



Child Exploitation Practice Guidance and Protocol



Date of Approval	December 2021
Status	AGREED
Review Date	December 2024 (with annual desktop review)
Approving Body/Group	Exploitation Strategic Priority Group

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Introduction & Purpose

This document is for practitioners, volunteers and managers in organisations and agencies working with children and families in Shropshire. It provides evidence-based practice guidance and outlines the local multi-agency procedure in Shropshire for identifying, preventing, and responding to the exploitation of children.

All front line staff, volunteers and managers working with children and their families should receive appropriate learning and development opportunities appropriate to their role in line with the tiers outlined in the [Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership Learning and Development Strategy](#).

In addition to reading this document, please ensure you have read and are familiar with:

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#). Exploitation is recognised alongside abuse and neglect throughout the document.
- [Home Office Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance](#). In particular:
 - Chapter 9: Child Victims
 - Annex A: Indicators of child victims
 - Annex D: Working with vulnerable people
- [West Midlands Regional Safeguarding Procedures](#); in particular:
 - Children affected by Exploitation and Trafficking (including Gangs) (2.1)
 - Safeguarding children and young people against radicalisation and violent extremism (2.2)
 - Shropshire Thresholds Document
 - West Mercia Missing Pathway
 - Local Substance Misuse Tools and Pathways

[The Escalation Policy: Resolution of Professional Disagreements](#) should be applied if there are professional differences of opinion or concerns about practice decisions, actions, or lack of actions to a referral, assessment, or the progress of a child's plan.

Ensuring equality

No child or group of children must be treated any less favourably than others in being able to access effective services which meet their particular needs.¹ Practice and service provision must be accessible, relevant, and sensitive to the needs of all children and young people from all groups; and particularly those who are:

- protected under the Equality Act 2010;
- subject to more than one form of discrimination (also known as intersectionality²);
- less likely to have their abuse identified or responded to.

Ensuring equality includes staff and volunteers working at all levels of organisations, being aware of and continuing to work to avoid and tackle unconscious bias in their contact with and provision of support to children and families.

Aims and Principles

Aims

- To identify children at risk of being exploited.

¹ HM Government: (2018:p11) [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

² See [Oxford English Dictionary's](#) sociological meaning of intersectionality

- To ensure a child-centred approach, action will be focused on the child's needs. This includes consideration of children with particular vulnerabilities or sensitivities, and the fact that children do not always acknowledge what may be an exploitative or abusive situation.
- To ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people who are, or may be, at risk from exploitation.
- To work collaboratively to ensure that children and young people at risk of being exploited are safeguarded.
- To provide timely and effective interventions with children and families to safeguard those vulnerable to exploitation.
- To apply pro-active problem solving to address the risks associated with victims, offenders, locations, and themes.
- To act against those intent on abusing and exploiting children and young people by prosecuting and disrupting perpetrators.
- To raise awareness and provide preventative education for the welfare of children and young people who are, or may be, exploited.

Principles

The principles underpinning a multi-agency response to the exploitation of children and young people include:

- Child sexual exploitation is a form of Child Sexual Abuse;
- Exploited children should be treated as victims of abuse, not as offenders;
- Exploitation includes sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and, in some cases, neglect;
- Children do not make informed choices to enter or remain in exploitation, but do so from coercion, control, enticement, manipulation, or desperation;
- Children who are, or at risk of, being exploited will have varying levels of needs. They may have multiple vulnerabilities and therefore an appropriate multi-agency response and effective coordination and communication is essential;
- Law enforcement activity should be prioritised towards those individuals who pose a risk of and cause harm to children who are exploited. These individuals are often adults but could also be other children. Children who cause harm may also be victims themselves and the regional procedure: [“Children who abuse others”](#) should be followed.

Governance

Addressing exploitation is a strategic priority of the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership; as outlined in its [Strategic Plan and Priorities](#).

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership Exploitation Group is responsible for the governance and strategic multi-agency oversight of the response to exploitation in Shropshire. The [Child Exploitation Panel](#) Chair is a member of and reports to this group.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Definitions

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership have agreed the below definitions, which take account of national definitions but recognise that children and adults can be at risk of exploitation and that exploitation can manifest in many ways (as not all national definitions reflect this).

What is exploitation?

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership (SSCP) have agreed the following definition:

Exploitation is a form of abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child, young person, or adult (including those with care and support needs) into any activity that results in financial or other advantage for the perpetrator or facilitator. Activity includes arranging or facilitating the involvement or travel (trafficking) of a child, young person, or adult (including those with care and support needs)

Specific types of exploitation include:

- Modern Slavery (including human trafficking)
- Sexual Exploitation
- Criminal Exploitation
- Financial Exploitation (including scams, doorstep crime and rogue traders)
- Radicalisation to commit acts of terrorism
- Any other Exploitation that enables services or benefits of any kind, including:
 - Removal of organs
 - Forced marriage
 - Illegal adoption

The victim may still be exploited even if the activities that they are engaging in appear consensual.

Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Multiple types of exploitation can occur alongside one another or as part of other forms of abuse.

For examples of how children are exploited, please refer to [How children become exploited](#) below.

Specific Types of Exploitation

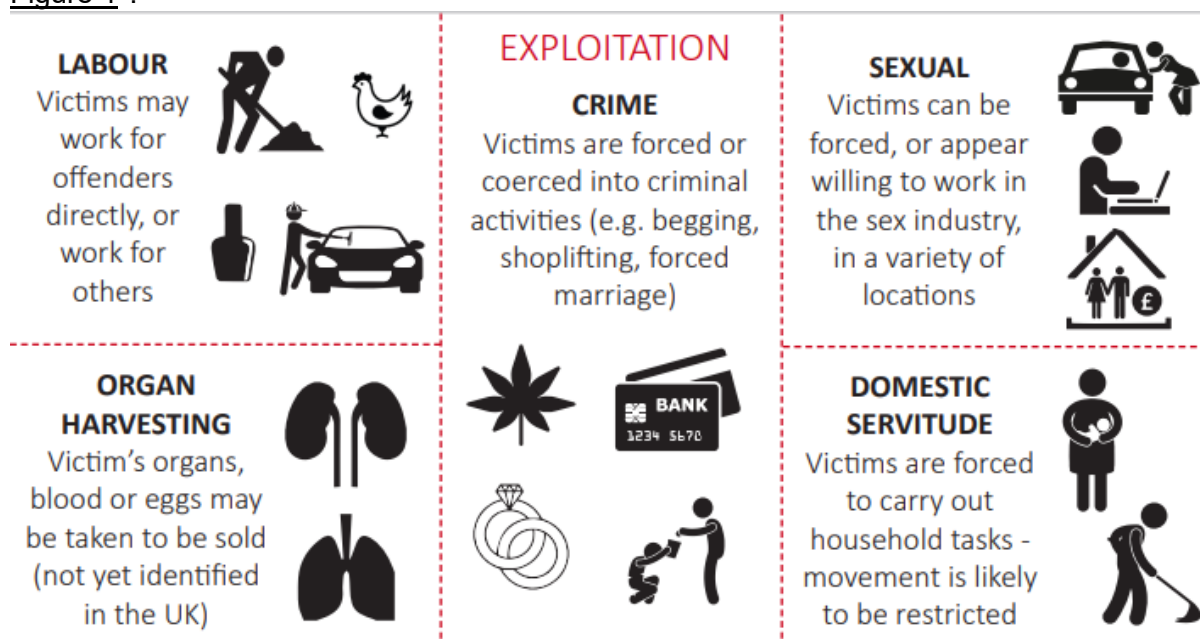
Modern Slavery

Chapter 2 [Home Office Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance](#) provides information about the definition of modern slavery for staff who may encounter or support potential victims and those who make [National Referral Mechanism](#) (NRM) decisions. The key points from this chapter are below:

Key points:

- Modern Slavery encompasses **human trafficking** and **slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour**.
- Human trafficking consists of three basic components: **actions, means and purpose** of exploitation. All three components must be present in an adult trafficking case; for child trafficking the 'means' component is not required.
- In human trafficking cases, **exploitation can take many forms**, including: sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, servitude, forced criminality and removal of organs.
- **Some people may not be victims of human trafficking but still victims of modern slavery if they have been subject to slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour.**
- **Human trafficking is not the same as human smuggling.** There are **common myths about modern slavery**, such as misconceptions that UK nationals cannot be victims and that a person cannot be a victim if they reject offers of help.

