



## Child Criminal Exploitation Practitioner Guidance

### **Definition of Child Criminal Exploitation**

*Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal or sexual activity. This will be carried out in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and /or for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator, and/or through violence or threat of violence.*

*The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.*

*Criminal Exploitation of children is broader than county lines and includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft.*

### **Child Criminal Exploitation can include:**

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Modern slavery
- Child trafficking

Modern Slavery and child trafficking involves the recruitment, movement or transportation of children from, to, and within the UK who are then exploited, forced to work, or sold. Children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, benefit fraud, forced marriage, domestic servitude, forced labour in factories or agriculture, criminal activity such as pickpocketing, begging, transporting drugs, working on cannabis farms, selling pirated DVDs and bag theft.

- Violence and gangs
- Radicalisation and extremism
- Exploitation through county lines activity and 'cuckooing'

The use of the term "gang" has a formal meaning within Criminal Exploitation. It should not be confused with a group of young people who chose to hang around together in public. To use the term "gang", the group must see themselves (and are seen by others) as a noticeable group that engages in a range of criminal activity that involves some violence. The gang will often identify with a territory and will conflict with one or more gangs with a similar profile. When involved with gangs or the victim of a gang, young people can become victims of bullying, domestic abuse and violence, rape and sexual assault, knife and gun crime, and Honour based violence.

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas (within the UK), using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". Urban gangs establish a base in the market

location, often by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force and/or coercion, in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing'.

The Home Office has produced a guidance: [Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance](#) for frontline professionals on dealing with county lines, part of the government's approach to ending gang violence and exploitation.

### **Child Criminal Exploitation is complex and covers many areas of child abuse.**

The following links will take practitioners to further information and guidance:

<https://bournemouth-poole-lscb.org.uk/child-exploitation/child-exploitation-2/>

<https://bournemouth-poole-lscb.org.uk/child-criminal-exploitation-toolkit/>

<https://bournemouth-poole-lscb.org.uk/child-exploitation/child-victims-of-trafficking-and-modern-slavery/>

<https://bournemouth-poole-lscb.org.uk/child-exploitation/supporting-children-and-young-people-vulnerable-to-violent-extremism/>

<https://bournemouth-poole-lscb.org.uk/events-and-campaigns/county-lines/>

<https://www.dorset.police.uk/help-advice-crime-prevention/safety-in-your-community/county-lines/>

### **Vulnerable Children**

Any child or young person can become the victim of Criminal Exploitation, but research has shown that some children are more likely to be abused in this way than others and practitioners should be particularly aware of the vulnerabilities of the following groups:

- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories)
- Having prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example)
- Having mental health or substance misuse issues
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Being excluded from mainstream education and /or attending specialist provision
- Social isolation or social difficulties
- Economic vulnerability
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status

### **Screening children and Young people at potential risk from Child Criminal Exploitation**

All practitioners working with children and families will complete Child Criminal Exploitation (CE) risk assessments where there is reason to believe a child or young person might be at risk of Criminal Exploitation. The Child Exploitation Screening Tool will help practitioners to

decide whether to complete a full risk assessment. If the screening indicates that a full risk assessment should be undertaken, the practitioner will need to first check with any other professionals involved whether an assessment has already been completed.

### **Completing and scoring the Criminal Exploitation risk assessment**

The Child Exploitation (CE) Risk Assessment document should be used to assess levels of risk for all exploitation of children and young people. Consent should be gained prior to commencing CE Risk Assessment, unless there is a defensible rationale for not seeking consent ie gaining consent is likely to place children/ young people at possible risk of harm. Children and young people and their carers will be involved in the completion of the risk assessment.

In all cases the risk assessment must be completed as fully as possible **within 5 working days**, and emailed to [MASH@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:MASH@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

The practitioners must be clear about the supporting evidence for information. When information is highly concerning, and an immediate risk of Significant harm is indicated the assessment must still be fully completed to give a comprehensive understanding of the risks. This will help when planning how to reduce them. Children and young people can be exploited in different ways at the same time and by more than one person.

The Criminal Exploitation Scoring is a guide for practitioners who are assessing the level of risk of exploitation posed to an individual child. Once complete, practitioners should plot the number of questions answered positively against the total score to give the initial indication of risk. The risk level is achieved using a combination of the final score alongside the volume of risk and vulnerability indicators. However, the most important indicator of risk is the combination of all of the information, the views of the child and their family and the professional judgement of the assessing practitioner and others working with them.

The grading chart is designed so that there is no rigid score for each risk level, understanding that risk can be influenced by various and diverse factors. The intention of the grading chart is to allow professionals the discretion to move within risk levels after considering all the available information.

### **Emerging Risk when children are not an open case to Social Care**

When the Risk Assessment indicates that there is an 'Emerging Risk' a Lead Practitioner must be identified. The Lead Practitioner will arrange a Team around the Family/ Multi- Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting to consider the risks further and to formulate a risk reduction plan. The MACE meeting template should be used to ensure that potential risks are explicitly addressed. The work should be managed through the Team Around the Family (TAF) process.

At each meeting, the concerns identified in the Risk Assessment should be discussed with the child or young person (where this is considered appropriate), the family, and the other professionals involved in the TAF. The Risk Assessment should be updated as new or changed information comes to light.

