

Complex Safeguarding Wales

A toolkit for child criminal exploitation



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Introduction

This toolkit was developed as part of a Health Care Research Wales funded study into child criminal exploitation in Wales. The study examined how young people were targeted, groomed and criminally exploited in Wales and what services need to do to identify, engage and safeguard young people at risk of or being criminally exploited. To do this, young people, parents, and practitioners with direct experience were asked about their experiences of criminal exploitation and what approaches and interventions were most helpful. The results were used to co-produce this toolkit. Co-production was based on the principles of action research and involved engaging the research advisory group, in 'problem-focused, context-specific and future-orientated' (Waterman et al., 2001:4) inquiry, based on study findings (see Maxwell and Wallace, 2021). The research advisory group included young people and parents with lived experience of child criminal exploitation and practitioners. In addition, sector experts and safeguarding leads were invited to comment on relevant sections. The toolkit was refined based on feedback from youth peer researchers and practitioners. The toolkit adopts the term 'young people' to refer to all children and young people up to the age of 25.

Aims

The toolkit is aimed at enhancing practitioner responses to child criminal exploitation. It has been developed with reference to study findings, the wider research literature and in accordance with existing policy and practice guidance. It does not replace existing practice guidance.

Specifically, the toolkit provides key messages regarding the:

- Different manifestations of child criminal exploitation in Wales
- Main warning signs and risk factors
- Effective multi-agency approaches.
- Working with young people and parents
- Sector-specific warning signs, roles and responsibilities.

The report is divided into two sections. Section one begins by presenting definitions for child criminal exploitation, the warning signs and good practice for multi-agency working and working with young people and parents. Section two provides sector-specific information regarding safeguarding responsibilities, warning signs, and an overview of relevant policy and practice. An Child Criminal exploitation Assessment Tool has also been developed to guide practitioner decision-making (see separate document).

Principles

The toolkit complements the policy and practice guidance landscape in Wales. It is based upon the fundamental need to adopt a child-centred, child rights approach. Young people must be heard and be included in decision-making. This is particularly pertinent given that exploitation takes control away from the young person. Practitioners must not do the same. They should safeguard

and not criminalise these young people and help and support them to take back control over their lives and reach their full potential. This means working with young people. establishing rapport, developing trust and building relationships where young people feel safe and able to share their views. The toolkit adopts the following principles:

- A child first, safeguarding approach
- Child-focused so that the young person's needs are identified and addressed.
- Delivered in the community to young people and their families.
- Aimed at prevention, early intervention, and diversion.
- Able to include parents as a resource rather than a risk.
- Includes the identification, investigation and prosecution of individuals or groups exploiting young people.

In doing so, the toolkit draws upon Transitional Safeguarding and Contextual Safeguarding approaches. Appendix A provides a summary of each approach: Complex Safeguarding, Transitional Safeguarding and Contextual Safeguarding.

Youth Charter

The toolkit includes a Youth Charter that has been co-produced with young people (see Working with Young People). It consists of nineteen statements regarding how young people want practitioners and parents to engage with them (Figure 5). The charter is underpinned by unconditional positive regard which refers to accepting, understanding and respecting young people for who they are.

Language use

Child criminal exploitation is a form of child abuse (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2019a). Young people cannot consent to being trafficked, they are not at fault or responsible for their exploitation. The toolkit promotes the use of neutral language and terms that do not explicitly or implicitly attribute blame to young people. More information about language use and terminology can be found in Appendix B.

Section one: Definitions and good practice

Drawing on findings from the Health Care Research Wales funded research study, section one summarises the types and definitions of child criminal exploitation and outlines risk factors at the individual, interpersonal and community levels. Section one then presents good practice for multi-agency working, and working with young people and parents.

Section two of the report provides detailed information regarding the roles and responsibilities for Children's Services, Education, Health, Housing, Police, Youth Justice, and Youth Services. Each sub-section concludes with an overview of the relevant policy and practice guidance.

Types of exploitation

The range of perpetrators and the way young people are groomed can make exploitation difficult to identify. This is further complicated as any young person can be exploited, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, presenting vulnerabilities or previous service involvement.

While vulnerable young people have had heightened vulnerability to being criminally exploited, there has been a shift towards young people who are unknown to services, coined 'ghost children'. This group are attractive to exploiters as they are less likely to be noticed. Exploitation is also difficult to identify as different forms of exploitation may co-occur, and/or young people may be moved from one form of exploitation to another. It is important that young people receive the most appropriate support for the abuse they have suffered.

Child criminal exploitation

Child criminal exploitation is defined as:

“...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 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 and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual.”

(Home Office, 2018)

Child criminal exploitation involves an element of exchange

The notion of exchange can be misleading as it does not always involve the transfer of something tangible (Children's Society, 2019). Rather, it can include the exchange of something:

- Tangible such as trainers, branded goods, the promise of 'easy money'
- Intangible such as feelings of security, belonging to a wider gang 'family', identity or status.
- Prevention of violence, such as violence towards a family member.

Child criminal exploitation involves criminal activity

The young person can be used for a range of activities, such as selling and transporting drugs, theft, burglary or being made to open a bank account for money laundering. Child criminal exploitation includes young people from other countries who are trafficked to Britain and forced into labour or domestic servitude or young people who are trafficked from one area of Wales to another. Young people may be trafficked only a few streets away from their home.

Child criminal exploitation may involve violence or the threat of violence

Young people may be the victims of violence and/or forced, manipulated, or coerced into using violence against others. Young people may be too afraid to ask for help due to fear of repercussions from the exploiters, to themselves or their family members.

County lines

County lines is defined as:

“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 forms of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.”

(National Crime Agency, 2019)

County lines is a police term. It is used to describe one type of drug distribution model where drugs are sold using a branded mobile phone number, for example, the ‘Barry line’. Young people are given burner phones so they can be told where to transport and sell drugs. This can be from a city to smaller towns or from one side of an area to the other. Therefore, young people criminally exploited into county lines operations may be trafficked across Wales or from England into Wales.

The term ‘county lines’ directs attention away from the range of perpetrators, the range of criminality young people are manipulated, forced or coerced into committing, and the physical and sexual abuse they suffer. Practitioners must adopt a broad definition of child criminal exploitation that includes manipulation or coercion into criminality by family members, friends or strangers. Young people do not have a choice. They are trapped within exploitative relationships through threats or actual violence.

Models of Child Criminal Exploitation

There are three main models of child criminal exploitation in Wales (Figure 1). While there are different models of drug distribution and supply, some areas will have elements of them all.

Figure 1: Models of child criminal exploitation

County Lines

Young people are trafficked into Wales from English cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham and London. They are forced, manipulated or coerced into transporting drugs, weapons or money.

- Any young person can be criminally exploited.
- Young people may not realise they are being used.
- Exploiters change how they operate to evade detection.

There has been an increase in the targeting of:

- Girls.
- Clean skins
- University students

Young people are often afraid of violent repercussions from the exploiters.



Blurred Lines

In some parts of Wales, local groups have retained control over the area by imitating the County Lines groups. These areas export drugs to other areas in Wales.

Young people are trafficked by local groups.
This may be from part of Wales to another.

Some young people are trafficked within the local area.
Young people may sell drugs locally.

They may use local bus services and return home the same day.
Young people are harder to detect in blurred lines.
They are less likely to be safeguarded.



Traditional

In some areas of Wales, drug supply has remained the same. In these communities, drug supply demand is controlled by local individuals or 'crime families'. Criminality may be normalised in these communities.

- Young people may be expected to go into the 'family business'.
- They may be forced or deceived into criminality by family members.
- Young people may face threats of actual violence if they refuse.
- Young people are more likely to be viewed as 'choosing this lifestyle'.
- They are less likely to be seen as victims who are trapped in exploitative relationships.
- They are less likely to be safeguarded.



Child trafficking and modern slavery

Modern slavery is defined as:

“Modern slavery encompasses slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. Traffickers and slave drivers coerce, deceive and force individuals against their will into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment”

(Home Office, 2019)

Modern slavery refers to the coercion, force or exploitation of young people and taking, transferring, harbouring or receipt of them through the use of force, coercion, deception, power imbalance or threats for a purpose. The notion of ‘purpose’ can include criminal, financial and/or sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, domestic servitude, shoplifting, and fraud. Young people cannot give informed consent to engage in forced criminality or to be abused or trafficked (Home Office, 2015). Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, young people are trafficked for the purpose of exploitation even where the exploitation has not yet occurred. Therefore, young people will be considered to have been trafficked even where practitioners have intervened before they were exploited.

Child trafficking is increasing in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019). This includes unaccompanied children and young people and those who are looked after by the local authority. Young people may not be physically moved (‘trafficked’) for criminal exploitation, but they can still be victims of modern slavery if they have been forced into slavery, service or compulsory labour. Modern slavery can occur directly through relationships, including relatives or romantic relationships or indirectly, where people known to the young person turn a blind eye or fail to report that the young person is being harmed.

Identifying child criminal exploitation

Our findings suggested that checklists were unhelpful for identifying child criminal exploitation for two main reasons: any young person can be exploited, and exploitation is hidden. Young people may have heightened vulnerability to child criminal exploitation due to a single event or a combination of events such as parental alcohol or drug misuse, poor parenting, low self-esteem, and living in poverty. Practitioners must consider that multiple vulnerabilities across the individual, family and community levels may heighten a young person's risk. Therefore, a child criminal exploitation risk assessment recording tool has been developed (see supplementary information). However, no one professional will hold all the necessary information to aid identification and safeguarding. This makes multi-agency information sharing and collaborative work vital in identifying and protecting young people.

Grooming

Exploiters groom young people using a range of different methods. This can include glamourising the lifestyle, befriending those who are lonely, isolated or struggling to fit in, offering them status, protection or threatening them with violence:

“So young kids are always looking at them [exploiters] as their idols. Some of them, they even give the youngsters some money, some little change. So, when they grow up, it's like they have this respect and love for that person. It could be as little as one pound, two pounds or five or ten”

(Young person interview)

Young people may be forced, coerced, or tricked into criminally exploiting other children or identifying and/or introducing them to the exploiter. This obscures the distinction between victim and perpetrator. Practitioners must adopt a more nuanced, child first, offender second approach where young people may be exploited victims rather than perpetrators (Ministry of Justice, 2019:5).

Young people may also be groomed and trapped within exploitative relationships due to 'debt bondage'. This tactic includes:

- Giving young people free drugs but then demanding payment with high-interest charges. Young people are forced to work off the debt.
- Exploiters arrange for young people to be 'mugged'. They then demand that the young person works off the money they have lost.