There are many different types of modern slavery, the main types identified are illustrated in [Figure 1³](#).



³ Cut from Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit:2018: [Modern Slavery Infographic](#)

Chapter 9 [Home Office Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance](#) provides further specific guidance about child victims of modern slavery and Annex A of the guidance provides specific indicators of child victims of modern slavery.

Home Office e-learning on [Child Victims of Modern Slavery](#) is available and should be completed by relevant staff and volunteers.

It is important to be aware [sexual](#), [criminal](#) and [financial](#) exploitation can also (but do not always) fit under the definition of modern slavery. This is important to understand to make sure that a child experiencing modern slavery receives the support and protection that they are legally entitled to ([Part 5 Modern Slavery Act 2015](#)) and that those who are responsible for or at risk of perpetrating offences of Modern Slavery against them can be disrupted and legal action can be taken against them.

Sexual exploitation

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership agreed definition:

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child, young person, or adult (including those with care and support needs) into [sexual](#) activity:

(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants (including for necessities such as food, shelter, or protection),

and/or

(b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

and/or

(c) an individual has felt frightened of the consequences if they refuse (coercion)

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Crucially, the individual that is, or has been, subject to sexual exploitation may not realise it.

Sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Girls and young women disproportionately experience sexual exploitation.⁴ However children and young people from certain groups are less likely to be identified as being at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation. In particular, this applies to: boys and young men, children who identify as transgender or non-binary, children with disabilities, and/or children from black and minority ethnic groups.⁵

Examples of Child Sexual Exploitation

Please first refer to [Methods used to exploit children](#)

- **Peer on peer sexual exploitation:** Children who cause sexual harm to other children are displaying [harmful sexual behaviours](#). The exploitation can include sexual bullying in educational and other social/organised settings or within the context of [modern slavery](#).

⁴ Home Office (2021): [Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#)

⁵ Department for Education (2017:p17): [Child sexual exploitation: definition and guidance for practitioners, local leaders and decisions makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation](#).

Please also refer to:

- Regional Procedure: [Children who abuse others, including peer on peer abuse/harmful sexual behaviour](#)
 - Youth Produced sexual imagery identified in education settings: Government Guidance on [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#).
 - National Working Group Guidance: [Discover the visible signs of sexual exploitation](#)
- **Organised/networked sexual exploitation including trafficking**

There is a strong inter-relationship between sexual and [criminal exploitation](#).

Within this context; the child is [groomed](#) to lead them to believe that they are safer or protected if they engage in [sexual](#) acts. These can include:

- being tricked into thinking they are in an intimate relationship,
- displaying [harmful sexual behaviours](#) towards other children,
- sharing personal intimate images/videos,
- intimately concealing drugs (also known as 'plugging', 'stuffing' or 'bottling').

Once engaged and/or if the child attempts to resist or leave, threat or force (including sexual harm) is used to make them continue to comply.

The child has a limited ability to resist and they are bonded to enable them to be used for sexual and/or financial gain across networks of other adults who harm and organised criminal groups across large geographical distance (being physical trafficked and in the case of online sexual exploitation on the internet).

For further guidance on Child Sexual Exploitation, please refer to the [Department of Education Child Sexual Exploitation: Definition and Guidance for Practitioners](#)

A free [Child Sexual Exploitation e-learning tool](#) is also available.

Criminal exploitation

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership agreed definition:

Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child, young person, or adult (including those with care and support needs) into any criminal activity:

- (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants,
and/or
- (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator (such as to support serious crime and/or terrorism),
and/or
- (c) through violence or the threat of violence to ensure compliance.

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual.

Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using technology and/or social media.

A national thematic review of serious child safeguarding cases where criminal exploitation was a feature identified that boys and young men and particularly boys and young men from black and minority ethnic groups were more vulnerable to criminal exploitation⁶. 14-17 year olds are most likely to be exploited by criminal groups, but it is known that younger children (as young as 7) can also be targeted. There is an inter-relationship between criminal and [sexual exploitation](#); so it is important to be aware of and consider that girls and young women; children and young people who identify as transgender or non-binary; and children and young people with special education needs and disabilities can experience criminal exploitation too.⁷

Children and young people who are criminally exploited are more likely to be arrested and criminalised for criminal behaviour, than those individuals or groups who are exploiting them. This is because they are more likely to be easily detected and often do not recognise that they are being exploited or are experiencing threats to their safety or that of their families. In such circumstances, children and young people should be considered as children who have/are experiencing abuse and exploitation first and consideration given to protecting them as victims under [Part 5 Modern Slavery Act 2015](#).

Examples of Child Criminal Exploitation

Please first refer to [Methods used to exploit children](#).

There are many ways in which children can be criminally exploited as summarised by the [Children's Society \(2021\)](#):

“Children across the country are being forced to work in cannabis factories; coerced into moving drugs across the country, made to [beg]⁸, shoplift, pickpocket or threaten others. They

⁶ [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel \(2020\) “It was Hard to Escape”](#)

⁷ [Children's Society \(2021\) Counting Lives](#)

⁸ Added to reflect the exploitation of children in organised begging.

are being cynically exploited with the promise of money, drugs, status and affection, and controlled using threats, violence and sexual abuse.”

Professionals should be particularly aware of two particular ways in which children who are identified which are often associated with criminal exploitation –

Distributor or courier role - Usually this arises where vulnerable young people from urban areas are exploited by gangs to deliver drugs in an outlying or rural area. These young people will most commonly be arrested in possession of significant amounts of drugs and/or cash, and often armed with large knives or other offensive weapons. Although less commonly seen, it is also possible that a child from Shropshire may be exploited in this way, either as a local operative in their local area or for transporting drugs to other areas (either within the County or beyond the County boundaries). The possession of substantial drugs and/or cash, usually with weapons, is a key sign of involvement in organised criminal distribution. The presence of a suspected controlling adult near the place of arrest is also highly significant.

Purchaser or debtor role - These will usually be local young people, who are offending to meet obligations (also known as debt bondage) to an organised criminal group; facing severe reprisal if they fail to pay. Typical offending might include systematic high-value shop thefts, burglary offences or theft of high value bicycles. Young people carrying out these types of offences may be alone, or in small groups of two or three. The immediate proximity of a controlling adult is less common, but professional curiosity should explore how the stolen goods are being ‘fenced’ into cash. One local ‘fence’ may facilitate a network of acquisitive crime involving many children.

Guidance on child criminal exploitation largely centres on criminal exploitation associated with the production and supply of illegal drugs (including specific reference to County Lines); for example:

[Children’s Society County Lines and Criminal Exploitation Toolkit](#)

[Home Office Guidance: Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults \(county lines\)](#)

[SSCP Professionals Learning Briefing: Criminal Exploitation and County Lines](#)

Please also refer to the regional procedure [Children affected by exploitation and trafficking including gangs](#).

