV cases.

Non-Recent Abuse



13.1 What is non-recent abuse?

Non-recent Child abuse, sometimes called historical abuse, is when an adult was abused as a Child or young person under the age of 18. Sometimes adults who were abused in Childhood blame themselves or are made to feel it's their fault. But this is never the case: there's no excuse for abuse.

You might have known you were abused for a very long time, or only recently learnt or understood what happened to you. Whether the abuse happened once or hundreds of times, a year or 70 years ago, whatever the circumstances, there's support to help you. It's never too late.

Vulnerable Groups



14.1 Mental Health

Team Members will be aware that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a Child or young person has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, abuse, neglect or exploitation. Whilst only appropriately trained professionals can diagnose mental health conditions, Team Members are often well placed to identify changes in behaviour, emotional wellbeing, presentation or functioning that may indicate a Child or young person is experiencing mental health difficulties or is at risk of developing them.

The impact of trauma, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), abuse, neglect and exploitation on a Child or young person's mental health, wellbeing, behaviour, relationships and outcomes will be covered through safeguarding awareness training and updates. If Team Members have concerns regarding a Child or young person's mental health that may also constitute a safeguarding concern, they must share these concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Person (DSL/P) or Deputy DSL /P without delay.

We recognise the importance of promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing and will signpost Team Members to relevant guidance and resources where appropriate.

When supporting Children and young people experiencing mental health difficulties, settings may draw upon resources such as:

- the Link Programme, Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families
- senior Mental Health Lead Training
- promoting Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing
- rise Above Resources from Public Health England
- every Interaction Matters Webinar
- wellbeing for Education Recovery
- preventing and Tackling Bullying
- promoting and Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools and Colleges

14.2 Private Fostering Arrangements

A private fostering arrangement occurs when someone other than a Parent or close relative cares for a Child for a period of 28 days or more, with the agreement of the Child's Parents. It applies to Children under the age of 16 or 18 if the Child is disabled. Children looked after by the local authority or who are placed in residential Schools, Children's homes or hospitals are not considered to be privately fostered.

Private fostering occurs in all cultures, including British culture and Children may be privately fostered at any age.

The organisation recognises that most privately fostered Children remain safe and well but are aware that safeguarding concerns have been raised in some cases. Therefore, all Team Members are alert to possible safeguarding issues, including the possibility that the Child has been trafficked into the country.

By law, a Parent, private foster Carer, or other persons involved in making a private fostering arrangement must notify Children's services as soon as possible. However, where a Team Member becomes aware that a Pupil may be in a private fostering arrangement, they will raise this with the DSL/ DSP and the DSL will notify MASH of the circumstances.

14.3 Looked after Children and Previously Looked after Children.

Children who are looked after, previously looked after, have a social worker, or are living in kinship care may be more vulnerable to safeguarding risks and may experience additional barriers to learning, wellbeing and positive outcomes. Abuse, neglect and exploitation are among the most common reasons Children become looked after.

Team Members should be aware of the increased vulnerabilities that some of these Children may face and the importance of providing consistent, nurturing and trauma-informed support. Understanding a Child's legal status, care arrangements and the network of professionals involved in their support is essential to promoting their safety, wellbeing and educational progress.

Settings should ensure that relevant Team Members understand the role of key professionals involved with Children who are looked after, previously looked after, have a social worker or are in kinship care, including social workers, Carers, Virtual School Heads and other agencies supporting the Child.

Designated safeguarding leads/persons and other relevant leads should work collaboratively with professionals, families and Carers to ensure Children receive the support they need to thrive and that any safeguarding concerns are identified and responded to promptly.

Team Members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with current statutory guidance, including Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker, Children in Kinship Care and Looked-After Children, and understand how a Child's experiences may impact their development, relationships, behaviour and emotional wellbeing.

14.4 Children Missing Education and Children Absent from Education

Children who are missing education or who are persistently absent from education may be at increased risk of harm. A Child going missing or being absent from education can be a warning sign of a range of safeguarding concerns, including abuse, neglect, Child Sexual Exploitation, Child criminal exploitation, mental health difficulties, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, radicalisation or other forms of harm.

Team Members should be alert to patterns of absence, unexplained missing episodes, changes in presentation or behaviour, and any indicators that a Child may be at risk. Professional curiosity should be exercised where concerns arise, and information should be shared in line with safeguarding procedures.

Accurate and up-to-date contact information plays an important role in safeguarding Children and young people. Settings should seek to maintain reliable emergency contact details wherever reasonably possible.