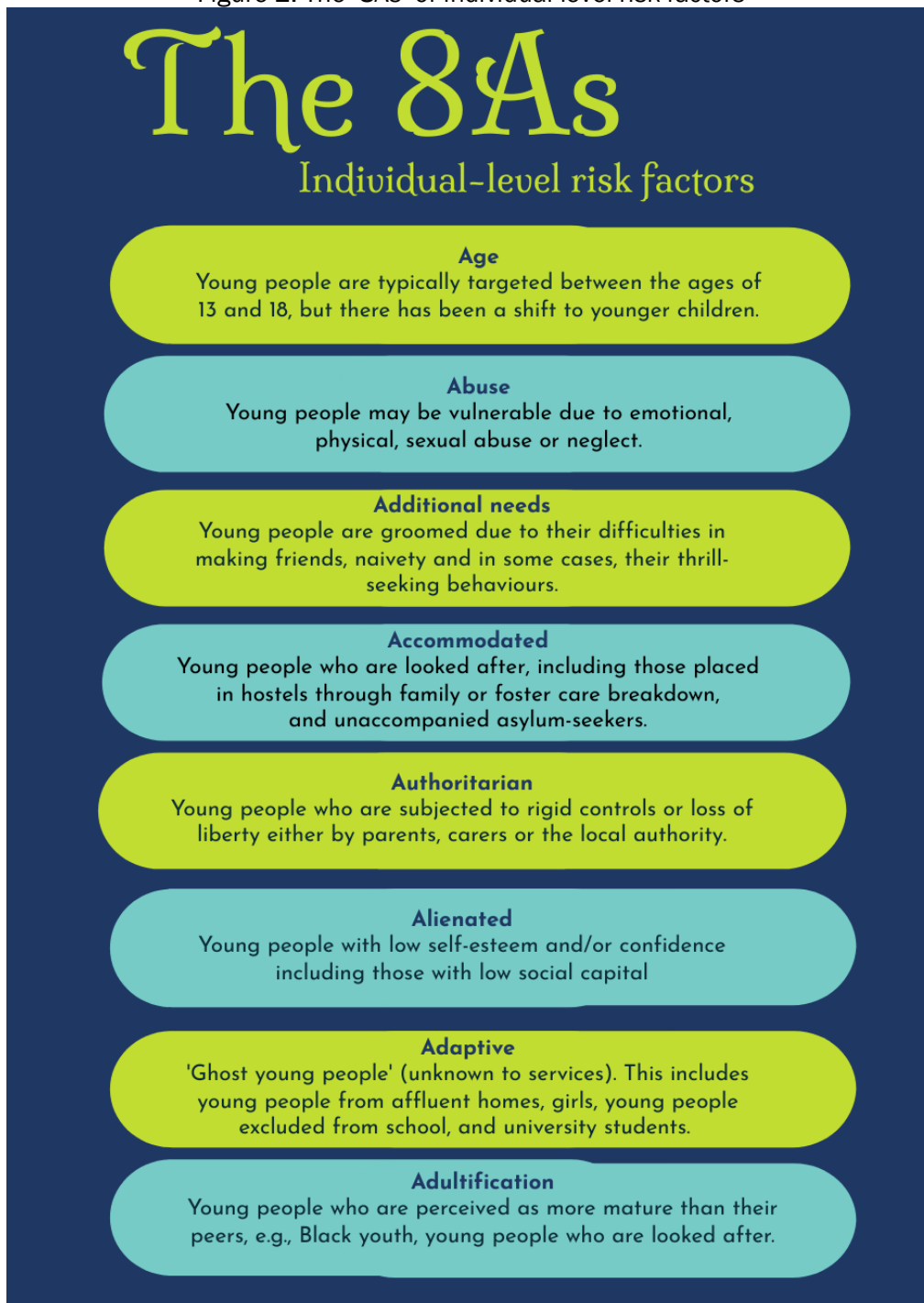
This places the onus on practitioners to be 'curious' about the young person and the underlying reasons for their behaviours, such as going missing, staying out late or why they have a few different mobile phones. Many young people will be reluctant or unwilling to ask for help or disclose exploitation. This may be due to the culture amongst young people not to snitch or tell tales. Exploiters reinforce this through threats of violence toward them and/or their families. It can also be for other reasons, including denial or ignorance about their exploitation, they may have been taught not to trust the police or other professionals, have previous negative experiences with

practitioners, or they may be frightened about what the exploiters will do to them or their families if they ‘snitch’.

Individual level risk factors

Any young person of any age, gender, ethnicity, or background can be criminally exploited. Exploiters target young people who are vulnerable due to their unmet needs or lack of social capital and social inclusion. Figure 2 provides a summary of the main individual level risk factors.

Figure 2: The ‘8As’ of individual-level risk factors



Missing episodes

According to parents, going missing was the biggest indicator of child criminal exploitation (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021). This supports wider research findings about the link between missing episodes and child criminal exploitation (Bonning and Cleaver, 2020, Wigmore, 2018, Sturrock and Holmes, 2015). While parents were aware that their child was behaving differently, and disengaging with family and school, going missing was the first visible sign that something was happening to their child. Missing episodes may indicate an escalation of criminal exploitation:

And then it just got to the point where it was like, he was out the whole day and back in the early hours of the morning, and again I just couldn't work out what he was doing
(Parent interview)

Over 10,000 incidents of missing children and young people are reported every year in Wales (National Youth Advocacy, 2020). Young people go missing or run away for a range of reasons. This includes running away from a problem or event or running to a place they want to be, or they may be forced, tricked, deceived or coerced by an individual or group to leave their home (Home Office, 2014). Some young people are more likely to go missing than others, this includes:

- Young people in residential care homes.
- Young people placed in out of area residential care.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

Young people may feel they have to disappear to survive and avoid harm to themselves and their families. Exploiters are adept at obscuring service responses due to their in-depth knowledge of service thresholds and processes.

Going missing should not be treated independently from other forms of risk for the child or young person. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures practice guide for young people who go missing from home or care (2019b) states that young people should be offered a Return Home Interview, but this is not a statutory requirement. Consequently, exploiters are beginning to target young people who are unknown to services as this reduces the likelihood they will be invited to a return interview. Therefore, return interview should be undertaken when criminal exploitation is suspected and/or when the young person has frequent missing episodes to determine where the young person has been, who they have been with and what they have been doing.

Return interviews should be held within 72 hours of the young person being found. Young people have the right to a return home interview that is led by someone who is independent of their parent or carer. Practitioners should consider who is best placed to undertake the return interview based on the young person's wishes and which practitioner is able to establish rapport with the young person. Young people may be wary of speaking to the police due to fear of arrest or repercussions. However, practitioners should not assume that young people will remain silent or refuse to share information. Practitioners must create a safe environment, maintain transparency about their role and responsibilities and ensure the young person understands why the return interview is being held and its safeguarding purposes. This includes being sensitive to the potential risks to the young person from exploiters.

Family factors

While research has shown that supportive families are a protective factor for young people, any child regardless of their family background can be criminally exploited. Child criminal exploitation goes beyond what a family can support themselves; parents often become secondary victims. Practitioners must be professionally curious about all young people and alert to the risk signs of criminal exploitation:

“[their] home is pretty stable, but in terms of how vulnerable they are in the community they are really vulnerable, and, that makes them more vulnerable because they’re not flagging up for any other reason ... that makes them more vulnerable because they could slip through the net”

(Practitioner interview)

Media portrayals of child criminal exploitation can reinforce misleading stereotypes that it only affects Black or ethnic minority young people, those living in deprived inner-city areas or young people in gangs. Therefore, parents may not think that it is something that can happen to their child. This is compounded by the age at which young people are targeted. Adolescence is a time when young people spend less time with their parents or carers and more time with their peers as they move towards independence:

“Have you ever tried to get a 16 year old boy to school, he’s bigger than you, to physically get them there if they don’t want to go, like, that’s not fair ... not all parents are colluding or OK with what’s going on, some of them are just scared stiff or just don’t know how to deal with it and are not getting any help”

(Parent interview)

Parents should not be blamed. Parents are experts on their child; they know them and will notice changes in their behaviour, attitudes, peer groups and/or whether they are staying out late. Therefore, practitioners must listen to parents and perceive them to be part of the multi-agency response.

Family-level risk factors

While there are some family-level risk factors that increase a young person’s vulnerability to child criminal exploitation, in most cases parents are not to blame. Exploiters target young people when they are most vulnerable, this includes when they are having problems at home. Parent separation can obscure criminal exploitation as changes in behaviour may be attributed to a response to the family breakdown. Vulnerability to exploitation may also be increased if parents are having issues that adversely affect their ability to meet their child’s needs. This includes parental mental health, alcohol or substance misuse, and domestic abuse. Young people may be groomed by older relatives such as siblings or cousins. Young siblings may be threatened as a way of controlling the exploited young person, or younger brothers and sisters may inherit their debt to the exploiter. Exploiters may also manipulate parents to befriend or use existing friendships to target their children. This can make it difficult for parents to know who to trust:

“I do feel really paranoid about everything because you know I had a phone call from another mum who wanted some support for her son, but it actually turned out that her son was one of the older boys who was actually grooming my son”

(Parent interview).

This necessitates whole-family interventions to build resilience and strengthen family responses to child criminal exploitation.

Risk to the family

Parents are often secondary victims due to the nature and impact of child criminal exploitation. Exploiters may intimidate and threaten parents in their homes or workplaces, especially where young people have been removed from the area as a protective measure. Hence, voluntary accommodation placed family members at risk of violence. Initial findings suggested that this measure failed to protect young people from continued exploitation (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021).

Parents may be reluctant to tell services what is happening or report their child missing in case this results in their being harmed by the people exploiting them. This puts parents in a difficult position of wanting to protect their child but not knowing how to do this safely.

“They will just give instructions, of where to go or they’ll, you know, in most cases threaten them because I remember my son used to come to me and say, “Mum, you don’t understand, he’s bigger than you, he’s bigger than everybody. I can’t explain, Mum, it’s too much. I can’t, Mum, just please, trust me, trust me.” But I could see the fear in his eyes”.

(Parent interview)

Parents may also distrust professionals and fear child protection responses to the exploited child and their other children. They may be unwilling to speak to the police in case their child is criminalised and/or the culture against snitching and risk of repercussions to their child.

Community factors

Exploitation usually happens outside the home. Young people are groomed in the local community through friendship, peer pressure or where an older peer gives them money, takes them out for food or for days out. It may be in parks or at school by people they know, in the street by strangers or on social media:

“I was just approached. No apps or nothing. I was on my own and they offered me a phone, a burner. I didn’t know them”

(Youth interview)

Therefore, working with the community and raising public awareness can aid the identification and protection of young people from exploitation. This can be undertaken through contextual safeguarding work by safety and peer mapping. Safety mapping is a tool that can be used to understand where young people feel safe and where they feel vulnerable (for more information see the Contextual Safeguarding Network at <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/>).

At the individual level, it enhances safeguarding as it informs safety planning and can be used to frame conversations around how to strengthen the protective factors around young people. Practitioners can use this information to inform their decision making. It may help them to understand why the young person doesn’t attend appointments in certain areas or why they may not want to go to certain areas. It can help practitioners identify the places where young people

want to spend their time and where they feel safe. At the community level, safeguarding training can be offered to local businesses, public transport workers or accommodation providers. Such training must include details of how they can report their concerns.

Multi-agency working

As child criminal exploitation a cross-cutting issue, effective complex safeguarding delivered by multi-agency partners is vital. Multi-agency working enables complex, transitional and contextual safeguarding. This supports a whole system approach that can be targeted at identifying and protecting young people by working together to:

- Prevent child criminal exploitation.
- Safely support children and young people away from exploitation.
- Identify, disrupt, and prosecute the exploiters.

Practitioners should not assume that other agencies hold the same information about a young person. There is seldom clear evidence that a young person is being criminally exploited. A single piece of evidence or concern may not be suggestive of criminal exploitation but when information is collated across agencies this provides a comprehensive picture. This makes it vital for practitioners across all sectors to contribute to multi-agency responses to child criminal exploitation.

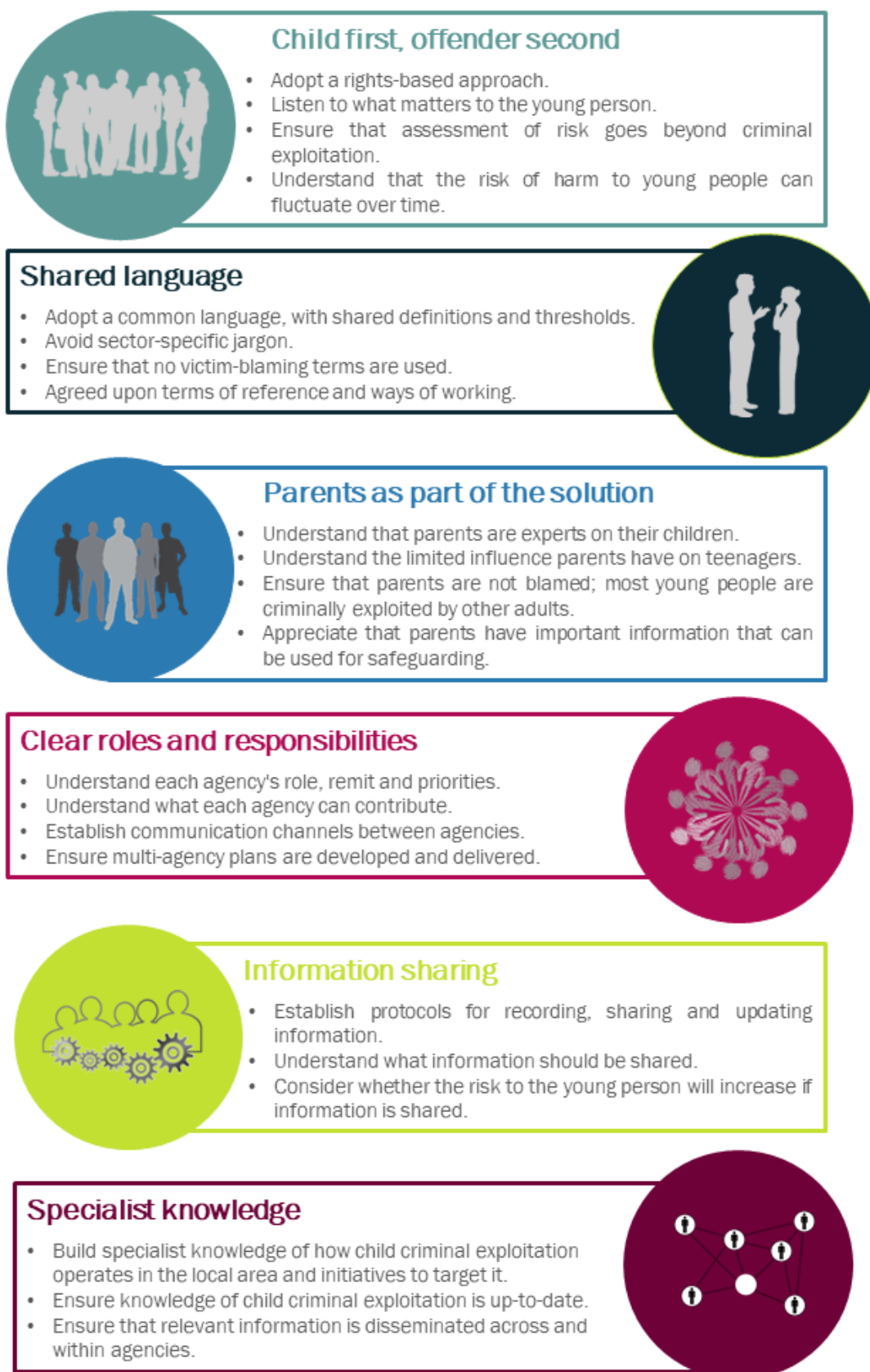
For multi-agency working to be effective, practitioners must establish processes that facilitate collaborative working across agencies build on a shared language and a culture of respect (See Figure 3). This should be underpinned by a shared mission to develop and target responses to risk and harm outside the family environment and the ability to work with complex safeguarding risks and develop interventions and approaches that are not linear or time limited.