Stop the Traffik also provide [signs of forced criminality](#) which should also be considered.

Financial exploitation

Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership agreed definition:

Financial exploitation is a form of financial abuse. It occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child, young person, or adult (including those with care and support needs); to misuse or take their financial assets (including welfare benefits) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been financially exploited even if the activity appears consensual; or may not have explicit knowledge of the exploitation.

Financial exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using digital or postal communication.

As children become older, they have greater access to and control of their own finances and are more financially independent of their caregivers. Some children are given greater access and control over their own money by caregivers; or look to generate their own income by [earning it](#). From the 16 years old, some children are able to [claim benefits](#) in certain circumstances.

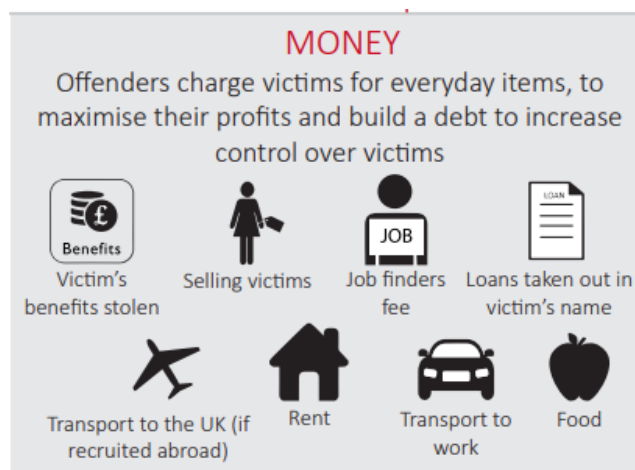
Examples of Child Financial Exploitation

Please first refer to [Methods used to exploit children](#). Those who harm can exploit children's motivations to be financially independent through [labour](#) or [criminal](#) exploitation. They can also target children who have their own benefit or earned income to defraud them of their benefits or income. This can include:

- [Mate crime](#)
- **Online child exploitation and the use of technology:** Such as [social media scams](#)
- **Organised/networked exploitation**
 - Loan sharks : Watch the [video](#) or visit the [Stop Loan Sharks webpage](#) to find out more .
 - [Modern Slavery](#); specifically Labour exploitation; domestic servitude and criminal exploitation. Debt bondage (as illustrated by Figure 2⁹ below) often forms part of these.
 - [Criminal exploitation](#). Debt bondage in these circumstances is often associated with drug debts or those causing harm stating the children owe them money for “failed” drug deals etc.

⁹ Cut from Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit:2018: [Modern Slavery Infographic](#)

Figure 2



Radicalisation¹⁰

Radicalisation is the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

Terrorism is the use or threat of an action for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial, or ideological cause which is designed to influence:

- the UK Government or
- international governmental organisation or
- the public or section of the public.

Extremism is defined as: “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces.”

It is important to understand the relationship between extremism and terrorism:

“Preventing people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism requires challenge to extremist ideas where they are used to legitimise terrorism and are shared by terrorist groups”

Further information on the signs of radicalisation can be found on the [Action Counter-Terrorism \(ACT\) Website](#)

Please refer to [responding to Child Exploitation](#) below

How children become exploited

Push and Pull Factors

Children at risk of and experiencing exploitation may be subjected to several factors that “push” and “pull” them out and away towards people and circumstances that increase their risk of being exploited.

¹⁰ Radicalisation and Extremism definitions taken from [Home Office Prevent Duty Guidance \(2021\) Glossary of terms \(radicalisation\) and paragraph 7 \(extremism\), paragraph 8 \(relationship between extremism and terrorism\)](#). Terrorism is defined by [Section 1 Terrorism Act 2000](#)

- **Push out:** [factors which increase a child's vulnerability](#) and push them away from sources of support and safety.
- **Pull away:** factors that encourage children to move away from sources of support and safety. These include [methods used to exploit children](#).

Further information on push and pull factors:

- We Are With You Shropshire: [Am I at risk?](#)
- [Catch 22: What causes a child to go missing](#)

Methods used to exploit children

Please also refer to [Stages of "recruitment"/Grooming](#).

Child exploitation can take many forms. There are common methods used by those who exploit and harm children across the [specific types of exploitation](#). These methods are subject to ongoing change as those who harm continue to find different ways to evade disruption and prosecution.

Grooming/stages of "recruitment"

Those (individuals and groups) that intend and/or cause harm to children through exploitation take advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive the child(ren). This process is called "grooming". It is important that those working with children understand how children are groomed so that they can prevent, [identify](#), and [disrupt](#) exploitation.

The process of grooming was originally used to explain the [pre-conditions for child sexual abuse and exploitation](#). The theory explained in the link can also be useful to understand how children are groomed for different types of exploitation. We Are With You Shropshire have produced a [What is grooming?](#) resource for children which also explains this.

There is an increasing understanding of the grooming process specifically related to:

- Criminal Exploitation: Children's Society Stages of recruitment [video](#) and [flyer](#)
- [Online grooming](#)

The following examples¹¹ and further guidance are provided to help increase your understanding and response:

Peer on peer exploitation: Children and young people can be exploited by people of a similar age as well as adults. In all cases of peer-on-peer exploitation, a power imbalance will still inform the relationship, but this inequality will not necessarily be the result of an age gap between the children.

The exploitation can take place in educational and other social/organised settings both in person and through the use of technology. Within the context of organised exploitation; children who are being exploited themselves by others in organised criminal groups can be exploited to harm others as 'alpha victims' as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

¹¹ Adapted from the Pan London Child Sexual Exploitation Operating Protocol (June 2017) and [\(2021\)](#)

Figure 3¹²



Please refer to the Regional Procedure: [Children who abuse others, including peer on peer abuse/harmful sexual behaviour](#) as well as the [Child Exploitation Local Protocol](#).

Older children and young adults over the age of 18 who are being exploited are more likely to become alpha victims. Where you suspect a young adult aged 18 years or over is an 'alpha victim' and therefore a victim of exploitation; please refer to the [Home Office Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance](#) and [Keeping Adults Safe in Shropshire Working with Risk Guidance](#).

Organised/networked exploitation including child trafficking: Children and young people (who are often connected) are passed (in person and/or by digital means) through networks of groups of abusive adults, or among organised criminal groups for the purposes of exploitation. This can occur at parties and gatherings or online platforms where children who are involved may recruit others into the network (see peer on peer exploitation and online child exploitation in this section). Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and [modern slavery](#), involving the buying and selling of young people or use of them for the purposes of committing acts of terrorism or violence; and/or for territorial, financial, or sexual gain.

Children are often trafficked over significant geographical distances within and across local authority boundaries, regions and across international borders. Child trafficking is [modern slavery](#).

In addition to this guidance and the [Child Exploitation Local Protocol](#), please also refer to:

- Regional Procedure: [Children affected by exploitation and trafficking \(including gangs\)](#).
- We are With You Shropshire Publication for young people: [Gangs](#)

Online child exploitation and the use of technology: The digital world is an essential part of most children, young people's and family's lives. Young people often operate very freely and confidently with technology including in the online world. By secondary school age some are likely to be spending a substantial amount of time online.¹³ Those who harm are increasingly using online platforms and available technology to exploit children. This

¹² Cut from Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit:2018: [Offenders Infographic](#)

¹³ Department for Education (2019:p9) [Statutory guidance: Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#)

exploitation can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline exploitation.¹⁴ This can include [online grooming](#) to exploit children into committing sexual, criminal and or terrorist activities or to obtain personal and financial information for the purposes of fraud or gaining a power over a child to enable exploitation.