Team Members should understand that Children who go missing from education, either occasionally or repeatedly, may require additional support and assessment to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Concerns regarding attendance, absence or a Child missing from education should be shared promptly with the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Person (DSL/P) or appropriate safeguarding lead.

Relevant safeguarding training and updates should include awareness of the vulnerabilities associated with Children missing education and the importance of early identification and intervention.

Child on Child Abuse (incl. Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment and HSB)



15.1 Understanding Child-on-Child Abuse

Child-on-Child abuse occurs when a Child or young person is abused by another Child or young person. It can happen both inside and outside of education and care settings, as well as online. Child-on-Child abuse should never be dismissed as banter, a normal part of growing up, or simply a disagreement between Children.

Children and young people may be harmed by their peers in a variety of ways, including:

- domestic abuse within teenage relationship contexts.
- bullying, including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying.
- Child Sexual Exploitation.
- harmful sexual behaviour.
- sexual violence and sexual harassment.
- upskirting.
- serious youth violence.
- initiation, hazing-type violence and abuse.
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos.

The term Child-on-Child abuse can refer to all of these definitions and a Child may experience one or multiple facets of abuse at any one time. Therefore, our response will cut across these definitions and capture the complex web of their experiences.

15.2 Responding to and Preventing Child-on-Child Abuse

The term Child-on-Child abuse can encompass one or more of these forms of abuse. Children may experience multiple forms of harm simultaneously, and safeguarding responses should recognise the complexity of their experiences.

Team Members should be aware that Children often find it difficult to disclose abuse by their peers. Research indicates they are more likely to tell friends than trusted adults. Creating environments in which Children feel safe, respected, listened to and believed is therefore essential.

It is also important to recognise that experiences of Child-on-Child abuse may be influenced by factors such as age, gender, disability, additional needs, culture, sexuality and lived experience. Team Members should remain alert to these vulnerabilities and avoid making assumptions about who may be at risk.

Organisations can help reduce the risk of Child-on-Child abuse by:

- promoting a culture of respect, inclusion and positive relationships.
- maintaining high expectations for behaviour and conduct.
- providing age and developmentally appropriate education on healthy relationships, consent, personal boundaries and online safety.
- ensuring Children know how to raise concerns and seek help.
- providing appropriate support and interventions where risks are identified.
- using risk assessments and safety planning when required.

Any concerns, disclosures or allegations relating to Child-on-Child abuse should be taken seriously and shared promptly with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or appropriate safeguarding lead. Concerns should be managed in line with safeguarding procedures, with advice sought from relevant agencies where necessary.

Both the Child who has experienced harm and the Child who has displayed harmful behaviour may require support, assessment and intervention. Responses should be Child-centred, trauma-informed, proportionate and focused on safeguarding, welfare and positive outcomes for all involved.

Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence and Harmful Sexual Behaviour



16.1 Distinguishing Normal Development from Abuse

The boundary between what is abusive and what is part of normal Childhood or youthful experimentation can be blurred. The determination of whether behaviour is developmental, inappropriate, or abusive will hinge around the related concepts of true consent, power imbalance and exploitation. Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, ranging from normal and developmentally expected, to inappropriate, problematic, abusive, and violent. Problematic, abusive, and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. This may include Children and young people who exhibit a range of sexually problematic behaviour such as indecent exposure, obscene telephone calls, fetishism, bestiality and sexual abuse against adults, peers, or Children. Team Members should be vigilant to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying)
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm.
- sexual violence and sexual harassment
- sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery)
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals
- upskirting

16.2 Developmental Sexual Activity

Encompasses those actions that are to be expected from Children and young people as they move from infancy through to an adult understanding of their physical, emotional, and behavioural relationships with each other. Such sexual activity is essentially information gathering and experience testing. It is characterised by mutuality and of the seeking of consent.

16.3 Behaviour of a Sexual Nature and Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Can be inappropriate socially, inappropriate to development, or both. In considering whether behaviour fits into this category, it is important to consider what negative effects it has on any of the parties involved and what concerns it raises about a Child or young person. It should be recognised that some actions may be motivated by information seeking, but still cause significant upset, confusion, worry, physical damage, etc. It may also be that the behaviour may derive from playing out other sexual situations to which the Child or young person has been exposed. If an act appears to have been inappropriate, there may still be a need for some form of support or intervention. For some Children, educative inputs may be enough to address the behaviour,

Abusive sexual activity includes any behaviour involving coercion, threats, aggression together with secrecy, or where one participant relies on an unequal power base. In order to determine the nature of the incident the following factors more fully should be given consideration. The presence of exploitation in terms of:

- equality – consider differentials of physical, cognitive, and emotional development, power and control and authority, passive and assertive tendencies.
- consent – agreement including all the following:
 - understanding that is proposed based on age, maturity, development level, functioning and experience
 - knowledge of society's standards for what is being proposed.
 - awareness of potential consequences and alternatives
 - assumption that agreements or disagreements will be respected equally.
 - voluntary decision
 - mental competence
- coercion – the young perpetrator who abuses may use techniques like bribing, manipulation and emotional threats of secondary gains and losses that is loss of love, friendship, etc. Some may use physical force, brutality, or the threat of these regardless of victim resistance.

