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Safeguarding in SEVEN

Child Criminal Exploitation

1. Background

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) is a growing problem that occurs throughout the UK. It affects boys and girls who are under 18 from any social, ethnic and economic background, some victims can be primary school aged children. CCE robs victims of their childhood and has serious long-term effects on every aspect of their lives and may be life threatening.

This is an issue of abuse not a lifestyle choice and the children who are criminally exploited are victims. It is important that practitioners understand this when engaging young people and recording any information about them. In many cases, the boundary between 'victim' and 'offender' will often be blurred. Practitioners need to give sufficient priority to both areas as part of their practice. Put simply, when offending is driven by exploitation, one won't be addressed without the other.

2. What is it?

CCE involves criminals targeting young people, often vulnerable, to carry out criminal activity. There is an imbalance of power that enables the perpetrator to coerce, control, manipulate and deceive the child. Children often do not realise they are victims and the activity can appear consensual; however, it is important to remember that this is not a 'choice'.

3. Why it matters?

Criminals and/or organised crime groups exploit children and young people to deal drugs and carry out other criminal activity on their behalf. Children and young people are seen by perpetrators to be easily controllable and inexpensive to resource. Victims can also fall into debt (known as debt bondage) to these groups which can often lead to threats and violence. The children involved do not recognise that they are victims of exploitation as they consider they have acted voluntarily and most often it can be about status – to be part of the group and have a sense of belonging. Perpetrators groom children through giving them money, drugs or clothing to keep them involved in the criminal activity.

4. Recognising vulnerability

Several factors can make a young person vulnerable to being criminally exploited. These include the child having a history of abuse, living in a chaotic household, children in care, bereavement or loss, low self-esteem, learning disability / mental health issues or exposure to violence. This list is not exhaustive and professional curiosity is essential in identifying children at risk as not all victims are typically vulnerable. For exploitation to take place, adverse childhood experiences (ACE's), trauma, learning needs and particularly for online grooming, there is a need to find nurture and protection from somewhere else if the young person is not getting this from within the home. Significant influences leading to exploitation can come from outside the family home and be contextual such as from a peer group, be online, at school and/or in the neighbourhood.

5. The signs

CCE can be difficult to identify, however there are several factors to look out for. These include:

- children who go missing from home/school,
- being found a distance from home,
- associating with other children at risk of CCE,
- carrying weapons,
- unexplained injuries,



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5. The signs (continued)

- excessive receipt of calls or texts,
- self-harm or changes in emotional wellbeing,
- experimenting with drugs and alcohol,
- unexplained acquisition of money, phones or clothing,
- appearing nervous, scared, evasive or secretive,
- evidence of criminal behaviour.

6. Learn & Improve

- Have you read the CHSCP's review on [Child I?](#)
- Have you read '[It was Hard to Escape](#)'? (published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel)
- Access [free multi-agency training](#) provided by the CHSCP.
- Practice guidance on exploitation is available [HERE](#).
- Do you know who to discuss your concerns within in relation to CCE and how to refer /make a request for support for a young person who may be at risk?

7. Worried About a Child?

If you are [worried that a child](#) is at risk of CCE, discuss with your line manager immediately and contact:

Hackney MASH

0208 3565500 / MASH@hackney.gov.uk

0208 3562710 / Outside 9am-5pm contact the Emergency Duty Team

City of London Children & Families Team

0207 3323621 / children.duty@cityoflondon.gov.uk

0208 3562710 / Outside 9am-5pm contact the Emergency Duty Team

If you think a young person may be at immediate risk of harm ring 999.