Community approaches

At the community level, practitioners must share information about criminal exploitation and how it manifests and evolves within the local area so new adaptations of the model can be identified quickly. This information should be used to pursue, prepare, prevent and protect. For example, the police should pursue exploiters at the top of the hierarchy and protect young people at the street-level through disruption strategies deployed in hotspot areas. The Safer Communities Safety Partnership should focus on prepare and prevent by raising awareness and developing local initiatives around child criminal exploitation. This should include working with the police and housing practitioners to tackle cuckooing and enhancing community safeguarding responses through training for local businesses, including taxi drivers, fast food workers, hotel staff and park rangers. Education practitioners should equip young people with the knowledge and skills to prevent and protect themselves from child criminal exploitation. This should be embedded in the healthy relationships curriculum. Schools must understand their local area and ensure that young people have safe routes to and from school, especially where young people live in close proximity to exploiters:

“He just doesn’t want to be seen in case someone approaches him, I’m not sure if it’s because of fear or he doesn’t want to be looking weak and saying, no, I’m not interested, I’ve moved on” (Parent interview)

Figure 3: Principles of effective multi-agency working



Information sharing

Information sharing is a critical component of multi-agency working and safeguarding criminally exploited young people. Practitioners must understand their responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and what information must be shared with other agencies; what information could support effective decision making, and what information poses a risk to the young person if shared. Agencies must ensure that practitioners understand the different considerations and have effective systems and processes in place for timely information sharing. This includes regularly updating information so that young people are not subjected to over surveillance once their risk has subsided.

Peer mapping (Sloane et al., 2019) is a useful tool for identifying a young person's connections, potential exploiters and other young people who may be criminally exploited. This information can help to safeguard young people and disrupt and prosecute exploiters. In doing so, clarity is needed regarding the balance of evidence, actual and perceived role of each named peer and what actions have been taken. The map must be regularly updated. Practitioners should have clear guidelines regarding when young people and parents should be notified that their name has been peer mapped and recorded.

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Meetings (MACE)

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings have strategic oversight across all the exploitation cases in the area. Agencies must have agreed terms of reference, clarity around roles and responsibilities, information sharing protocols and a lead coordinator (see Figure 3).

No one agency will hold all the information about a young person. By contributing what is known about the young person a comprehensive picture can be obtained:

“People run MACE differently across Wales, our MACE is very strategic, we don't talk about individual children we talk about trends and themes, we talk about police operations, we talk about hotspots and actually what's being done about them and what else can be done”
(Social Work Practitioner interview)

The aim of MACE is to share important information relating to:

- Victims of exploitation.
- Exploiters.
- Places and spaces where criminal exploitation occurs.
- Themes and trends.

It is not designed to manage individual cases. Any cases taken to the MACE must have been subject to a multi-agency strategy meeting.

The purpose of MACE is to meet monthly in order to:

- Support a partnership approach to child criminal exploitation for children and young people up to the age of 25.
- Identify approaches to address child criminal exploitation in the short, medium, and long-term.

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- Identify and address any potential issues or challenges in implementing interventions.
 - Make sure that resources are directed at the most effective approaches in a timely way.

This relies on having the systems in place to record and share this information quickly. While MACE meetings are targeted at local responses, they should also feed into what is known about child criminal exploitation in neighbouring areas and across Wales. This is particularly needed where young people are being exploited by county lines or blurred lines as young people may be trafficked around Wales. Informing agencies in other local authorities aids the identification and tracking of criminally exploited young people and informs a strategic approach to safeguarding. It also alerts agencies a when young person is known to numerous local authorities so that they can build a picture of what is happening and create care and support plan to meet the young person's needs.

Multi-agency strategy meetings

Multi-agency strategy meetings are aimed at keeping the young person safe from exploitation. They are guided by law and statutory guidance including:

- Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- Wales Safeguarding Procedures.
- Children's Act 1989.

A multi-agency response is crucial as different agencies will hold different information about a young person. Information sharing can fill in the gaps about what is known about the young person. It provides intelligence about exploitation in the local authority area that be used to safeguard the individual young person and other young people in the wider community through targeted policing, youth work and other interventions.

Under section 47 Children Act 1989, a multi-agency strategy meeting or discussion must be held when child criminal exploitation is suspected. The section 47 assessment should consider the young person's needs rather than whether they meet service thresholds. The aim of the meeting is to:

- Share information
- Identify the child's care and support needs
- Develop a plan to reduce the risk of exploitation

The multi-agency response should be led by children's services and attendance will be determined by the extent to which practitioners know the child and/or can contribute knowledge about exploitation and keeping the young person safe. This can include a doctor, police, school, probation or community rehabilitation representative, youth offending service, or substance misuse services. There must be at least three different professional agencies in attendance. All agencies must support this process to facilitate timely identification of the right practitioners.

Consideration must be given to the young person's views either through an Independent Professional Advocate or where appropriate, the young person's attendance at the conference. The young person should understand the purpose of the conference, who will attend and be supported to prepare their contribution. The young person should meet the conference chair prior to the meeting.

Parents should be sent copies of the report before the conference and be prepared to think about the young person's wishes and feelings. Both mothers and fathers should be supported to attend and participate. Regarding fathers, it is widely accepted that they are less likely to attend meetings so proactive strategies should be employed to foster their engagement. Both parents will be expected to share their views, correct any errors, and understand why different agencies are involved. They should be told they can bring a friend, family member or another supporter with them. Young people and parents should not be overwhelmed by the number of practitioners present.

All practitioners must send a report, even if they are able to attend the conference. Under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, the multi-agency meeting should be held in the geographical location where the young person is located. While this enables local agencies to respond, this information must be shared with agencies in the area in which the young person resides. Consideration should be given as to whether monthly meetings are appropriate for child criminal exploitation. The risks for children and young people can change very quickly. In some areas, weekly meetings have been set up to discuss adolescent risk so that multi-agency partners can monitor risk and address emerging concerns in a timely manner.

The action plan

Multi-strategy agency strategy meetings should culminate in the production of a coordinated response across agencies. This should include a clear action plan with processes in place to monitor the plan to ensure that it meets the need of the young person and protects them from child criminal exploitation.

Consideration should be given to the complexities of child criminal exploitation and the impact this has on young people and their families. The action plan will need to:

- Address all the young person's care and support needs.
- Adopt a child-centred approach
- Include the wider context for the young person, not just the behaviours or visible issues.
- Be easy to access
- Have clear strategies for working with young people who may not accept or know they are being criminally exploited.

Once the plan and delivery partners have been identified, the social worker should tell the child, young person and family what is in the plan, outline the role for identified agencies and provide a named person they can contact if the young person or their family have questions or issues.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

When a young person is suspected to be a victim of child criminal exploitation, practitioners must make a referral to the National Referral Mechanism, known as a 'NRM' (Figure 4). In 2021 there were a total of 190 NRM referrals for children suspected of criminal exploitation aged 17 or under in Wales. Of these, 16 were for females and 174 were for males (Home Office, 2021). The NRM is the process used to decide whether a young person has been a victim of modern slavery and trafficking. and it is important to remember that:

-
- The activity might appear consensual but according to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, young people under 18 cannot consent to be abused or trafficked (Home Office, 2015).
 - Young people may not show obvious signs of distress or see themselves as being at risk of harm.
 - Young people may be unaware they have been trafficked or exploited.

Practitioners do not need to be certain that someone is a victim before they refer them. For young people up to the age of 18 their consent is not needed to make a referral. Young people over the age of 18 must consent to a referral being made.

The NRM referral can be made by the police, local authorities, and some voluntary organisations. Practitioners from third sector organisations may be best placed to undertake this role as they are not constrained by a statutory role and as such, they may have more scope to build rapport with children and young people, establish trust and provide help and support.

NRM referrals should also be referred to the police because all victims of modern slavery are potential victims of crime. This should either be done by the person making the NRM referral or by the competent authority. The young person should be told that their case will be passed onto the police as they are a potential victim of a crime.

When a child or young person is referred to the NRM, they must still be referred to Children's Services under Part 7 of the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

A negative Reasonable Grounds or Conclusive Grounds decision can be appealed in two ways:

1. **Reconsideration.** A first responder or practitioner can ask the competent authority to look at the evidence again or to include new evidence in their decision making.
2. **Judicial review.** The young person can ask the court to review the decision.

A positive NRM decision should lead to better outcomes for the young person. However, if young people are not appropriately safeguarded there is a risk that young people will be returned to exploiters. The young person may also be at risk from the exploiters if they believe the young person has avoided prosecution through 'snitching'. This necessitates creative and strengths-based practice around monitoring young people who have been through the NRM.

Figure 4: The NRM process



Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs)

Under section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs) are an independent source of help and support for young people who have been trafficked. Every local authority in Wales has ICTGs. This service is an independent source of advice, and ICTGs can speak up on children's behalf. Once a first responder has followed the usual safeguarding and NRM referral routes for a young person, they should refer them to the ICTG service via an online form.

The ICTG service will assess the immediate safeguarding needs of the young person and provide advice to the frontline professional or 'first responder' making the referral. The role of the ICTG service is to work with public and non-public agencies and parents through consultation and advice to ensure the young person's best interests are recognised. They also provide expert advice to professionals about how to best support and safeguard child victims of trafficking. Where a young person has committed offences in the course of or as a result of being trafficked, the ICTG will ensure all professionals are aware of the non-punishment principle and section 45 defence in the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

The Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by telephone: 0800 043 4303 or email: trafficking.referrals@bypmk.cjsm.net.

Working with young people

Any young person of any age, gender, ethnicity or background *can* be criminally exploited. Practitioners must be vigilant to the individual, interpersonal and community risk factors that heighten a young person's risk of being criminally exploited. This includes the absence of risk factors, as these young people are more likely to go under the practitioner's radar making them more attractive to exploiters. Nevertheless, practitioners must offer a proportionate response to young people. This must be underpinned by a child-rights approach. Young people are not to blame for being criminally exploited. Practitioners must also understand adolescent development and the tension between supporting young people into independence and safeguarding them from child criminal exploitation. Placing young people under constant surveillance and close monitoring can serve as a push factor, reinforcing the exploiter narrative that practitioners do not want what's best for young people.

Reiterating the impact of adolescent development, young people's brains do not fully develop until their early 20s and so their decisions may not seem logical or rational to practitioners. Moreover, when young people are groomed at an early age and miss substantial amounts of compulsory education their cognitive age may be far lower than their chronological age. Following the Mental Capacity Act 2005, this disconnection between the young person's chronological and cognitive age must be borne in mind. Practitioners must engage with young people in accordance with their cognitive age.

Young people may be both a victim and perpetrator of child criminal exploitation. Young people are deceived into thinking they have made a choice to earn 'easy money'. The reality is that young people are controlled by the exploiters, they are subjected to physical and sexual abuse, forced to stay in filthy trap houses with little food and surrounded by adult drug addicts. Their siblings or parents may have been threatened. Some young people may begrudgingly accept this abuse as an unavoidable consequence of easy money while others feel trapped and unable to safely exit from the exploiters. Practitioners must adopt a child first, offender second approach where young people are safeguarded and not criminalised (Welsh Government, 2019). Every contact with every practitioner should be used to create a reachable moment that can be used to safeguard young people. This may be through police contacts, healthcare providers or relationships with teachers. Practitioners must be role models for strengths-based, child-centred safeguarding practice and understand the importance of engaging young people when they are ready to engage. Therapeutic approaches such as Motivational Interviewing may facilitate this process (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2019). Motivational interviewing is aimed at eliciting behaviour change and should be delivered by trained practitioners.