Where the risk of Child Exploitation is 'Emerging' or 'Reducing', the frequency and requirement for a further Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meeting will be agreed at each meeting.

The CE risk assessment should be reviewed on a three monthly basis until risk is reduced or unless there is a significant change in presenting circumstances. If the risk increases to Moderate or Significant the procedures below must be followed.

### **Emerging risk where a child is an open case to Social Care**

The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meeting will be held in addition to other established planning processes such as Looked After Children planning processes, Child protection or Child in Need planning processes.

### **Moderate or Significant risk for children not already known to Social Care**

Where a Moderate or Significant risk is identified by the practitioner they must refer to the Social Care MASH Team using an Inter-Agency Referral form to accompany the Risk Assessment. Where there is an Immediate significant risk, the practitioner must telephone the MASH to discuss the concerns and an immediate response. In all cases the Risk Assessment in respect of the child or young person will be discussed at the Moderation Meeting on the following working day (see below). The practitioner completing the risk assessment (or their manager) will be included in the Moderation Meeting, they will be contacted by the organising manager to discuss attendance either in person or through conference call.

If the children and young people are confirmed at Moderate risk, the moderation meeting will determine whether a referral is made to Children's Social Care for an assessment at Level 4. Not all cases will require an assessment at Level 4 and can be supported at Level 3 services / Early help support. Should the risk escalate to Significant, it can be referred back to MASH with an updated CE Risk Assessment, for consideration at moderation meeting.

If the children and young people are confirmed at Significant risk, following moderation, then a strategy meeting will be held. This will lead to a social worker undertaking a Child and Family Assessment in all cases. If a recent strategy meeting is held around similar concerns, there can be an informed decision around risk management taken by Social Care.

### **Moderate or Significant risk for children already known to Social Care.**

In these instances, the allocated social worker will usually be the person taking the CE assessment forward. However, when another practitioner undertakes the Risk Assessment and it indicates Moderate or Significant risk it must be passed to the allocated social worker within one working day. The Risk Assessment must then be emailed to MASH

This assessment will be considered at the Moderation Meeting on the next working day.

## **Moderation Meetings**

Daily 'Moderation Meetings' will take place in the MASH between relevant Social Care Manager (or Partner Practitioner/ Manager), MASH Safeguarding Health Advisor and Police Officer at 10.00am to consider Risk Assessments reaching Moderate or Significant Risk. This consistent approach will ensure that risks are considered in a standardised way across the authority by experienced managers. This also allows for early identification of trends, hotspots and links. It is important that when practitioners send the completed Risk Assessment they ensure their and their Manager's availability to attend at 10.00am. They will then be party to the discussion and decision making around risk

This meeting will confirm the level of risk and ensure that immediate protective action can be taken if required. If a Strategy Meeting is required, this will then be arranged by relevant Children's Social Care team using existing processes.

Where there is disagreement about the risk level, the MASH escalation process will be followed but the higher level of risk will be temporarily agreed until the escalation has been considered and a resolution reached.

## **Children who are newly assessed and confirmed at Moderate or Significant Risk of CE**

A Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meeting will be held within 15 working days of the Risk Assessment, followed by regular reviews until the risk is reduced.

## **Risk Reduction for all children through Multi-Agency planning and services. The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meeting**

Whatever level of risk the Risk Assessment has identified, Emerging, Moderate or Significant, a Risk Management plan must be put in place. This will take place through the MACE meeting using the agreed template. The initial meeting will take place within 15 days of the Risk Assessment being completed. It is important that all involved partners attend these meetings and contribute to planning as each agency has a responsibility to consider what services they can provide to reduce the risks. A member of Social Care CE team will always be invited to MACE meetings where the risk is Significant as they can offer expertise or services. The child/young person and their parents or carers will be invited to all or part of the meeting when possible. There is a challenge in involving young people in their planning as they may not recognise the risks and the benefits of their attendance must be carefully considered especially in the initial stages of intervention.

At the meeting it is important to be open about the concerns but mindful not to share confidential intelligence that might interfere with any Police Action planned to pursue or disrupt the perpetrator/s.

The meeting will consider the Risk Assessment and use this as a basis for discussion. The information will be considered in respect of:

- Protection of the child/young person
- Pursuing and disruption of the perpetrator

- Wider preventative actions that can be taken to minimise risk to the child and disrupt the perpetrator
- Consider actions that can be taken to manage high risk locations

The meeting will consider:

- What we are worried about
- What is working well
- What needs to happen to keep the child/young person safer
- Who is responsible for completing any actions?
- The timeframe for completing the actions with specific timescales

If there is new, verifiable information shared that raises the risk from Emerging to Moderate or Significant, the Risk Assessment should be further updated and sent into MASH for moderation as per these procedures.

## **Reviews**

MACE meetings will review progress at intervals of 6 and 12 weeks, dependant on risk. These maximum timeframes are set to ensure that the plan is responsive and progressed at pace and reflects the changing nature of risks in this area of work. It is recognised risks can escalate very quickly and some situations will need to be reviewed far more frequently.

## **Chairing of MACEs**

For children and young people where the risks are assessed as Emerging, where there is no Social Care involvement, the meetings will be chaired by the lead professional.

When a child is assessed as at Moderate or Significant risk, the meetings will be chaired by Children's Social Care Team managers who have operational management responsibility for the case. For those at Significant risk, Service Manager will determine if they will chair the MACE.