Technology (phones, consoles etc) is also often used to exploit children. In addition to the use of online platforms, children may often be provided with technology as part of the grooming process (for example as a 'gift'), in order evade detection (provision of multiple/[burner phones](#)), or to maintain power and control (through surveillance/tracking, hacking or removal of communication methods).

Please also refer to the Regional Procedure: [Online safety: children exposed to abuse through digital media](#) in addition to this guidance and the [Child Exploitation Local Protocol](#).

A list of online safety sources of information and support for professionals and parents/carers is also available in Annex D of [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#).

ThinkuKnow also offer a number of [training courses](#) for professionals working with children to increase their awareness of and response to online safety.

Relationship/friendship model: In order to minimise external barriers and the child's resistance to exploitation¹⁵, those that cause harm [groom](#) the child into believing that they are in a friendship or intimate relationship with them for the purposes of exploitation. The person causing the harm may be significantly older than the child, but not always (see peer on peer exploitation in this section). This can also be referred to as "[mate crime](#)"¹⁶.

For children aged 16 years and over who believe they are in an intimate relationship, [Domestic Abuse Tools and Pathways](#) as well as the [Child Exploitation Local Protocol](#) should also be considered.

Familial: Whilst a lot of exploitation takes place [outside of the family home](#); children can be exploited by their parents or other family members. Exploitation can take place within their family home because those caring for them are being abused or exploited too. Please refer to [Parents and Carers](#) and [Adults at risk](#).

Opportunistic: This is where a person who intends to cause harm (and who can be linked with a network of abusive adults) identifies and takes advantage of opportunities to exploit children. The grooming process often occurs more quickly because of the use of force or because the child is unable recognise or respond to the risk (because of their age, development, disability or previous experiences of abuse or trauma).

Factors which increase vulnerability

All children can be vulnerable to exploitation due to their age and physical, emotional, and mental health and development.

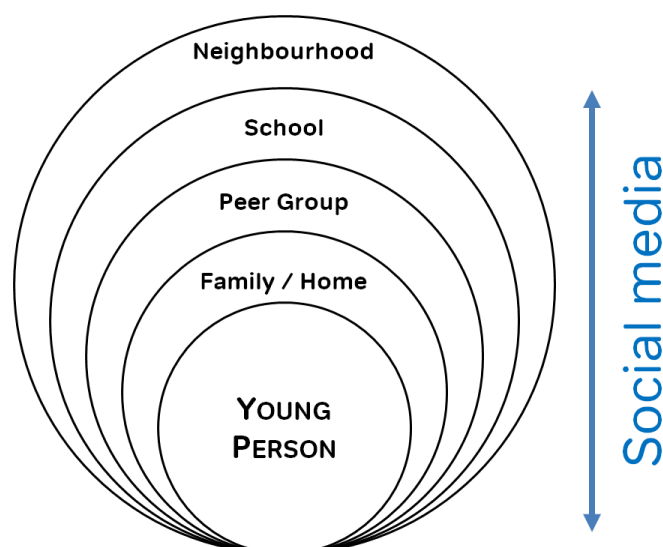
There are however additional factors that can increase a child's vulnerability to exploitation. These factors can be best demonstrated by considering the individual child and the contexts around them, as demonstrated by:

¹⁴ Definition of Abuse: HM Government: (2018:p106) [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

¹⁵ Based on Finkelhor's pre-conditions for child sexual abuse (1986 cited in [Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse \[Lucy Faithfull Foundation\]:2021:steps towards prevention](#)). This model also helps us to understand the grooming process for other specific types of exploitation too.

¹⁶ This term has been used to in the context of disability hate crime and adult safeguarding including exploitation but is equally relevant to children.

Figure 4¹⁷:



Child/Young person:

- **Characteristics:** As far as we know from what is reported, there is an over-representation of children and young people with certain characteristics experiencing [specific types of exploitation](#). A child's characteristics (including nationality, immigration status, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, mental or physical disability, or religious beliefs) can be misused by those that cause harm for the purposes of exploitation. These individuals and groups therefore discriminate to continue to cause harm for their own advantage. They will therefore continue to find ways to seek out and exploit children who are less likely to be seen and/or identified and reported as being at risk. Those working to protect children should therefore [ensure equality](#) in their approach to preventing and tackling child exploitation.
- **Adolescence:** Adolescent children are more likely to be subject to harm by way of exploitation perpetrated by individuals outside of their family home/environment than younger children. Adolescent development is a sensitive time and can increase a child's chances of experiencing harm. Support provided to children and young adults during this time is crucial to help reduce the risk of harm to them and enable them to prepare and [transition safely into adulthood](#). For more information, please refer to:
 - [Engagement and Consent](#)
 - [NSPCC \(2020\) How safe are our children?](#)
 - [Department for Health and Social Care \(2021\) Bridging the Gap](#)
- **Learning or communication difficulties/disabilities:** Children in this group are more vulnerable to harm and exploitation. For more information, please refer to:
 - Regional guidance [Children with Disabilities](#)
 - Children with specific needs section in the [Threshold document](#)
- **Poor mental health and wellbeing:** Children whose are experiencing mental ill health or wellbeing (including that associated with [adversity](#) or related to their feelings of belonging and/or self-worth) are more vulnerable to exploitation. For sources of support for children, please refer to:
 - [Early Help: Children's mental health and wellbeing.](#)
 - [Young minds: resources for professionals](#)

¹⁷ Adapted from Firmin:2013:47: Contexts of Adolescent Safeguarding and Vulnerability cited in [Safeguarding Network: Contextual Safeguarding](#)

- **Drug and/or alcohol use:** Children who have access to or are already using drugs and/or alcohol are at greater risk of exploitation as drug and alcohol can be used as part of the grooming process and to disinhibit and control a child. Where there is an indication that a child is living in an environment where drug or alcohol misuse is taking place or is using drugs or alcohol refer to [Substance Misuse Tools and Pathways](#).

Home/family environment:

Children and young people are more vulnerable to exploitation where within their home/family environment there are:

- **Existing (previous or current) experiences of abuse/neglect** in the family home/environment; including child who are looked after.
- **Caregivers with their own individual vulnerabilities and difficulties** which impact on their capacity to look after and care for the child.
- **Homelessness/unstable home environment**
- **Unaccompanied children:** please refer to [modern slavery](#) and [Department for Education Statutory Guidance: Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery](#)

Note: Those who exploit children have more recently been targeting children who come from safe and supportive home/family environments. This is because these children are less likely to be seen and/or identified by authorities as being at risk.

Whether vulnerabilities existing within a child's home/family environment or not; working constructively and collaboratively with [parents and carers](#) is therefore vital to promote the welfare of and safeguard children. Please also ensure that you refer to the [Children's Threshold document](#).

Peer Group:

Children and young people are more vulnerable to exploitation where they have friendships and contact with:

- **Other children or young people who are being exploited.**
- **Children displaying harmful behaviour towards others** (including [peer on peer abuse/exploitation](#))

School:

The availability of and attachment to formal education, training or employment is vital to minimise the risk of child exploitation. Detachment from education can have a negative and long term impact on a child's health, wellbeing, and development, removes their engagement with positive activities and sources of support and can increase their social isolation. Children who are being exploited are at greater risk of exclusion from school. Exclusion further increases the risk of exploitation. It is vital that schools and other agencies work with the child, their parents and each other to avoid excluding children to minimise this risk. For more information see:

- [Just For Kids Law \(2020\): Excluded, Exploited, Forgotten](#)
- Regional Procedures: [Children missing education](#)
- [Missing Tools and Pathways](#) (which include missing from education)
- Shropshire Council [School Attendance or Exclusion](#) pages

Neighbourhood:

Children who live or spend a lot of time in [deprived](#) communities are more vulnerable to exploitation. Deprived communities are less likely to be resilient, and therefore less able to support and protect children from adversity.¹⁸

Social media: Please refer to online child exploitation and the use of technology in [methods used to exploit children](#).