Relationship-based approach

Young people will have a lead practitioner, or key worker, who has the capacity to establish rapport and build a relationship with them:

"It does take time and more than one chat to change a person like that because, after that chat, he's still probably going outside and doing what he's doing. Still meeting up with

*those friends and drinking so it makes no difference. You need 1, 2, 3 – it’s a slow process
– but they will get there”*

(Young person interview)

The lead practitioner may be a youth worker, youth justice practitioner or social worker. Where available, young people should also have access to a peer mentor with lived experience of criminal exploitation. Peer mentors are often more adept at engaging unwilling or reluctant young people as they have more credibility and have insight into how young people may be feeling and the barriers they are facing (Maxwell et al., 2022). Peer mentors can provide strategies for overcoming these barriers, challenge misconceptions and serve as role models for recovery (Nixon, 2020).

Youth Charter

Drawing on the principles of the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, a Youth Charter has been co-produced with young people about how they want practitioners and their parents to engage with them. The Charter is based on the need for practitioners and parents to demonstrate ‘unconditional positive regard’ which refers to understanding, respecting and accepting young people for who they are, without judgement (Rogers, 1951). In doing so, the Youth Charter has been developed to enable practitioners to talk to young people about what matters to them, how their existing strengths and resources can be used to do these things and what services and approaches they would find most helpful.

The Charter consists of nineteen statements. These statements were developed in consultation with the Peer Action Collective (PAC) based at Media Academy Cymru. The Peer Action Collective consists of ten Peer Researchers aged 18-25 from Cardiff, Swansea and Wrexham. Peer researchers took part in small groups as part of a larger event at the CASCADE offices. The list of statements they generated was subject to review and refinement drawing upon research findings from young people with direct experience of child criminal exploitation. The edited Youth Charter was sent to PAC for their comments and feedback until the final list was agreed upon (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Youth Charter

Ask us

Give us the option about how, when and if we engage with you.

Be yourself

Introduce who you are and why you want to talk to us.

Create a safe place to talk

Find a safe, comfortable place to talk to us. Ask us where we would like to meet you.

Don't assume you know us

We are all different. Take time to get to know us and what we may find upsetting.

Explain your role and responsibilities

Be clear and upfront about your safeguarding roles and responsibilities. Tell us what information you must share and whether you will tell us before this happens.

Focus on us, not what information you need

Don't just bombard us with questions. Let the conversation flow by taking part. Don't just write notes.



Give us time

It may not be the right time for us to tell you what is happening. We may have obligations to our friends, or we may be afraid of repercussions from exploiters.

Help us to trust you

Be honest. Tell us about your links and roles with other practitioners. It can be distressing if we don't know who you are talking to about us. But it can also be positive if we know you are working with other people to help us.

Include us in decision-making

Encourage and support us to make decisions about our lives. This includes what support we receive, the services we engage with and the activities we take part in.

Jargon excludes us

Talk to us at our level and keep jargon to a minimum.



Keep our needs in mind

We have different backgrounds and cultures. We may not want to engage in the same way. We may not feel comfortable in group meetings or activities.



Listen to us

Be prepared to hear what we have to say. Respect our views and don't assume you know us.

Maintain boundaries

While we want you to get to know us, this is still a service setting. Encourage us to develop a practitioner-young person relationship. Don't try to be our friends.

Never force us

Be mindful of our body language and use of eye contact. Give us our personal space and be sensitive to our needs and triggers. Don't force us to disclose to you.



Only promise what you can deliver

Don't make false promises or say you will do things unless you know you can do them. Be realistic about what you can and can't do.

Prepare yourself to feel uncomfortable

It can be difficult to hear what we have to say, for a range of reasons. Don't judge us. Just listen.

Query, but don't question

Check you understand what we've told you, but don't question or interrogate us.



Report back to us

Tell us when you will do things and what will happen next. Let us know what actions have been taken since we met you.

Say goodbye

Let us know if you are changing jobs or roles. Say goodbye to us and introduce us to the person taking over your role.

Working with trauma

Even when young people are unable or unwilling to disclose, they have the right to be safeguarded. This necessitates a new approach to service thresholds and holistic risk assessment to capture concerns and fluctuating levels of risk. Young people may be distrustful of practitioners based on exploiter indoctrination and/or previous negative experiences. They may suffer from post-traumatic stress due to their experiences while being exploited. They should be supported before, during and

after disclosure by a lead practitioner who is highly skilled in engaging with young people and working with trauma. This may include additional or separate support from Trauma Stress Wales.

Lead practitioners must also understand the nature of exploitation and ensure that they adopt a joint planning approach so that young people have a say in all decisions that affect them. The lead practitioner should advocate for young people's views and support them to participate with practitioners from other agencies. The lead practitioner should explain the role and responsibilities of all practitioners to young people and where appropriate, their parents or carers. They should ensure the young person's voice is heard, considered, and included at all stages of service provision. Where decision making and/or service provision is not aligned with the young person's wishes, the lead practitioner should explain the rationale for the decision. Lead practitioners must explain child protection processes and be transparent about what information will be shared, with whom and what it will be used for. The lead practitioner must also ensure that the risk of harm is not increased when information about a young person is shared with other agencies. The lead practitioner may decide to anonymise the information, share only a portion or delay dissemination until the young person has been safeguarded. The lead practitioner must also ensure that information about a young person is regularly updated across all agencies. While historical information should be considered when assessing risk, young people should not continue to be held to account as they move away from criminal exploitation and enter onto positive pathways.

Disruption strategies

Consideration must be given to the impact of criminal exploitation on the young person, especially as exploiters situate themselves as their 'new family' and indoctrinate young people against their family, friends and practitioners. Young people must have access to a support network which they can access 24-hours a day, seven days a week. It is when young people are alone, isolated, and bored or frightened that they are most at risk of being groomed back into criminal exploitation.

There are mixed results regarding the effectiveness of electronic tagging in protecting young people from continued criminal exploitation. Effectiveness is associated with a larger package of support and a good relationship between the young person and practitioners. Electronic tagging can deter exploiters from targeting young people and give them a protected space to begin recovery. In some cases, it was described as the 'best six months of his life' (parent interview). Lack of effectiveness was associated with the adapting models of child criminal exploitation as young people may still be criminally exploited in the local area and/or be vulnerable once the electronic tag is removed. Therefore, the lead practitioner must work with young people to devise appropriate disruption strategies. This should include supporting them back into education and/or suitable alternative provision and having high expectations for young people. Criminally exploited young people may see no way out of their current situation so it vital that they are given hope and support onto positive pathways:

"[he's] telling me it's never going to work for him, that he just wants to die. He's either going to be in prison or two options – prison or dead. He can't see another option. Telling me he never knew what was happening, that this, what was happening, was not what he wanted." (Parent interview)

Once on positive pathways, young people still require support from practitioners. It may take time before they disclose everything they have endured, and they remain vulnerable to child criminal exploitation until they have managed the trauma they have suffered.

Responding to missing episodes

More consistent use of return interviews is needed when young people have missing episodes, regardless of duration (see Figure 6). Exploiters use service loopholes by ensuring that criminal exploitation is not detected. This places young people at increased and continued risk of harm. Practitioners have a duty to report the child as missing and agencies must work together to provide a joined-up response. Practitioners must follow safeguarding procedures when a child is reported missing from home or care as outlined under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Parents should have a lead practitioner they can contact whenever the young person goes missing. The lead practitioner must alert other practitioners and record each incident. They should be aware that exploiters coach young people on what to say to practitioners. This includes telling the police that they are safe and staying with friends even when they are being forced to stay in trap houses.

Parents, carers and residential workers should be given information about how to respond sensitively and what to do if the young person says they have been harmed. When found, young people may be scared of how their parents, carers or practitioners will react. The young person should be offered a private place so they can talk about where they have been and what has happened to them. They may need access to medical treatment if they have been physically or sexually harmed and/or been given alcohol or drugs.

If a young person presents for a health service and it becomes apparent that they have been reported missing from home or local authority care, health practitioners must make a referral to children's services. Where young people have suffered harm while they have been missing, they should always be offered a health assessment. It is important that the assessing professional understand the harms associated with child criminal exploitation, including plugging (inserting drugs into any openings in the body), physical injuries, sexual abuse. In these circumstances, child protection processes must always be followed. Under the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, health and social care provisions must be integrated.

Figure 6: Police and children's services responses to missing episodes



Working with families

In most cases, parents and carers are not to blame for child criminal exploitation. Parenting adolescents is challenging. Parents have reduced influence and little control over what happens in the wider community. Exploiters capitalise on this. They use normal teenage development to obscure exploitation. They use the tendency to blame parents to deter help-seeking. They threaten parents with violence to their child(ren) or themselves and/or coach their child to make false child protection allegations about them:

“He got beaten up, he was attacked...[they] filmed it and then I got sent the video of it. It was awful “

(Parent interview)

Rather than a failure to disclose missing episodes, suspected child criminal exploitation or non-engagement, parents may be afraid. They may fear the exploiters, practitioner safeguarding responses and the police criminalising their child. Most parents feel helpless, isolated and stigmatised (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021).

Under complex safeguarding, parents are part of the solution. Practitioners should adopt strengths-based, solution-focused ways of working to engage parents in a safeguarding contract. The contract should be underpinned by Transitional Safeguarding and include:

- Roles and responsibilities for parents and practitioners.
- Agreed upon actions.
- Shared strategies regarding how to address each action.
- Accountability arrangements for both parents and practitioners.

The contact should be used to facilitate trust between the parent and practitioners and expedite safeguarding the young person. This must be undertaken in partnership with parents and conducted in a non-judgmental, strengths-based manner. In doing so, parents and practitioners should work together to undertake a dynamic process of risk assessment and management. This information will provide real-time intelligence that can be used for safeguarding the young person and more widely by identifying hotspots in the local community, and exact times of the day or night when risk may escalate for young people. This intelligence should also be used to identify individuals associated with the criminal exploitation of young people.

In response to the indoctrination techniques exploiters use to manipulate, force or control young people, practitioners must support parents to maintain a connection with their child. Rather than imposing strict controls, parental efforts should be focused on maintaining communication and reinforcing their love and commitment. This counteracts exploiter attempts at controlling the young person and isolating them from their family and other protective factors. Consideration should be given to training parents in the Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) approach (Jakob, 2018), an intervention delivered by Child Adolescent Mental Health Service and aimed at parents of children who exhibit destructive and harmful behaviours. NVR teaches parents a range of techniques, such as de-escalation, increased parental presence, firm responses to acts of violence and continual verbal affirmations of parental commitment to their child:

But what it really means is that, in a point of crisis, you are able to keep that connection, or at least try to sort of have some solidarity ... that was my lifeline, because I was doing everything that normal parents would do, but obviously it wasn't the best result, especially when a child is being manipulated and controlled as an outside influence.

(Parent interview)

Maintaining the parent-child relationship means that the young person can ask for help when they are ready. It also alleviates parental anxiety about losing their child to the exploiters:

"You know, if something were to happen to him, I don't think I could live with myself if I had cut off from him"

(Parent interview)

Where appropriate and safe to do so, criminally exploited young people should be supported to remain at home with their families. This requires whole family interventions to build resilience and strengthening family responses to address the impact of child criminal exploitation on all family members. This will include preventative measures for younger siblings, supporting them family to address unmet needs at the interpersonal and community levels.

Section two: Sector-specific information

Under the Working Together Statutory Guidance (volume 5, page 11) all practitioners working with young people have a responsibility for safeguarding. The remainder of this report provides detailed information regarding the warning signs of child criminal exploitation, safeguarding roles and responsibilities specific to each sector: Children's Services, Education, Health, Housing, Police, Youth Justice, and Youth Services. Each sub-section concludes with an overview of relevant, sector-specific policy and practice guidance.

Children's Services

Children's service practitioners have a central role in safeguarding young people suspected of or who are being criminally exploited. This role can be challenging to navigate due to the cross-cutting nature of child criminal exploitation. Social workers and other children's service practitioners may find themselves working alongside the police, youth justice service, education, and third sector practitioners. Social workers must be skilled in working with different agencies, their remits, and priorities. They must be comfortable allocating clearly defined roles and responsibilities to practitioners in other agencies. They must promote the rights of the young person, child-centred approaches and ensure that the young person is safeguarded. This includes ensuring that the young person has the most appropriate lead practitioners, their voice is heard, and agency responses are in the best interests of the young person.