In evaluating sexual behaviour of Children and young people, the above information should be used only as a guide.

16.4 Youth produced sexual imagery (sexting)

The sharing of images and videos through social media, messaging applications and other online platforms is common amongst Children and young people. However, technology can also be used to create, possess and share nude or semi-nude images and videos. Incidents involving Children and young people should always be considered within a safeguarding context.

The term youth produced sexual imagery, also referred to as sharing nudes and semi-nudes, can include situations where:

- a Child or young person creates and shares a nude or semi-nude image or video of themselves with another Child or young person.
- a Child or young person shares a nude or semi-nude image or video of another Child or young person.
- a Child or young person possesses a nude or semi-nude image or video of another Child or young person.

Children may share images consensually, under pressure from others, through coercion, grooming, exploitation, bullying, abusive relationships, or as part of harmful sexual behaviour. Each situation should therefore be considered on its individual circumstances, with the welfare and safety of those involved remaining the primary consideration.

All concerns relating to youth produced sexual imagery should be treated seriously and responded to in line with safeguarding procedures and current guidance, including *Sharing Nudes and Semi-Nudes: Advice for Education Settings Working with Children and Young People*.

Team Members who become aware of an incident should report their concerns promptly to the DSL/P. Team Members should not deliberately view, copy, print, forward, store or share images unless specifically directed to do so as part of an agreed safeguarding response.

Particular concern may arise where:

- an adult is involved.
- a Child appears to have been coerced, groomed, manipulated or threatened.
- the Child may lack capacity to consent.
- the imagery depicts sexual acts, violence or content that is not age-appropriate.
- the Child involved is particularly vulnerable due to age, disability, additional needs or other safeguarding concerns.
- the imagery has been widely distributed.
- there are concerns that a Child is at risk of significant harm.

In such circumstances, advice and support may be sought from Children's social care, the police and other relevant agencies, in line with local safeguarding arrangements.

All incidents should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the context, the wishes and feelings of the Child, any vulnerabilities present, the level of risk, and the support required. Appropriate records should be maintained in accordance with safeguarding recording procedures.

Digital Risks



17.1 Online Abuse

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet. It can happen across any device that's connected to the web, like computers, tablets and mobile phones. And it can happen anywhere online, including:

- social media
- text messages and messaging apps
- emails
- online chats
- online gaming
- live-streaming sites.

Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know or from strangers. It might be part of other abuse which is taking place offline, like bullying or grooming. Or the abuse might only happen online.

17.2 Types of online abuse

Children and young people might experience different types of online abuse, such as:

- cyberbullying
- emotional abuse
- grooming
- sexting
- sexual abuse

17.3 Signs of online abuse

A Child or young person experiencing abuse online might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they are talking to and what they are doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet

Some of the signs of online abuse are similar to those seen in other forms of abuse, including:

- cyberbullying
- grooming
- sexual abuse
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Children and young people increasingly use digital devices, online platforms, social media, gaming environments and communication applications in their daily lives. Whilst technology provides many benefits, it can also create opportunities for harm, including bullying, exploitation, grooming, abuse, radicalisation and exposure to inappropriate content.

All Team Members have a role in helping to keep Children and young people safe online. This includes promoting safe online behaviours, remaining alert to indicators of online risk, responding appropriately to concerns and following safeguarding procedures where risks are identified.

Settings should ensure that Children, young people, families and Team Members receive appropriate information, guidance and support to help them understand online risks and use technology safely. Team Members should also receive regular training and updates in relation to online safety, including emerging technologies, filtering and monitoring arrangements, and safeguarding risks associated with online activity.

17.4 Signs of being sexually abused online

If a Child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- behaving as though they have to be online at a certain time, or rushing to get on their phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet
- expressing the need for money, this may be used if they are being blackmailed.

Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse.

17.5 AI and technology

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies are increasingly being used in education, care and support services. Whilst these technologies can provide benefits, they also present safeguarding, privacy, information security and online safety risks that must be understood and appropriately managed.