Signs of exploitation

Children rarely self-report that they are being exploited, so it is important that practitioners are aware of the signs.

There are signs that are common to all forms of exploitation as outlined below and those that are particular to [specific types of exploitation](#). A [spot the signs of exploitation poster](#) is also available to remind you and raise awareness in organisations/communities but it is recommended that you consider the more detailed table of signs below when completing the [Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool](#).

Some signs indicate a greater level of risk to the child than others and should be considered when completing the [Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool](#)

Relationships/friendships (indicators of coercion/control):

- Does not appear to have autonomy/control over own movement/medical treatment/finances/formal documents/environment (including accommodation).
- Fearful/emotional about their family particularly their safety.
- Act as if they were instructed by someone else
- Others talking/acting for them when the child is addressed directly.
- Sudden development of strong intimate relationships/friendships to the detriment of other friends/family.
- Child is friends with or linked to a person/people/group and there are concerns about the imbalance of power, exploitation and/or offending.
- Distanced/disconnected from support networks, family, and friends.
- Distrustful of authorities
- Secrecy about relationships/friendships.

Finances/Material goods:

- Perceives they are bonded by debt (has been led to believe that they must carry out actions or work for little or no benefit to pay back a debt)
- Sending/giving money to new friends/partners who they see are in “immediate need” (including those met online).
- Spending/borrowing large amounts of money for goods and services for themselves/others because there appears to be an “immediate need” to do so.
- Receiving “gifts” of money/clothes/material items that they do not have the means to afford themselves.

Use of technology/online activity:

- Sharing extreme/criminal/sexual/violent views on social media.
- Regular changes of/multiple mobile phones/sim cards/computers.
- Secrecy about who they’re talking to/what they are looking at online/on their phone.
- Concerns about the number of unknown connections/friends online.
- Spending increasing/excessive amount of time on their phone/online

Communication/Behaviour:

- Expressing views that they wish to cause harm to others or displaying violence/aggressive behaviour (including serious violence)

¹⁸ Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (2021) [What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?](#)

- Comes to the attention of Police: (e.g. drugs supply/production, financial fraud (including benefit fraud), begging/shoplifting/street robbery)
- Is being transported around or facilitated to travel in taxis, private cars or on public transport to areas in which they have no obvious connection/reason to travel (possible trafficking).
- Has a weapon in their home or carries one.
- New use of language (in conversation/online) associated with organised crime/extremist views.
- Unable to communicate (lack of English, communication difficulties, communication is restricted (no means of contact)
- Absent for appointments
- Significant decline in school engagement, results/performance
- Absent/detached from education, training, or employment.
- [Missing](#) from home, care, or education for periods of time (more concerning if regular and lengthy)

Health and wellbeing:

- Physical injuries with unclear explanations or that have not been appropriately treated.
- Medically unexplained and recurring symptoms which may indicate trauma.
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Unplanned/unwanted pregnancy (more concerning if these are regular)
- Drug and alcohol misuse/particularly if increasing levels of dependency, debt to others (such as dealers/loan sharks).
- Physical/medical concerns arising from potential captivity, neglect, or poor environmental conditions.
- Attachment or identity difficulties (which can create detachment/over-dependence/extreme views or attitudes)
- Presenting as distressed/anxious/fearful.
- Becomes withdrawn or seem troubled and unwilling to talk about it.
- Indicators of psychological trauma: difficulty regulating emotions, memory/attention difficulties, self-harm, suicidal ideation/attempts, disassociation, flashbacks.

Employment conditions (for post school-aged children who say they are working):

- Works in a sector where there is higher prevalence of exploitation (agriculture, food processing and packaging, construction, warehousing and logistics, hotels, catering, cleaning, and other service industries including sex work, manufacturing).
- Not clear about where they work or live or who they work for.
- Lack of understanding/information about their rights as a worker.
- Work related injuries sustained through poor health and safety measures.
- Wages are withheld/managed by someone else (including deductions for food/accommodation)
- Excessive overtime
- “Working away” for long periods of time.
- Person is transported/accompanied to and from “work” (possible trafficking)

Accommodation and or places where the child stays/visits:

- The child is not clear/vague about where they are living.
- Staying at multiple addresses/regular change of address that cannot be visited.
- Unknown people frequently staying at/moving into their accommodation; often described by the child or other household members as “friends”;
- The child or other household members have moved out or are regularly staying away from the property while unknown individuals remain;
- New vehicles regularly parking or remaining outside the property;
- An increase in the number of comings and goings throughout the day and/or night, including people who/vehicles that have not been seen before;

- An increase in anti-social behaviour (such as property damage, littering, regular loud music or 'parties' evidence of verbal or physical aggression) in and around the property;
- The child/other members of the household are refusing entry to or restricting access to certain parts of the property to neighbours, friends, or professionals (particularly if they have allowed it before).

Engagement and Consent

Engagement

Engaging a child or young person means meaningfully and authentically listening to their views and experiences and involving them as much as possible in decisions that are made about them; on their terms and in a way which meets their needs.¹⁹

Barriers to engagement

There are a number of factors that could influence how a child and their parent/carers engage with those trying to help keep the child safe:

- **Trauma:** experiencing exploitation is traumatic. This is likely to have an impact on how a child responds to and engages with those trying to help keep them safe. Practitioners should therefore take a [trauma-informed approach](#) in their work with children and consider whether 'negative' behaviours displayed by a child are possible [signs](#) of exploitation or an ongoing lack of feeling safe and secure:

“behaviours that seem irrational, self-destructive, or even abusive are reconceptualized as survival skills that once helped the individual respond to threatening encounters but which now impede the ability to tolerate distress and set boundaries” (Levenson, 2017: 107)²⁰.

It is therefore vital that children receive services that are consistent and persistent in their approach, working with the child's strengths and redeemability²¹ to have a better life.

- **Professional mis-judgment/bias:** It is vital that professionals are [professionally curious](#), self-aware of and responsive to their internal biases; and factors that may impede their professional judgment. See also [ensuring equality](#). This includes being aware of the [attitudes and language](#) used in working with children who are being exploited and their families. If a child or their family does not feel heard or feels blamed; this can act to push them further away from support and potentially increase the risk of exploitation and/or re-traumatise them.

Examples of professional misjudgement/bias can include:

- Not considering [signs](#) as indicators of exploitation.
- Not considering [children from certain groups](#) as being potentially at risk.
- Not considering the impact of [trauma](#) on the child.
- Adopting the misconception that children are choosing to engage in behaviours which lead to them being exploited. This can lead the child to feel blamed or reinforce a negative self-identity or 'label' (for example of a drug dealer), which pushes them away from sources of support and pulls them

¹⁹ Beyond Youth Custody (2014): [Engaging young people in resettlement: a practitioners guide](#)

²⁰ Cited in Hickie, K (2021): [A Brief Introduction to Trauma Informed Practice](#)

²¹ “Redeemability” is explained in Skuse & Matthew (2015) Trauma Recovery Model cited [here](#).

towards contexts and people which increase their risk of exploitation. Negative experiences with professionals can also impact upon their willingness to trust services. Children cannot consent to exploitation. Please further refer to [consent](#) and [professional attitudes and use of language](#)

- **The child does not think they are being exploited.** Children who are in the early stages of being [groomed/recruited](#) may consider themselves in a rewarding relationship or positive place and not understand that they are victims or are being abused. Furthermore, children who have become '[alpha victims](#)' may not consider themselves to be exploited.
- **The child is afraid.** Those who exploit children [use coercive and controlling behaviour](#) to keep them quiet, avoid detection and maintain their ability to exploit. Generating fear and shame is a key component of this. Children may have been threatened not to talk to professionals and told that if they do there will be consequences for themselves, friends, or family.