Social workers must be adept at working with young people who may be both victims and perpetrators. Young people may not accept they are being criminally exploited or may find the notion distressing. Social workers must see beyond the visible evidence of criminal activity to identify potential risk of harm. Social workers are responsible for assessing risk of harm and determining whether a multi-agency discussion is needed. While assessment tools can guide information gathering, criminally exploited young people may present with a series of concerns rather than actual risk factors. The risk of harm may fluctuate, and it may take many weeks to build trust and establish rapport with the young person before the risks are identified (Child Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool). Some young people present with a low level of risk despite being subject to high levels of harm due to criminal exploitation:

"There are so many different ways that young people are exploited, so many different contexts, I think we need to be really careful to not get caught up in that all of this is extra-familial, or all of this is intrafamilial and, actually, it can be both, it can be either, yes, I guess, it's holding that both and approach to assessment. And not being, like, there's concerns about exploitation, therefore, it's this, not rushing to make assumptions and assessing each case individually"

(Children's Services interview)

The risk of harm from child criminal exploitation can change quickly. This often occurs outside of normal office hours, in the evenings and weekends. Social workers must be available to support young people when they are in crisis. They must establish links or systems so that young people can access their social worker outside office hours. Social workers must develop a relationship with the young person and build trust using open-ended information gathering techniques to obtain evidence pertaining to risk. They should also work with other agencies who may hold information about the young person. Some local authorities have protocols or processes in place for young people suspected of being criminally exploited but who do not meet service thresholds. These protocols ensure that the young person receives timely support aimed at preventing an escalation of exploitation. Youth workers and third sector agencies should be used to support young people, contribute to safeguarding, monitor risk and alert social workers if this increases.

Working with families

Even when parents are perceived as having the capacity to support their children, child criminal exploitation goes beyond what they can support alone. Under the Care and Support (Eligibility)

(Wales) Regulations (2015) local authorities should intervene in these cases. Practitioners should not blame parents. Parents are often assessed when the risk of harm is outside the family environment and in the community by older peers or adults. Establishing trusting relationships with parents and partnership working will be adversely affected where parents are made to feel they are part of the problem. It may also hinder opportunities for them to obtain help and support:

“So, it’s like I’m trying to save my family and yet, at the same time, I’m being criticised and scrutinised in whatever I do. And yet there is no physical support, there’s no support that – because they don’t understand, they don’t get it”

(Parent interview)

Exploiters take advantage of:

- The challenges of parenting teenagers.
- Increased influence of peers.
- Service remit, ways of working and thresholds.

Approaches and interventions based on strengthening parenting techniques can be counterproductive as they may push young people toward the exploiters. Young people are told that the exploiters are their ‘new family’ and only they care about them and want them to do well. Therefore, when parents challenge young people and try to impose boundaries it feeds into this narrative and further disconnects young people from their families.

Some parents reported that their children had been coached in techniques to deter them from seeking support. One parent described how she called her son’s bluff when he had threatened to report her for sexual abuse if she contacted the police or Children’s Services (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021). However, other may be frightened that their other children would be taken into local authority care if they reached out for help from social workers.

Children’s Service practitioners should support parents to retain a relationship with their criminally exploited child. This should include the adoption of narratives that run counter, but do not challenge, exploiter attempts at isolating the young person from their family.

Children's Services: policy and practice guidance

Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 states that young people are best looked after by the family, where it is safe to do so; the young person's welfare is paramount. While most of the Children Act 1989 applies to Wales, the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 replaces part three (local authority support for children and families) and sections 22 and 23 relating to children who are looked after. In relation to child criminal exploitation, part five (protection of children) says that local authorities have a duty to look into cases where a young person is thought to be at risk of harm. This means that the local authority should assess whether they need to support the family or take action to protect the young person.

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

Under the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, a young person is seen to be at risk if they have care and support needs, regardless of whether they are being met, and appear to be at risk of harm, abuse or neglect. The Act includes a new assessment process for care and support needs which is based on what matters to the individual. It says that the individual's strengths and existing support from friends and family should be considered.

Under section 130, Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, all practitioners have a duty to report concerns about a young person's safety or well-being. In the first instance, this should be made to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The DSL will be a practitioner who has received additional safeguarding training and is able to provide advice and support. All agencies must have a DSL.

The local authority has a duty to investigate any concern referred to them. Referrals are made by practitioners by completing the appropriate referral form. Where possible they should seek consent from the young person and parents, provided it does not increase risk of harm to the young person. Following the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, the local authority must make a proportionate response to safeguarding referrals. Figure 7 outlines the referral process.

Figure 7: Children's Services referrals and outcomes



Education

Education settings must adopt a child-centred, strengths-based approach. At the individual level, young people should have access to a trusted adult within the school or college environment. This may be a teacher, teaching assistant or pastoral support workers. Regardless of education setting, young people should be given a sense of belonging in a safe environment where they are supported to develop their education, independence, resilience and self-reliance (Estyn, 2021a, Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2014; McCluskey et al, 2015):

"Making them feel a part of something in school where they're building their friendships and, for example, enrolling them in clubs – giving them a sense of responsibility – something that they can feel a part of"

(Young person interview).

At the family level, education practitioners must listen and work with parents and carers to safeguard young people. At the community level, education settings must embed teaching and learning about child criminal exploitation, grooming and safety messages within the curriculum and based on local intelligence as to how it manifests in that locality. This should be added to the 'healthy relationship' element of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) under the new curriculum. Teaching should increase in complexity as young people mature, rather than repeating the same lessons (Estyn, 2021b: 8).

Education settings must embrace a broader preventative strategy for safeguarding embedded within the curriculum at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Information about child criminal exploitation must be conveyed to parents in a strengths-based way to avoid misconceptions that the education setting has an 'issue' with criminal exploitation. Rather, parents must understand that any young person can be exploited, the warning signs, and where to access help and support.

Safeguarding role

Drawing on key messages from policy and practice guidance and findings from the research, education practitioners have a range of roles and responsibilities aimed at safeguarding young people. Education practitioners play an important role in identifying and protecting young people from harm; they may be the only professionals who have regular contact with young people and their families. This places the onus on education staff to help young people:

- Feel part of the school community.
- Feel safe at school, Education Other Than At School provision or other education settings.
- Have good relationships with young people.
- Create a culture that values young people.
- Have a culture that values and supports emotional and mental wellbeing.

Education settings must take reasonable measures to minimise the risks of harm to the well-being of young people. This includes consideration of the appropriateness of their policies for child criminal exploitation, trafficking, absenteeism and missing education. Practitioners must receive appropriate training aimed at embedding professional curiosity into routine practice with proportionate responses to the risks of harm identified. Education practitioners must have access to clear information, advice, and guidance about the warning signs of child criminal exploitation,

their safeguarding duties under the Social Services Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, and how to make appropriate child protection referrals. Education practitioners must utilise existing electronic case management systems such as MyConcern and CPoms to record and share information that can be used to identify patterns and trends regarding child criminal exploitation. This information should be used at the local level to inform safeguarding approaches. Practitioners must understand GDPR and what information should be shared with multi-agency partners through MACE and multi-strategy discussions and meetings.

Education settings must have Designated Safeguarding Leads with specialist knowledge of child criminal exploitation and up-to-date links with local and national services and organisations. This facilitates referral processes and enables the provision of the 'right support at the right time' for young people. Education settings should also have a named police officer who liaises with regarding local activity and preventative initiatives for child criminal exploitation and other forms of harm.

Education risk factors

There are a range of additional risk factors that education practitioners should be alert to.

Some pupils have heightened vulnerability

This includes those with additional learning needs, local attendance rates, and those who have managed moves, temporary or permanent exclusions. Young people may also be at enhanced risk if they have quieter personalities, live in certain hotspot areas or have siblings/other relatives who have been criminally exploited or who are known to the police in relation to their criminal activities. Finally, young people who are being bullied or struggle to fit in or make friends may be targeted by exploiters. Education practitioners must be alert to the amplified risk when young people have a range of vulnerabilities and adopt strengths-based ways of supporting these young people.

Transitions

Exploiters target young people when they feel vulnerable. This can include the worries and concerns around making new friends, settling into a new setting or travelling independently to and from school. Some groups of young people find this much harder than others. Additional support and interventions should be offered before, during and after transitions from primary to secondary education and moving from secondary to college education. Exploiters may enrol on college courses to befriend young people. Therefore, college and higher education settings must be vigilant about their students and exercise professional curiosity towards students who do not engage.

Grooming at the school gates

Exploiters may hang around outside the school gates and use ex-pupils or older siblings to groom younger pupils. Pupils may be asked to drop a package off for a 'friend' or a 'friend of a friend'. They may be given money on the first occasion but on the second occasion, exploiters may arrange for the young person to be mugged. This leaves the pupil in debt to the exploiter and trapped until they repay the debt. Education settings should take measures to safeguard young people during the journey to and from school. This should include ensuring that school staff are available before and after school and working with the local community to safeguard young people.

School exclusion

School exclusion is associated with child criminal exploitation. This is partly due to the over-representation of vulnerable young people in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision. This includes those with additional learning needs, young people who are looked after, those on free school meals, boys and young people on reduced timetables. The risk of school exclusion has also been associated with poverty, mental health problems, young carers and ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences (Samaritans Cymru, 2019). Our review for the Wales Violence Prevention Unit (Maxwell and Corliss, 2020) found that school exclusion includes:

- **Self-exclusion** where young people remain at home to avoid bullying.
- **Voluntary exclusion** where parents are asked to keep their child at home in response to problem behaviours.
- **Unlawful exclusion** where young people are sent home as a form of discipline, either for short periods, indefinitely or permanently.
- **Managed moves** where the school is unable to manage the young person and arranges for them to be transferred to another education setting.

Exploiters coach young people to 'act out' so they will be excluded. In 2019/20, the most common reason given for a school exclusion was 'persistent disruptive behaviour', accounting for just over a quarter of all exclusions (Welsh Government, 2021). This was followed by 'verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult' and 'physical assault against a pupil'. As education settings are responsible for the safety of all their pupils, this can create tension between safeguarding the young person and safeguarding the wider school community:

"We've often found ourselves at a real crossroads between how do we keep our community safe, our teachers safe, our learning maintained, whilst also ensuring that we're not sending young people into the free time where they could be increasingly vulnerable"

(Education practitioner interview)

School exclusion reduces professional oversight and increases the amount of unstructured, unsupervised time for the young person. In addition to increasing the availability of young people to exploiters, education practitioners must consider the impact of school exclusion on young people's future opportunities and self-worth:

"People need to tell them [young people] about the consequences of being kicked out of school. I didn't feel supported at school. School need to talk to me and ask me how I'm feeling and what's not going okay in my life, don't just blame me for bad behaviour"

(Young person interview)

School exclusion is linked to low self-esteem, reduced opportunities and there is a risk that young people on the cusp of being exploited are placed in the same venue. In this sense, it is 'like you open them up to the wolves' (Parent interview). Therefore, the need to support both the social and learning needs of young people in EOTAS, the provision of specialist staff training such as counselling and additional learning needs is essential in achieving quality provision (Thomson and Pennacchia, 2014).

Warning signs for education practitioners

Education practitioners need to be alert to the warning signs for child criminal exploitation:

- A pattern of repeated short-term enrolments in schools, this could be for a term or longer.
- Unexplained injuries, vague symptoms, self-harm and/or mental, physical or sexual trauma.
- Young people may be vague about their lives and reluctant to share any personal information.
- Young people may be reluctant to disclose what is happening due to fear about what will happen to themselves or their families.
- Young people may be coached in what to say, so they may repeat similar stories to others or use terms they do not understand.

(All Wales Practice Guide for Safeguarding children who may be trafficked, 2019c)

In addition, education practitioners should look for changes in behaviour, appearance or having new unexplained belongings:

“... changes in attendance, physical appearance so if they’re tired and look like they’ve been up all night, clothing so turning up in a £400 pair of Nikes, lots of chains and watches, high amounts of cash that you wouldn’t expect for someone on the free school register, intoxication...and increased frequency of getting in trouble with the authorities”

(Education practitioner interview).

Education practitioners may notice that previously attentive pupils disengage from education. Conversely, previously disruptive pupils may become attentive as exploiters are beginning to coach pupils into remaining in schools and avoiding attention from teachers.