Team Members should be aware that AI technologies can generate content, images, audio and information that may appear convincing but may not always be accurate, appropriate or safe. Professional judgement should always be applied when using information generated by AI tools.

The use of AI and technology should align with existing safeguarding, data protection, online safety and information governance requirements. This includes ensuring that personal information is handled appropriately and that Children, young people and vulnerable adults are protected from potential harm.

Potential risks associated with AI and emerging technologies may include:

- exposure to inappropriate, harmful or misleading content.
- inaccurate or biased information.
- privacy and data protection breaches.
- online exploitation, grooming or manipulation.
- cybersecurity risks.
- creation or sharing of harmful, deceptive or fabricated content.
- reduced critical thinking or over-reliance on technology.

Where Children and young people access AI-enabled technologies, settings should ensure appropriate supervision, monitoring, education and safeguards are in place. Team Members should support Children and young people to develop digital literacy skills, understand online risks, and critically evaluate information obtained through technology.

Organisations should ensure Team Members receive appropriate guidance and training regarding the safe, ethical and responsible use of AI and emerging technologies. Local policies, acceptable use agreements and online safety procedures should reflect the evolving nature of technology and emerging safeguarding risks.

Further information can be found through guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE), Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), the UK Safer Internet Centre, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

17.6 Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to Child protection that focuses on risks young people face outside the home, such as in neighbourhoods, Schools, and online. It recognizes that as teenagers gain independence, they are vulnerable to extra-familial harm (e.g., exploitation, gangs, trafficking), shifting the focus from only familial care to addressing environmental dangers.

Key aspects of this approach include:

- **targeting Environments:** Interventions are directed at places where abuse occurs (e.g., parks, shopping centres) rather than just on the Child or family unit.
- **addressing Extra-Familial Harm:** It specifically addresses risks like criminal/sexual exploitation, Child-on-Child abuse, and radicalization.
- **partnership Working:** Involves collaborating with community members, businesses, and transport providers who have influence over these public spaces.
- **changing Practice:** It aims to move child protection systems beyond the home and into the wider contexts where children experience harm.

17.7 Disguised compliance

- **disguised compliance** occurs when Parents or Carers appear to cooperate with Child welfare services to avoid suspicion, allay concerns, and stop professional intervention, while failing to make meaningful changes to improve a Child's safety. It is a dangerous, often subconscious, tactic that can cause case drift and leave Children at risk.

Key Indicators and Behaviours include:

- **superficial Agreement:** Appearing to agree with improvements needed, but making no significant changes.
- **controlling Interactions:** Trying to dominate meetings, choosing meeting locations, or focusing on their own issues rather than the Child's.
- **avoidance Tactics:** Frequently cancelling, rescheduling, or missing appointments with social workers or other professionals.
- **partial Compliance:** Doing just enough to appease professionals, such as attending appointments but not making, or sustaining, behavioural changes.
- **over-eagerness to Please:** Agreeing immediately and without challenge to avoid in-depth scrutiny.

17.8 Adultification

Adultification is a form of bias where Children, particularly Black Children and those from minority ethnic backgrounds, are treated as older, more mature, and less innocent than they are. This harmful perception often results in overlooking their vulnerability, neglecting safeguarding needs, and imposing harsher, adult-like consequences for behaviour.

Key Aspects of Adultification:

- **racial and Social Bias:** It heavily affects Black Children, who may be viewed as threats rather than Children in need of protection.
- **safeguarding Failures:** Professionals may view Children as “streetwise” or “grown-up” leading to ignored abuse, lack of protection, and failure to recognize them as Children
- **criminalization:** Adultified Children are often treated as more culpable for their actions, contributing to the School-to-prison pipeline.
- **impact on Wellbeing:** This bias causes significant psychological harm and forces Children into age-inappropriate, responsible roles.

Examples include assuming a Child involved in a gang can protect themselves (neglecting duty of care) or questioning a young person’s true age to justify harsher treatment. It is a critical issue in Child protection and education

17.9 Additional Resources

NSPCC: nspcc.org.uk

Childline: childline.org.uk

Anti-Bullying Alliance: anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Educate against hate: educateagainsthate.com

Provision for transgender Pupils: Guidance for maintained Schools and academies in England on provision for transgender Pupils November 2022

Childnet International – making the internet a great and safe place for Children. Includes resources for professionals and Parents/Carers: childnet.com

Thinkuknow (includes resources for professionals and Parents/Carers): thinkuknow.co.uk

Safer Internet Centre: saferinternet.org.uk

Refuge runs the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, available 24 hours a day **0808 2000 247** and its website offers guidance and support for potential victims.

Refuge: refuge.org.uk