Children's top tips for engagement

Below are the 'top tips' that Shropshire children who have experienced exploitation want adults who help children and young people to follow²².



Professional attitudes and use of language

In all cases practitioners should be mindful of attitudes and language that 'blames' the child for their own exploitation. This not only acts as a [barrier to engagement](#) with the child and

²² Direct quotes from children who agreed to take part in the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership focused discussion on their experiences of exploitation (June 2021)

their family but can also impact if this language is used in verbal and written submissions about them.

Such language and terminology may find its way into and be used as evidence in formal case notes, statutory meetings, or a courtroom relating to care proceedings or where those who have harmed children are being prosecuted. Please remember that children and their families may be present in court proceedings or may access their case files in later life and will hear and read the terms that professionals used to describe their abuse.

The [Making Words Matter](#) Practice and Knowledge Briefing describes why language is important, the impact of language on a developing child and young person and suggests ways to support practitioners and services in attending to their language.

Critical (aka teachable or reachable) Moments

[Critical moments](#) (also referred to as [teachable](#) or [reachable](#) moments) are turning points in a child's life where there is an opportunity for a specific and decisive response or intervention which will make a long term difference to a their future. Examples of these moments²³ include:



These moments are crucial opportunities to prevent and protect a child from exploitation. It is important that those working with children and their families respond to these opportunity by:

- Being open to the [signs](#) of exploitation. Watch the [Are you listening?](#) video
- Practising professional curiosity. For more guidance, you can refer to:
 - [Shropshire's Professional Curiosity Management and Practice Guidance](#)
 - [Devon's Exploitation Toolkit: Professional Curiosity Guidance](#)
- Understanding their role and responsibility to act in line with this guidance and protocol.

Difficult Conversations

Talking to children and their families about exploitation is difficult. For guidance on how to have difficult conversations, please refer to the following guidance:

- [How to engage young people in difficult conversations](#)
- [Having healthy conversations about feelings](#)

²³ Research in this area is still developing. Examples adapted from [Hard to Escape Report](#) and SSCP Practitioner Learning Event held on 5th May 2021

- [Talking about difficult topics](#)
- [Having difficult conversations with parents/carers](#)

Interventions and support for children

The level of support offered to a child and their family should be in line with the [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#).

There are a number of specialist sources of support/interventions available for children at risk of experiencing exploitation and their families and the professionals working with them.

The following links provide further information and resources:

- [Shropshire Child Exploitation Directory](#)
- [We are With You “Where to Get Help” leaflet](#)
- [Contextual Safeguarding Network practice guides and resources](#)
- [National Working Group resources](#)

Parents and Carers

Child Exploitation is often (but not always) an external threat to the child’s household and parents need to be part of the solution rather than treated as part of the problem. Whether vulnerabilities exist or harm is taking place within a child’s home/family environment or not; working constructively and collaboratively with parents/carers and is vital to promote the welfare of and safeguard children.

There may be situations when risks outside the home are recognised by parents or carers who are responding appropriately and working with agencies to reduce the risk. In these circumstances, depending on the outcome of strategy discussions and any assessments, it may not be appropriate or necessary for a child to be made subject to a child protection plan. However, the child and their family may still need multi-agency intervention and support that is well coordinated, regularly reviewed, and monitored to make sure it is the right response. It is vitally important that parents and carers get the appropriate help and support they need in these circumstances.

If parents or carers are not supporting their child, fail to acknowledge the risks, and/or are not protecting them, then depending on the outcome of the strategy discussion and assessment, a child protection plan may be appropriate.

More work with parents or carers is essential if they do not recognise the risks or are struggling to support their child. If they are helped to understand and address the risks, and family relationships improve, this may help to prevent children from going missing or being exploited.

Where parents or carers have vulnerabilities which may mean they need additional support/intervention in caring for their child, please also ensure you are familiar with relevant [regional procedures](#) relating to parental/caregiver: disguised compliance and resistance to change; drug and alcohol misuse; and/or mental health problems.

Where a parent/carer is at risk of abuse or exploitation see [Adults at risk](#).

There is a variety of information and support available to parents and carers which you can signpost them to and is available to them in addition to your work with them. Here are some examples:

- [Crimestoppers \(anonymous crime reporting\)](#)
- [Parents Against Child Exploitation \(PACE\)](#)
- [Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline](#)
- [Contextual Safeguarding Network parent resources](#)
- [SafeCall Service \(Criminal exploitation\)](#)

- [Stop and Prevent Adolescent Criminal Exploitation \(SPACE\)](#)
- [Stop It Now! \(Sexual abuse and exploitation\)](#)
- [Action Counterterrorism \(Radicalisation\)](#)
- [ThinkuKnow \(online safety\)](#)
- [Marie Collins Foundation Resources \(online safety\)](#)
- [Stop Loan Sharks \(Illegal money lending\)](#)
- [Shropshire Council Trading Standards Advice](#)
- [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(NSPCC\)](#)

Please also ensure that you also refer to [Children's Threshold document](#).

Consent

Please first refer to the Consent section in [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#) and also to [Responding to concerns](#) below.

Children and young people cannot consent to being exploited. When children are being exploited, their perceived compliance and decision making is influenced upon by a number of external factors and contexts. The Social Model of abused consent helps explain this further. Further explanation is in this [video](#), [article](#) and in [Figure 5](#)²⁴



[Professional curiosity](#) enables practitioners to explore the contexts and influence of a child's decision making when working with children who experiencing exploitation. Parental engagement and seeking of consent even when the child does not or is not able is vital to responding to concerns.

Responding to child exploitation

This practice guidance and [protocol](#) should be used alongside the [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#). The sections below provides additional guidance specifically related to responding to child exploitation.

National Referral Mechanism

There are a number of [legal mechanisms](#) to help identify and provide protection and support for victims of modern slavery. One of these is called the **National Referral Mechanism**, which enables the identification, assessment, and provision of support for adults and children who are experiencing modern slavery.

For an overview watch: [National Referral Mechanism Introductory Video](#)

²⁴ Image from <https://www.nwgnetwork.org/agency-structure-abused-consent-relation-young-peoples-decision-making/>

Children's consent is not required for referral to the National Referral Mechanism where it is suspected that they are a victim of modern slavery. In such cases: first ensure immediate [child protection](#) and follow the [Child Exploitation Protocol](#) as well reporting Modern Slavery.

If you work in a [first responder organisation](#) your organisation has legal responsibilities relating to the National Referral Mechanism including a duty to identify and notify/refer people who are suspected of being victims of modern slavery to the Home Office. If you work in one of these organisations, make sure you know whether you are a first responder and if you are not who is and how to raise concerns to them.

To learn more about the responsibilities of being a first responder:

- Read: [Report Modern Slavery as a First Responder](#) and [National Referral Mechanism Guidance](#)
- Complete [Home Office First Responder Training](#)

If you do not work in a first responder organisation, and you suspect someone is a victim of modern slavery you can contact a First Responder, such as [West Mercia Police](#) **and** in the case of [children](#) or [adults with care and support needs](#), Shropshire Council First Point of Contact Team.