Working with young people

Education cannot compete with the easy money offered by exploiters. Education practitioners must provide them with a range of options and opportunities:

“Just show them that there’s more to life than chilling with this guy and do that. Shove that. There’s always hope. There’s always an opportunity. You’ll get there.” Give them a goal. Set targets”.

(Young person interview)

Targeted support should be given to young people who struggle with their academic studies, and those with personal difficulties or problems at home. As education practitioners may not have the time, expertise, or resources to address these needs, they may need to develop initiatives with other agencies including third sector organisations. This includes drawing upon the current systems to support vulnerable young people and having high expectations for all young people:

“All of these petty little jobs that no one would want to apply and study for. They’ll just give it to these guys who fail in school. That’s what I believe.”

(Young person interview)

Education: Policy and practice guidance

Young people have the right to an education under Articles 28 and 29 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), aimed at the development of a young person's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

In Wales, education is guided by several pieces of legislation, including the Education Act 2002, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Equality Act 2010. In addition, there are legal duties within the statutory guidance, 'Keeping Learners Safe' (2021).

Education Act 2002

Under section 175 of the Education Act 2002, Welsh Ministers have powers to safeguard children and young people and promote their welfare. This includes roles and responsibilities for:

- Local authorities.
- Governing bodies of maintained schools.
- Further education institutions.

Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP).

Every education or alternative provision setting should have a Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP) with lead responsibility for safeguarding. The DSP has strategic responsibilities that include working with other agencies to support effective multi-agency working and contributing to coordinated responses to meet the needs of young people. To fulfil this role, DSPs should:

- Know how to recognise the warning signs and understand when it is appropriate to make a referral to children's services.
- Be available when needed to advise staff or speak with young people at 'critical moments'. These are moments when the young person may be more likely to want or accept help and support.
- DSPs must attend statutory meetings and liaise with other agencies.
- Raise awareness amongst their colleagues and ensure that specialist staff such as teaching assistants, learning support staff and any other staff working with young people receive training to help them identify potential victims of exploitation.
- Provide advice and support to other staff and liaise with other agencies as appropriate.
- Ensure that all education staff understand child criminal exploitation, the warning signs and the education setting's policies.
- Consider how safeguarding concerns around child criminal exploitation can be addressed and what preventative measures are needed
- Maintain links with specialist local and national services and organisations to facilitate the provision of appropriate referrals and the right support at the right time.

School and College Governors or Management Committees

All school and college governors or management committees should have relevant safeguarding and child protection training. This should consist of a minimum of the Keeping Learners Safe (2021) modules and be aimed at sufficient understanding of child criminal exploitation to fulfil their safeguarding duties to the school, college, or education setting. Specifically, they must ensure that:

- Education settings have effective child criminal exploitation safeguarding policies.
- Staff who are trained to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Staff training is up to date.
- Appropriate arrangements to ensure temporary staff and volunteers understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
- Ensure any weaknesses or problems with child protection and safeguarding are solved.
- Ensure that the DSP, designated governor, and chair of governors receive training in inter-agency working.

The designated governor for safeguarding has additional responsibilities. This governor has responsibility for all child protection matters. They must make sure that the governing body undertakes an annual review of safeguarding policies and procedures and have they have been created and used within the education setting.

Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)

EOTAS provision is education that is aimed at meeting the needs of young people who cannot attend mainstream school. This can include, but is not limited to, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), individual pathways, and other forms of independent or voluntary sector provision.

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, young people have a right to receive a suitable and efficient education. Young people who do not receive a suitable education are at “risk of a range of negative outcomes that could have long term damaging consequences for their life chances” (Welsh Government 2019). The Welsh Government (2017) describes EOTAS learners as some of the most vulnerable learners as they include young people with medical issues, additional learning needs or those who have been excluded from mainstream school.

The Education Act 1996 places the responsibility for EOTAS provision onto local authorities.

EOTAS provision includes:

- Pupil Referral Units.
- Further education college.
- Maintained and non-maintained schools.
- Work-related education.
- Training providers.
- Voluntary organisations.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are the most used type of EOTAS.

According to the National Assembly's research briefing (2019) PRUs should provide short and medium-term placements with a goal of reintegrating learners into other schools. It is worth noting that not all PRU pupils receive their education solely outside of a mainstream schooling environment. Some will continue to be on roll at a mainstream school, spending a proportion of the schooling week between both mainstream and PRU provisions, usually for a short period of time, to help with reintegration (Welsh Government, 2019b).

Keeping Learners Safe 2021

The Welsh Government outlines the safeguarding responsibilities for education practitioners in the statutory guidance, 'Keeping Learners Safe' (2021). This guidance must be followed by nurseries, schools, governing bodies, further education colleges and local authorities. It is also recommended for youth services, work-based learning providers, EOTAS providers and higher education providers.

The guidance states that education settings have a legal duty to protect and promote young people's well-being up until the age of 18. This guidance draws upon the Social Services Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

The 'Keeping Learners Safe' guidance defines safeguarding as:

- Protecting children from harm, abuse, neglect and other forms of harm.
- Preventing impairment of children's health or development.
- Ensuring that children and young people have safe and effective care.
- Take action to enable children and young people to achieve the best outcomes.

This means that education staff are responsible for:

- Creating and maintaining a safe learning environment.
- Having their own policies and procedures to keep young people safe from harm, abuse and neglect.
- Identifying child wellbeing concerns and take action to address them, in partnership with other agencies where appropriate.
- Developing young people's understanding, awareness and resilience through the curriculum.

Multi-agency partnership working

Education settings are seen as part of the wider safeguarding system for young people especially as they may be the only agency who engages with young people and their families. They are perceived as the ideal place to identify early concerns, provide help and support and make appropriate referrals. In doing so, education settings must:

- Promote and protect children and young people's rights.
- Contribute to effective multi-agency working.

- Communicate with agencies who provide care and support for children, young people and families.

Education settings must work with local authorities, the police, health services and other services to protect children and young people from harm.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, practitioners must promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of children and young people across their lifetime. This includes enabling children and young people to fulfil their potential regardless of their background or personal circumstances.

Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, education staff must focus on preventative work to reduce the impact of what is known as 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACEs). These are childhood experiences that directly harm a young person. This includes harm to the young person such as child abuse or neglect as well as harm they experience in their environment such as parental substance misuse or parental separation. This is based on research findings that suggest ACEs have a negative impact on child development that may lead to health difficulties later in life (Bellis et al., 2015).

While the presence of ACEs may show that a young person is at an increased risk of being groomed into child criminal exploitation, the Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018) has warned against using risk factors to predict future behaviour.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on governing bodies and education providers to make sure their practice does not discriminate against young people who are pupils at, or who are applying to, a school. The Act protects everyone from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on protected characteristics, which include disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity. The Act also considers socio-economic inequalities.

This responsibility exists even when young people are absent, have been temporarily excluded and includes former pupils of the education setting.

Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 provides a statutory framework for local authorities, education providers, governing bodies, youth offending teams, and health providers. Its aim is to support young people who have additional learning needs. It came into force in September 2021 and replaced the former special educational needs framework.

The Act introduces the term 'additional learning need' to replace other terms that have been used in the past, including, 'special educational needs' or 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities'. The

term additional learning needs includes all children and young people with cognitive impairments, physical disabilities and also:

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- ADHA
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia

The Act also replaces the term special educational needs coordinators with additional learning needs coordinators.

Under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, young people have an additional learning need if they have greater difficulties in learning than other young people the same age, or if their disability prevents or makes it harder for them to use education or training facilities that their peers can access.

The Act:

- Provides consistency across the local authority and education providers.
- Improves partnership working between local authorities, education providers and health boards.
- Makes provision for universal, statutory Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for all children and young people (aged under 25) with additional learning needs (ALN).

The Act is supported by the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (<https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-code>)

Individual Learning Plan (IDPs)

Section 10 of the Act states that Individual Development Plans (IDPs) should be created for every young person up to the age of 25 who has an additional learning need, regardless of the severity. Individual Development Plans replace Statements and Individual Education Plans for children and young people on the School Action or School Action Plus system. Education providers are responsible for identifying young people with additional learning needs. The plan should be reviewed regularly and updated to meet the care and support needs of the child or young person, where appropriate. It is either the responsibility of schools or local authority.

Youth Services

Given that the child criminal exploitation model evolves and adapts, local authority and voluntary sector youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers play an important role in Complex, Contextual and Transitional Safeguarding. Youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers are uniquely placed to obtain intelligence outside the family home, in the communities where young people are most at risk of criminal exploitation. Due to the nature of their work, youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers are often privy to local risks for young people and they engage with young people who may go under the radar of other practitioners. This includes young people who do not adhere to commonly held county line exploitation stereotypes, such as males, black or ethnic minorities, gang members and/or those living in poverty. Further, their presence in the community can render youth workers and youth support workers privy to intelligence from local businesses and members of the public including rumours of drug dealing such as increased activity in certain areas:

“[Business owner] was saying, there’s something odd, there is somebody turns up in this car, these kids will hang around here of an evening and then this car turns up and they disappear.”

(Youth Officer interview)

Youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers must be included in multi-agency responses so they can access and impart intelligence. They must contribute to decision making at the individual and community level and contribute to service responses. Youth workers, youth support workers or youth work volunteers may be the only practitioners working with a criminally exploited young person. Therefore, all youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers, whether they are delivering targeted or universal services must have a robust understanding of child criminal exploitation and the knowledge and skills to identify emerging models of child criminal exploitation and supporting young people at the identification, support, and prevention stages. Youth work volunteers must receive awareness raising training and guidance on what to do if they come into contact with a child or young person who they think may be subject or at risk of exploitation.

Regarding identification, when a youth worker or youth support worker suspects a young person is criminally exploited, they must have the knowledge and skills to support the young person while they monitor the situation and collect further evidence until a referral to children’s services and/or the NRM can be made. This is particularly pertinent given that this is often a series of concerns rather than disclosure or specific incident. Youth workers and youth support workers support young people when other agencies are closed, and they are at their most vulnerable. Therefore, youth workers and youth support workers should have the ability to work with fluctuating levels of risk and have access to multi-agency responses outside of normal office hours should the young person reach crisis (Child Practice Safeguarding Panel (2020)). In providing young people with support, youth workers and youth support workers should receive training in trauma-informed approaches.

Exploiters are adept at using service loopholes; they may suspend exploitation while services are working with the young person only to continue when services step back:

“[young person was] coming in for three months saying, it’s all fine. We take them off the children in need plan and they commit a murder three months later”

(Youth Worker interview)

Hence, youth workers and youth support workers should provide stepped down support once other agency support ends to ensure the young person has safely exited the exploitative relationship. Finally, youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers have a role in the prevention of child criminal exploitation. This should include raising awareness amongst young people and providing them with a range of skills and techniques to strengthen their overall resilience, promote positive choices and responses, such as how to avoid potentially risky situations, when and where to seek help.

Safeguarding duties

Under the Youth Work Strategy for Wales (2019), youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers should provide safe environments and support the development and well-being of young people. Safe environments should include both the physical and virtual environments, including social media where young people spend their time. Youth work should be focused on diversionary activities and early intervention working with young people to prevent or reduce the likelihood of statutory involvement, including contact with the youth justice system. Youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers should have visible presence in the community at times and in venues other agencies do not reach. They have a duty to report their safeguarding concerns to children's services.

Youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers are skilled at establishing rapport and developing relationships with young people. They should be skilled at balancing the tension between safeguarding the young person and maintaining a relationship with them. Hence, youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers must ensure they are clear and transparent with young people regarding their child protection and safeguarding duties. This includes ensuring that young people are not placed at increased risk of harm when information is shared with other agencies. This is particularly important when youth workers or youth support workers are the lead practitioner for a criminally exploited young person. In these instances, the youth worker or youth support worker must have access to appropriate resource and flexibility so they can safeguard the young person and monitor the fluctuating levels of risk.

Youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers should create a safe environment for young people, so they feel comfortable disclosing what is happening to them. They should address the young person's concerns regarding the possibility of being arrested, placed under child protection or child in need arrangements and the potential impact on their parents and siblings. Youth workers and youth support workers should use the information they are given to develop a picture about hotspots, perpetrators or suspected criminal exploitation. They must have access to systems to record this information and disseminate it to other agencies. This must be undertaken in accordance with the young person's rights and right to safeguarding.

Warning signs for youth workers

There are a range of additional risk factors that youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers should be alert to.

At the individual level, youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers should be vigilant to behaviour changes. This may include staying out late, having numerous mobile phones, changing peer groups and/or having new belongings or money. They may also display challenging behaviours at school and the relatively recent adaptation where young people are encouraged to be well-behaved so as not to draw attention to themselves. Hence, youth workers should be alert to previously unsettled young people who become settled and model pupils. They should be curious about why these changes have occurred.