You can also call the 24 hr Modern Slavery Helpline on 0800 0121 700 or [report it online](#). The Helpline's trained Advisors can help you access services that can help.

Preventing Terrorism (Channel)

If you identify that a child is at risk of [radicalisation](#) and you are part of a "[specified authority](#)" (as listed in Schedule 6 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) you have a legal duty to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" ([section 26 Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015](#)) and must have regard to the [Home Office Prevent Duty Guidance](#).

Further information on the signs of radicalisation can be found on the [Action Counter-Terrorism \(ACT\) Website](#)

Free [Home Office e-learning training on Prevent](#) should be also completed by all relevant staff and volunteers in specified authority organisations.

Please refer to:

- the regional procedure on [Safeguarding children and young people against radicalisation and violent extremism](#)
- Shropshire's Approach to Prevent and Prevent National Referral Form available [here](#).
- The [Child Exploitation Local Protocol](#)

Contextual Safeguarding

Please refer to the "Considering extra-familial context and contextual safeguarding" section in the [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#).

Disruption

To disrupt exploitation is to take action to prevent, interrupt and/or stop it.

Disruption is often a term used by criminal justice agencies; however:

“Disruption is not the focus of a single agency, but requires us all to work collectively to create safe spaces for our children and young people today.”²⁵

Disruption activities are single/multi-agency actions taken to disrupt those that intend, prepare, or perpetrate harm, and so safeguard children, families, adults (including those with care and support needs) and communities. This places multi-agency focus and action on the individuals and contexts that increase/pose a risk of or are causing harm to the child(ren); rather than placing the responsibility to stop the exploitation upon the child and their family.

Please ensure you are familiar with the disruption activities available to you and other agencies by referring to:

- [National Working Group Disruption Toolkit](#)
- [Home Office Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit](#)
- [Local Disruption Activities](#)

Transitional Safeguarding

Transitional safeguarding is about recognising that exploitation does not stop at 18 years of age. It focuses on safeguarding young people during [adolescence](#) (a period which spans from child to adulthood). This period is an individual journey not an event, and every young person will experience this journey differently. It requires practitioners, leaders and all involved in services for children and adults, to consider how they might work together and think beyond child/adult silos for the benefit of young people at this key life stage.²⁶

Please refer to:

- the “Preparing children for adulthood” section in the [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#).
- [Department for Health and Social Care \(2021\) “Bridging the Gap”](#)
- [Adults at risk](#) below.

Adults at risk

Where:

- a child is likely to remain at risk of exploitation when they turn 18
- a parent or carer is at risk of harm from abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- an adult connected to the child is at risk of harm from abuse, neglect, or exploitation

Agencies should refer to [The Adult Safeguarding Process in Shropshire](#) for children turning 18/adults who may have needs for care and support and the [Keeping Adults Safe in Shropshire Working with Risk Guidance](#) where they do not.

²⁵ Sheila Taylor in Foreword: [National Working Group Disruption Toolkit](#)

²⁶ Paraphrased from [Bridging the Gap](#): Key messages

LOCAL PROTOCOL

Intelligence Reporting (sharing information to prevent and detect crime)

The ways in which children are exploited can amount to criminal behaviour by those who are exploiting them and/or as a presenting behaviour of a child who is being exploited.

There may also be behaviour that you witness in communities that cause you to be concerned that unknown children are being exploited (such as activity around addresses or locations).

If you have information about anti-social or criminal activity or behaviour (even where you do not know who is at risk or of concern) which indicates that child exploitation may be occurring and you **do not have information about specific children**, please ensure you pass this information to West Mercia Police as soon as possible to enable them to prevent and detect crime ([s115 Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#)). You can submit this information in the following ways:

- Report under the “Tell Us About” section on the [West Mercia Police website](#) or phone 101 or
- Email the information directly to the West Mercia Police Child Exploitation Team in Shropshire: CETeamShropshire@westmercia.pnn.police.uk
- Anonymously to [Crimestoppers](#) on 0800 555111
- Where you think there is an immediate risk to a person or you witness a crime taking place: Phone 999, (use 55 if you are unable to talk).

Note: Where you have child specific information which suggests that a child is at risk of or experiencing harm as a result of exploitation, you must [Respond to child exploitation concerns](#) and pass information related to criminal activity or behaviour posing a risk to West Mercia Police.

Children, their families and/or other members of the community may be worried about sharing information about crime with the Police but you can encourage them to do so anonymously by signposting them to:

- [Crimestoppers](#)
- [Fearless](#) (for young people)

Responding to concerns

Where there are [signs](#) that a child **may be** at risk of experiencing child exploitation:

Ensure that every attempt is made to [engage and seek consent](#) from the child and their parents

Work together where more than one agency is involved with the child and/or their family.

Where you suspect a child is experiencing [modern slavery](#) [report it](#).

Immediate risk of significant harm to the child (being exploited)?

Evidence of [Modern Slavery?](#)
[Report it](#)

Risks present but not immediate?

Child at risk of Radicalisation?

Immediately [report concerns to Compass](#).

Complete and send [Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool](#)

Also refer to [Prevent](#)

Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool

The [Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool](#) can be completed by any practitioner working with a child or their family. It should be completed when the practitioner (in discussion with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Line Manager) considers that a child is at risk of or vulnerable to exploitation. The risk assessment should be reviewed regularly where a risk of exploitation (at whatever [level](#)) is identified.

The tool will assist in determining whether a child may be at risk of child exploitation. It will enable professionals to make a risk judgement on the level of risk of exploitation for the child and what support and or actions are needed.

During the course of the assessment process if you:

- Have gained information about potential perpetrators/crimes/concerning places/vehicle details etc, ensure timely [intelligence reporting](#)
- Consider that a child is being exploited and needs protection and/or is at immediate risk of significant harm, **immediately [report concerns to Compass](#)**.

Please also refer to the "Assessment Practice" section of the [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#) in completing the tool

The tool should be completed:

- **With the [engagement and consent](#) of the child and their parent/carers** unless it is not safe or possible to do so.

Completing the tool should be a planned [conversation](#) with the child and their parent/carers in which they are actively engaged and are able to meaningfully participate in the assessment process. This does not necessarily mean going through the tool with them. The conversation should include:

- Explaining why you are worried and what the purpose of the tool is, as well as what will happen with the information gathered. This will help the

child to understand your role and that you will take seriously any information that they do share.

- Listening and capturing both the child and their parent/carers views. This might require talking to them separately and may take more than one meeting with them. See [questions to consider](#) below.
 - Ensuring an opportunity for the child and parents/carers to tell their story rather than respond to a series of questions.
 - Ask them what is happening from their point of view rather than told what you think is happening.
 - Using the [questions to consider](#).
- **With information from a wide variety of sources.** Ensuring that information and/or assessments from other involved agencies and other family (where appropriate) are included. Consider a multi-agency meeting to gather information where there is more than one agency involved with the child and their family.
 - **Considering strengths, needs and risks:** Consider areas of strength that minimise the risk of exploitation as well as [factors which increase vulnerability](#) to and [signs](#) of exploitation.

In a contextual assessment, it is important to differentiate between [existing vulnerability factors](#), and/or a [sign](#) indicating risk, which when combined increases the harm experienced. Taking this approach helps to [ensure equality](#) in assessment.

The Assessment Triangle

The assessment triangle in Figure 6 below is based on the assessment framework²⁷. It will assist professionals to identify areas of need or welfare relating to the risk of child exploitation. This includes considering [factors which increase vulnerability](#) to and [signs](#) of exploitation.

The triangle should be used as a guide for professionals, to assist them in identifying what [response](#) needs to be taken and in what timeframe, to meet the needs of the child and so reduce the risk of exploitation.