Youth workers and youth support workers have a duty to support young people to access education, training, and employment opportunities. This should include safeguarding young people during education transitions: primary to secondary school (10 or 11 years), secondary school to further education college (16 years) and further education college to higher education (18 years), employment, or training. It also includes the transition from child to adult services. This occurs at the age of 16 for health services and the age of 18 for Social Services and the Youth Justice Service. In doing so, youth workers and youth support workers should adopt transitional safeguarding to safeguard young people into adulthood.

At the interpersonal level, youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers may notice damage to the young person's home. Exploiters may 'kick the door down' (parent interview) to threaten or intimidate the young person, their siblings or parents. Youth workers and youth support workers should engage with younger siblings as they may be at a heightened risk of criminal exploitation. Young people with no family or links to the local community can be a sign that they have been trafficked to the area.

At the community level, youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers are ideally placed to observe young people and their relationships with their peers. They should be alert to controlling relationships with older peers or adults or if a young person is afraid of individuals, groups or places. This includes being vigilant to unexplained physical injuries or young people who are vague about what happened. They may avoid certain areas or not want to be seen talking to youth workers or youth support workers. Youth workers, youth support workers and youth work volunteers should also be alert to cannabis use as a hook into child criminal exploitation. While cannabis use is not an indicator of child criminal exploitation some young people may be given drugs 'on tick' to deceive them into debt bondage.

Youth work: policy and practice guidance

The National Youth Work Strategy for Wales (2019)

The Youth Work Strategy for Wales (2019) complements the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 which states that youth services are a universal entitlement delivered by statutory or voluntary agencies. Youth workers should adopt a rights-based approach and include planned and unplanned opportunities to work with young people. Its aim is to provide safe environments and support the development and wellbeing of young people in Wales. This includes both targeted and universal provision. Under the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities have a duty to undertake preventative work. For example, Section 15 places a duty on local authorities to provide or support the provision of services that promote young people's upbringing to prevent contact with the criminal justice system.

The purposes of youth work as set out in the strategy are that

- Youth services must promote and actively encourage opportunities for all young people to help improve their life chances by supporting young people through significant changes in their life.
- Youth workers must work with young people's 'skills, resources and time'.
- Enable young people to keep themselves safe.

It can occur in a range of settings such as schools, the youth justice system or in community centres. It can also occur via outreach, street-based or mobile work. It can involve targeted work or informal information giving either one to one or in groups.

Youth work in Wales is underpinned by five pillars: Educative, Expressive, Participative, Inclusive and Empowering based on the eight principles of voluntary engagement, empowerment, equality and inclusion, rights-based delivery, partnership working, formal or informal engagement, recognition of young people's responsibilities and meeting where they are, and the provision of a safe environment in which to support their well-being and development (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2018).

Learning and Skills Act 2000

Youth work is underpinned by section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The Act states that youth services support young people aged between 11 and 25 to participate in education or training, obtain employment and participate in their communities. To do this, local authorities should:

- Provide youth support services.
- Secure the provision of youth support services.
- Participate in the provision of youth support services.

This includes helping them to access services, support and experiences according to their needs. This is underpinned by:

- Developing trusting relationships between young people and youth workers.
- Supporting young people to have good relationships with their peers.
- Accessing to safe spaces in their communities.

Youth Workers are not limited to a particular setting and may move between statutory services, voluntary services or charities. This means that youth workers are based in a range of different agencies, including statutory and non-statutory services. The Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS) represents the youth work sector and proactively supports the strategic and operational development of their work.

Health

Health practitioners have an important role in identifying and protecting young people from criminal exploitation. Practitioners need to be curious about what has happened to the young person. Safeguarding should be embedded into routine practice across all health services including General Practice, Dentists, Opticians, Hospital departments. Health practitioners may only have a few minutes where the child feels safe enough to ask or accept help. Practitioners should be aware that while most young people are criminally exploited by strangers or peers, some are exploited by family members, such as uncles, cousins or siblings. Therefore, they should consider speaking with young people under 16 away from their relatives. Where exploitation is suspected for young people over 16, practitioners should use private cubicles so they cannot be overheard. Nevertheless, some young people may not be ready to ask for or accept help. However, a positive experience may make them more likely to ask for or accept help on subsequent health care visits.

Safeguarding role

Drawing on key messages from policy and practice guidance and findings from the research, education practitioners have a range of roles and responsibilities aimed at safeguarding children and young people. Under the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, health practitioners must work with local authorities and other organisations to improve the well-being outcomes for young people. The Act strengthens safeguarding power and is underpinned by a child's right approach where young people have a right to:

- Make decisions about their care and support.
- Access information and advice.
- Receive a proportionate individual-focused assessment.
- Receive a preventative approach to their care and support needs.

Under this Act, health and social care provision must be integrated where it promotes the well-being of young people and/or carers. This involves placing young people at the heart of the system, working in partnership with them and offering the right help at the right time to prevent their needs from increasing. This work is led by regional health boards. Therefore, health practitioners must work with local authorities to assess the care and support needs of young people who are suspected of criminal exploitation. They must co-operate and provide information to local authorities when asked unless this contravenes their own duties.

At the individual level, health practitioners must report a young person to the local authority if they suspect they are being criminally exploited. Therefore, health practitioners need access to appropriate training to help them identify potential victims of exploitation. Having staff with responsibility for safeguarding means that they can maintain links with specialist local and national services and organisations. This helps referral processes and offering the right support at the right time. However, all health practitioners should be aware of the care and support available in their region, including early intervention and prevention services aimed at the prevention of care and support needs. For example, school nurses, should raise awareness amongst teaching staff and parents regarding exploitation and the warning signs.

At the community level, health practitioners must contribute to MACE and multi-agency strategy discussions and meetings. As the child criminal exploitation model adapts to service responses,

sharing information about patient presentations and injuries is vital for shaping safeguarding practice and developing service provision:

“an awful lot of people probably think of it in terms of what they see on the news in London or the more typical examples of it, which doesn’t apply to most of it and so, [they] wouldn’t be thinking of it in the more subtle cases”

(Consultant)

Systems must be established that enable health practitioners to access and share information, as soon as possible. Health practitioners must understand what information can be shared under the General Data Protection Regulations. This includes information about the young person’s background, family and where they live. This helps the delivery of time-sensitive support.

Warning signs for health practitioners

There are a range of additional risk factors that health practitioners should be alert to (Figure 8). These include:

- Lack of information about where they live or go to school.
- Children and young people may be coached in what to say. They may struggle to remember their story, have inconsistencies or missing information.
- Unexplained injuries, vague symptoms, self-harm and/or mental, physical or sexual trauma
- Not registered with a GP.
- Has had multiple moves locally, nationally or internationally.

(All Wales practice guide for safeguarding children who may be trafficked, 2019c)

A lack of local connections may include not being registered with a general practitioner or reluctance to leave a home address can be a warning sign for criminal exploitation:

“So, say a discharge letter, they don’t actually have a specific address. We can prompt with questions, so it’s finding out whether they’ve got any benefit income coming in, and if they haven’t, it’s just stuff like that, it’s finding out those little red flags really”

(Specialist nurse)

Several strategies can be employed to foster communication with young people such as ensuring they have a dedicated health practitioner during the visit. This will help them to develop rapport and establish trust. Rather than adopting an ‘Ask and Act’ strategy, young people may be more likely to complete a short survey. The survey should adopt a tick-box format and only include a few questions. When young people are admitted to hospital, entry passwords and/or security measures should be employed to prevent exploiters from gaining access to the young person:

“You can see a change in their demeanour then, because suddenly they’re back connected to whoever they were connected with, and they don’t want to talk to you anymore”

(Nurse)

Health practitioners must be aware that exploiters may try to prevent young people from disclosing exploitation.

Figure 8: Warning signs for health practitioners



The infographic is titled "Warning signs" and features a central vertical dotted line. On the left side, under the heading "Physical injuries", there are three items: "Self-inflicted punch injuries" (with a fist icon), "Violent attacks" (with a knife icon), and "Taxing" (with a money bag icon). Below these is the "Mental health" section, which includes "Traumatised" (with a brain icon), "Violence towards others" (with a group of people icon), "Hopelessness" (with a leaf icon), and "Addiction" (with a syringe icon). On the right side, under the heading "Sexual injuries", there are two items: "Plugging" (with a globe icon) and "Sexual violence or abuse" (with a hand holding a heart icon). Below these is the "Parent mental health" section, which includes "Threats of violence" (with a person and speech bubble icon), "Impact" (with a person carrying a heavy load icon), and "Child to parent violence" (with a person and child icon). Each item in the right column is preceded by a gear icon. The background is dark blue with green accents.

Warning signs

Physical injuries

Self-inflicted punch injuries

This can be the precursor to escalating violence.

Violent attacks

Young people may be subjected to violent attacks, including being beaten with metal implements, stabbed or slashed in the face. Young people may not disclose this to parents and/or health practitioners.

Taxing

Taxing is used as a form of control. Young people who have 'done wrong' may be marked or injured as a lesson to others e.g., having their fingernails ripped out.

Mental health

Traumatised

Young people are forced to stay in filthy conditions with no food or clean clothing, far from home under constant threats of violence.

Violence towards others

Young people may be manipulated, forced or coerced into inflicting violence on others.

Hopelessness

"[he's] telling me it's never going to work for him, that he just wants to die. He's either going to be in prison or two options - prison or dead. He can't see another option"
(Parent interview).

Addiction

Young people may use alcohol or drugs as a way of dealing with what is happening to them.

Sexual injuries

Plugging

Young people are forced to hide drugs internally wrapped in kinder eggs, balloons, condoms, or latex gloves. Some exploiters hold young people down while they hide or remove drugs from the young person's body.

Sexual violence or abuse

Sexual violence and abuse is used as a form of control. Exploiters may film a young person being raped so they can use this film to gain their silence. Boys may be more reluctant to disclose sexual violence.

Parent mental health

Threats of violence

Parents may be threatened by the people exploiting their child. They may be frightened about telling anyone in case this makes things worse for their child or their other children.

Impact

The impact of caring for a criminally exploited child can have a negative impact on parental mental health and their ability to cope with the situation.

Child to parent violence

Parents may be subjected to violent attacks from their child. Parents may be embarrassed, ashamed or frightened to seek help and support.

Cannabis use and child criminal exploitation

Cannabis use can be a tool or a 'hook' that is used to trap young people into criminal exploitation through debt bondage. This can be giving existing users free drugs, known as 'strapping' or 'on tick'. Alternatively, exploiters target young people who cannot afford to buy cannabis. These young people are groomed through their desire to join in with their peers and be part of the group. Drug dealers add high-interest rates to this debt. When users can't repay, they are given a choice between being seriously hurt or working off their debt by dealing drugs. Therefore, health practitioners must identify and address substance misuse issues early. They should understand substance misuse and be aware of local service providers so they can make timely referrals.

Health: Policy and practice Guidance

In addition to the responsibilities under the Social Services Well-being Act 2014, health practitioners should adhere to the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-22. Under this plan, young people should be offered the most appropriate help based on their needs. To do this, health and social care must work in partnership with other organisations.

Services in Wales must adopt a client-focused, strengths-based public health approach to substance misuse (including drugs and alcohol). This means addressing harm reduction, prevention, and treatment. The aim is to reduce harm and promote long-term recovery. Under this plan, the priority areas include:

- Responding to co-occurring mental health problems and substance misuse.
- Improving access to support and treatment.
- Supporting families/carers of substance misusers.

Housing

Vulnerability to child criminal exploitation is increased when young people live independently as this can heighten existing risk factors. Housing difficulties may be the result of family or foster care breakdown or due to a young person's status, such as unaccompanied asylum seekers or those who are, or who have, experienced homelessness. Young people may feel lonely, isolated, and struggling to survive on a limited income. Exploiters offer young people 'easy money'. They befriend them to gain access to the property and/or groom young people with the promise of wealth, status and a new 'family'.

Under the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard People (2018), housing practitioners have a duty to safeguard young people. Housing practitioners should fulfil this role independently and as part of a larger multi-agency response that addresses all the young person's needs, not just criminal exploitation.

Safeguarding role

All practitioners who play a role in housing associations and supported housing should be trained in safeguarding. This should include knowledge and understanding of grooming, child criminal exploitation and cuckooing. This includes plumbers, electricians, handymen and other professionals who visit homes to carry out work. Housing practitioners must employ a range of safeguarding tools and strategies such as ensuring young people who are care experienced and young people who have recently left prison are not accommodated in close proximity to each other:

"They target the young people because they know that there are potentially, at any one time, nine young people, vulnerable young people living there"

(Housing Practitioner)

It may also mean enhancing safeguarding measures by housing young people who have been targeted by exploiters closer to the manager's office or placing increased security measures on windows and outside their homes.