²⁷ [Working Together 2018](#):Chapter1:p30

Figure 6²⁸



²⁸ This Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool has been adapted from National Working Group NWG Child (Sexual) Exploitation Assessment Tool [accessed September 2019]

Questions to consider

Child/young person and parent/carer views

- What are the child's views about their strengths, needs and the risks they face?
- What do they want for the short and longer term?
- What are the parent(s)/carers views about the child's strengths, needs and the risk they face?
- What do they want for the child's short and long term future

Child/young person domain

- What makes this child vulnerable?
- Any evidence of [trafficking](#)?
- What are the child's strengths and positive relationships?
- What do we need to know more about?
- Is there work directed at an individual child to reduce their risk outside of the home?

Family and living environment domain

- How does the child's family and/or living environment impact on the child's needs and vulnerability?
- Are there any familial issues which may be contributing to extra-familial harm?
- What protective factors exist or could be developed within this domain?
- What do we need to know more about?

Locality and wider community domain

- How do people, locations and other factors impact on the child's needs and vulnerability?
- What protective factors exist or could be developed within this domain?
- What do we need to know more about?
- What strengths/protective factors exist in a wider context (community, school, peer-group) to bring safety for the child under assessment (such intervention should, hopefully, make the context safer for other young people)

Determining level of risk

Based on the information that you have gathered; you then need to determine the nature and level of risk of exploitation to the child. Consider:

- **Type** of [exploitation](#)
- **Impact** on the child's long term health and development.

Think about whether this is physical, psychological, emotional, how it impacts their everyday functioning and how likely the child will be able to recover from the harm caused.

- **Likelihood** of harm being caused to the child.

Think about whether harm is taking place now or is likely to take place again; how often the child is being harmed and how long has it been going on for; when is the harm taking place (circumstances and context)? What needs, strengths, strategies, support and/or resources does the child already have which are helping or could help to reduce their risk?)

- **Who else** (if anyone) is at risk of harm?

You will then need to indicate your professional judgement as to the level of risk of exploitation to the child:



Actions following assessment

Child Exploitation Triage will review and determine the final risk level.

- Discuss and agree with the child and parent:
 - the completed assessment and gain consent to share it.
 - any interventions and support for the child or parents/carers
- Send the Child Exploitation Risk Assessment to Compass by secure email (Compass.referrals@shropshire.gov.uk). It will be forwarded to the Child Exploitation and Missing Coordinator in Compass and allocated for discussion at Child Exploitation Triage.
- Where parental consent has not been sought or agreed to and there is not clear evidence that the child is being exploited or is at risk of significant harm, the risk assessment cannot be discussed at Child Exploitation Triage.

Child Exploitation Triage

Triage meetings are co-ordinated and chaired by Children's Social Care (Operational Child Exploitation and Missing Lead). They are held twice a week, comprising of a range of agencies.

Purpose

- to triage any risk assessments, police intelligence reports or crime reports which have been received.
- Triage members provide an overview of what their agency knows of the children discussed, and the risk level is then confirmed based on the evidence available.
- A set of multi-agency recommendations are also agreed on the basis of the risk level to manage and respond to the risks for the children discussed.

Managing and responding to Child Exploitation

Level of support

The level of support provided to the child and their family should be determined by the level of risk identified and align with levels in the [Shropshire Thresholds Document](#).

Vulnerable

Early Help

- Appropriate [intervention and support](#) to be offered
- Regularly review: Child Exploitation Risk Assessment ensuring it is reflected in Whole Family Assessment Action Plan until child returns to Universal level of support.
- Regular Early Help Family meetings to take place

Groomed
and/or
targeted

Targeted Early Help or Child in Need

- Some children within this group may benefit from a social work assessment, especially where there are vulnerabilities in the home/family environment which require additional support.
- Appropriate [intervention and support](#) to be offered
- Every 3 months: Review Child Exploitation Risk Assessment ensuring it is reflected in Assessments and Action Plans until risk is reduced to vulnerable.

Being
Exploited

Complex/Significant

- Initial strategy discussion to decide on safeguarding actions.
- Immediate multi-agency safeguarding actions planned:
 - Appropriate [intervention and support](#) to be offered.
 - Ensure appropriate [responses to child exploitation](#) are in place
 - Consider actions to disrupt/manage the people/groups posing a risk to the child.
 - Child Exploitation Risk Assessment to inform level and nature of Children's Social Care support. S47 enquiry decisions to consider whether are concerns in the home/family environment*.
- Every 3 months: Review Child Exploitation Risk Assessment ensuring it is reflected in Assessments and Action Plans until risk is reduced to vulnerable.

***Note:** it is recognised that for most children where exploitation is the concern, the threat of harm is outside of the family environment, therefore a child protection plan may not be appropriate even when the child is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm (as a result of child exploitation), nevertheless what is effective is a multi-agency plan of support. A child protection plan will only be considered if parents or carers are not supporting their child, fail to acknowledge the risks, and/or are not protecting them.

Assessment informed action plans

When developing action plans, consider the strengths, needs and risks identified in the 3 domains of the child exploitation assessment tool.

Below is an example of the elements that you could consider putting into a plan:

Child/Young Person	Family and Living Environment	Locality and Wider Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Someone to talk to Sexual health screening (if appropriate) Maintaining education/training Referral to National Referral Mechanism (NRM) (to be actioned by first responder) Social media profiles Mapping Meeting Exiting Gangs protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Parents continue to report missing Support for parents in their own right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruption – civil orders e.g. Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHPO) licencing powers, NRM status Criminal investigation/bail conditions Intel gathering/submission Awareness raising within the community/local businesses Disruption meeting Locality Meeting

Local Disruption Activities

There are a number of local options available in addition to the [disruption activities above](#):

- **Disruption meetings:** Held to discuss potential disruption activities around a particular child(ren), context or locality. Chaired by Children's Social Care Operational Child Exploitation and Missing Lead.
- **Mapping meeting:** Arranged and held by lead professionals to map the relationships of a specific child when required, to aid understanding of the level of risk posed to them by their others or to identify other children at potential risk.
- **Locality Meetings:** Held when there are concerns around a specific location. Chaired by either Children's Social Care Operational Child Exploitation and Missing Lead or Children's Early Help Exploitation Lead. Schools, police, and any relevant agencies working with children and families in the locality attend, with the aim of compiling a picture of child exploitation in the area and considering potential safeguarding and disruption options.
- **Exiting Gangs Meeting:** Held to discuss potential options to help a child safely exit a gang. Chaired by Children's Social Care Operational Child Exploitation and Missing Lead.
- **Complex Strategy Meeting:** Please refer to statutory child protection procedures: [Organised and complex abuse](#)
- **Practitioner consultations:** Held on the first Tuesday of every month, as a drop-in clinic for any professionals to discuss young people of concern, or to gain understanding

around the Child Exploitation Protocol. 30 minute timeslots needed to be booked with Children's Social Care in advance, by contacting amy.amber@shropshire.gov.uk.

Child Exploitation Panel

This panel is a multi-agency panel attended by operational managers from key agencies working to prevent and respond child exploitation in Shropshire. It is Chaired by Children's Social Care Strategic Child Exploitation and Missing Lead.

The purpose of the panel is:

- to review and monitor the Child Exploitation Protocol
- specifically oversee and monitor the response to all children assessed as "Being Exploited"
- ensure there is a multi-agency contextual response to support the prevention and disruption of child exploitation in Shropshire.

Tools

The following child exploitation tools relating to this protocol are available to access [here](#).

- Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool
- Child Exploitation Pathway Overview
- Child Exploitation Intelligence Reporting Information