At the individual level, young people should be taught about safe internet use. When housing projects provide free internet access, housing practitioners should know how to safeguard young people online and understand online grooming and how this takes place. Housing practitioners should talk to young people about exploitation and grooming. This helps to develop relationships and communication channels so young people feel able to report potential criminal exploitation of themselves or their peers.

Young people may be reluctant to tell housing practitioners they are being exploited in case they are blamed, especially if they have spoken to exploiters, invited them into the property or asked for help earning money. Young people may worry that they will lose their tenancy. When young people are relocated out of area, housing practitioners should be aware that parents may become subject to threats and intimidation while the exploiters attempt to locate the young person:

"I'm shaking inside, shaking. So that's what I went through. Being approached at home, at work, they knew where I lived because they're there"

(Parent interview)

Parents and young people may be afraid to disclose criminal exploitation because of the repercussions if they 'snitch'.

Everyone has a right to be safeguarded from threats, violence, and intimidation, regardless of age. Housing organisations should have a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who can raise awareness and offer help and support to housing practitioners. The DSL should develop and maintain links with specialist local and national services and organisations for further help and support. They must have access to current intelligence in their areas, so they know how young people are being targeted and what activities they are being manipulated, forced, or coerced into committing. To do this, they must attend and contribute to multi-agency responses.

At the community level, housing practitioners should establish systems that enable efficient information and intelligence sharing with other agencies. This can be used to prevent the escalation of housing instability and the young person's risk of being groomed into criminal exploitation. It can also be used by other agencies to safeguard and disrupt criminal exploitation.

Housing risk factors

There are a range of additional risk factors that housing practitioners should be alert to.

Care experienced young people

When young people regard exploiters as caring for them and being their 'family', they may perceive the benefits to be greater than the risks of criminal exploitation. Care experienced young people may be actively targeted, especially those who experience foster care or other placement breakdowns as this may mean they have to stay in supported or temporary accommodation:

"When placement after placement has broken down, they go into bed and breakfast, and then that seems to fail, then they tend to make up links with people in the homeless community. You know, they're dipping in and out of either sofa surfing or a B&B sometimes, or they're back on the street's other times"

(Housing practitioner interview)

Criminally exploited young people

Parents may feel they have no choice but to voluntarily accommodate or ask the criminally exploited young person to leave the family home. This may be for a range of reasons including risk to other young people in the household, due to violence from the criminally exploited young person or the exploiters and/or fear of child protection responses from practitioners. Young people may be placed out of area away from family, friends and in an unknown area. Exploiters use this increased isolation and loneliness to continue the exploitation.

Housing instability

Having no fixed home renders young people vulnerable to criminal, financial, or other types of exploitation. Exploiters target young people living in hostels, sofa surfing or homeless. Young people living independently may be groomed and manipulated, forced or coerced into helping

exploiters to gain access to other young people living there. They do this through threats or actual violence, intimidation, and/or the offer of free drugs.

Cuckooing

A common feature of child criminal exploitation is ‘cuckooing’ where the home of a young person or vulnerable adult is taken over by a drug dealer or group. Young people may not know the people who have taken over their homes, or they may have been tricked into letting ‘friends of friends’ stay overnight. They may be manipulated, forced or coerced through the potential loss of friendship and membership of the group, the offer of free drugs or payment. While young women may be exploited through the illusion of a romantic relationship (Barnardo’s, 2014). Nevertheless, cuckooing can make a young person too afraid of returning home:

“They didn’t know what was going on, why he was coming back because he had been asking for his own flat for so long, then he had it [home] but suddenly he’s back at the placement, 12 hours a day, just refusing to leave and, it took him a while before he would open up to them about what was going on”

(Mental health practitioner interview)

Warning signs of cuckooing

Housing practitioners can identify a cuckooed property through the following signs:

- People coming and going at all times of the day and night
- Cars and/or bikes coming to the property for short periods of time
- Increased anti-social behaviour around the property
- The tenant may stop talking to housing staff or other practitioners.

Young people are not to blame for being cuckooed. Under subsection (3), section 55 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, housing practitioners can support young people who have had their homes cuckooed:

“A person is not to be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for the person to continue to occupy.”

Young people don’t have the power to make the exploiters leave or have a say in what is happening in their homes. Conversely, young people may be forced, coerced or intimidated into staying in properties cuckooed from other young people or vulnerable adults, or to cuckoo a property from someone else (Stone, 2018).

Housing: Policy and practice guidance

Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Many people do not know they are eligible for help with housing or that in legal terms they are considered homeless or under threat of homelessness. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 is the main law that covers housing and homelessness in Wales. It replaces the Housing Act 1996, which still applies to England. According to the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, homelessness goes beyond having no suitable accommodation and sleeping rough on the streets. It includes people who are threatened with homelessness as well as those who:

- Have no available accommodation but maybe staying with a friend, 'sofa surfing' or using a night shelter.
- Have accommodation but they cannot reside there. This may be due to an illness or disability, domestic abuse or because the accommodation is not of a good enough standard to live in.
- Have accommodation but they cannot secure entry to it. This may be due to squatters, illegal eviction or where people are living in a 'movable structure' such as a caravan or boat, they have nowhere to place it.

The Act extends and strengthens local authority responses to homelessness through early intervention, prevention and support. It states that local authorities must:

- Prevent homelessness and provide prevention services to anyone at risk of losing their home within 56 days.
- Provide suitable places to live whether in social housing or privately rented accommodation.
- Provide suitable sites for Gypsies and Travellers, if a need has been identified.
- Ensure the quality of homes they provide with standards for rent and service charges.

Under section 55 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, young people and adults are deemed to be homeless if they 'cannot secure entry' to their accommodation and:

"a person is not to be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for the person to continue to occupy".

This means that where accommodation has been 'cuckooed' or taken over by drug dealers, they have the right to help and support with their housing needs.

Under section 70 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, some young people can get urgent help with their housing needs. This includes 16 - 17 years, although the local authority may ask friends or relatives to check whether the young person is able to return to the parent or carer's home. In these instances, housing practitioners must exercise their professional curiosity as young people may be criminally exploited by friends or relatives. It should also be noted that the local authority cannot force the young person to return to the parent or carer's home.

Section 70 also protects young people aged 18 to 20 years who are at risk or are being controlled by another person, including sexual or financial exploitation. Young people up to the age of 20 who have been looked after, accommodated, or fostered until the age of 18 should receive urgent housing support and those who have been remanded to youth detention accommodation, or custody and those who have served a custodial sentence. Regarding young people over the age of 21, section 70 provides for those who are vulnerable due to a special reason such as having been the victim of violence or abuse and where this risk would continue if they were returned home.

To access help with housing or homelessness, there must be a local connection to the area. Under section 81, the person applying must live in the area or have lived there in the past, work in the area, have family living in the area, or have a connection to the area because of special circumstances. Housing practitioners must consider the young person's safety and whether they are requesting out of area housing to escape criminal exploitation.

Housing First Model

Housing First is an internationally acclaimed recovery-oriented, strengths-based, multi-agency approach to homelessness. This approach is aimed at supporting people with repeat histories of homelessness through the provision of long-term housing and wrap-around support. The Housing First model is based on the principle that people have a right to a home that is affordable and habitable, regardless of their circumstances. This follows the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Housing First for Youth.

Housing First for Youth is aimed at young people aged between 16 and 25 with multiple complex issues, such as mental health issues and/or substance misuse issues and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These young people may have negative experiences of service provision.

Cymorth Cymru (the representative body for homelessness, housing and support in Wales) have adapted the key principles of Housing First for young people. These principles are:

- 1. Young people have the right to a home.**
Young people should have housing from where they can access services, education and employment opportunities. They will have the choice to live alone, in shared accommodation, or near their family and friends.
- 2. Housing and support are separated.**
Support will follow the young person regardless of the accommodation they choose and the status of their tenancy.
- 3. Flexible support.**
Flexible support should be provided for as long as the young person wants it by specialists with expertise in working with young people. The support should change in light of the young person's choices and priorities.
- 4. Support with service transitions.**

Service providers must work with the young person to determine whether support with transitions are needed (e.g. from young person to adult services). Transitions between services should be carried out smoothly and sensitively.

5. **Young people have choice and control over the way they engage with services.**
Young people are expected to engage with services, but the onus must fall on the provider to find the right way of engaging.
6. **The service is based on the young person's strengths, goals and aspirations.**
7. **Harm reduction and/or safeguarding approaches.**
If a young person is showing behaviours that could be harmful to their health, mental health and well-being, services will adopt a harm reduction approach. If someone is at serious risk of harming themselves or others, the agencies will take a safeguarding approach.
8. **Strengths-based, psychologically informed, trauma-informed, gender-informed services.**
The service must be delivered in a strengths-based, psychologically informed, trauma-informed, gender-informed way that is sensitive and aware of protected characteristics.
9. **Voices of young people.**
Service providers will take time to understand the young person's interests, needs and interpretation of community, so they can support the client to build links with communities of interest as well as communities of place.
10. **Breadth of service provision.**
Young people should be offered a meaningful range of services for when they are ready to engage with them.

Psychologically informed approaches

Psychologically informed approaches help practitioners and services to understand trauma and work therapeutically with young people and adults at risk of, or who are homeless. They are aimed at providing homeless and rough sleepers the best chance of escaping homelessness through improvements in their emotional and mental well-being, their relationships and coping strategies.

There are five main elements to psychologically informed approaches:

1. **Psychological framework:** A strategic and operational commitment to psychologically informed approaches across all aspects of the service.
2. **Managing relationships:** Housing practitioners should understand that young people may have had bad experiences of service providers in the past. Therefore, they should have patience and understanding when working with young people and acknowledge that establishing good trauma-informed relationships may take time.
3. **Physical and social environment:** Housing practitioners should assess housing provision to make sure that it is safe for young people. This includes creating conditions that support young people's dignity, autonomy and identity (Centre for Homelessness Impact)

4. **Staff training and support:** Housing practitioners should receive training in trauma, the impact on young people and how this affects their engagement with practitioners and services.
5. **Evidence and learning:** Gather evidence on psychologically informed approaches to enable continuous learning and development.

In addition to these elements, reflective practice is a key part of this approach (Keats et al., 2019). Housing practitioners should reflect on their practice to learn from interactions and incidents. Reflective practice should be undertaken individually and within service teams, so they can adopt a shared approach and learn from each other.

Police

Child criminal exploitation poses challenges for the police. It involves a range of perpetrators including family members, peers and adults in the local area or further afield. Some county line holders live hundreds of miles away from the young person they are criminally exploiting. Any young person can be criminally exploited regardless of age, ethnicity, gender or family background:

“it’s not just people from poor, deprived backgrounds that are enticed into this or groomed into this, girls, boys, black, white, Asian, you name it, they don’t really discriminate, they just want whoever says yes basically to running these drugs and taking that commodity out there”

(Police interview)

Young people often begin as runners, but they may move up the hierarchy quickly. Nevertheless, they continue to be exploited by those higher up the chain while they are forced or coerced into exploiting younger children. This obscures the distinction between victim and perpetrator. Child criminal exploitation also involves a range of criminal activities from drug running to burglary, car theft, money flipping and violence. Police officers may not readily associate the criminal activity with child criminal exploitation. Further, young people may be found with visible evidence of possession with intent to supply, they are often distrustful of the police, they may be unwilling to disclose their exploitation which is confounded by their portrayal as streetwise. Criminally exploited young people do not present as typical victims, they may display bravado, a comprehensive knowledge of their rights and appear overly confident.

The role of policing is to identify, disrupt and prosecute the exploiters. Without this, criminally exploited young people who are not charged or remanded but are released on bail or realised under investigation (RUI), face continued exploitation. They may be trafficked to different areas of England or Wales to evade police detection. However, there is tension between the policing role and the realities of the job. As an emergency service, the police are often called upon when young people are in crisis outside office hours and when other services are closed.

Safeguarding role

Under the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019), police officers must treat young people as ‘children first, and offenders second’. The aim is to reduce youth offending and re-offending. All police officers must be alert to child criminal exploitation, its different models (county lines exploitation, blurred lines and traditional drug dealing), and the range of perpetrators and criminal activities young people are manipulated, forced or coerced into committing. This includes going beyond the visible evidence. Complex Safeguarding calls for professional curiosity regarding why the young person is in that location, why they have so much cash on them while they are starving, dirty and far from home or how did they afford the drugs? Police officers should also consider previous missing episodes and/or contact with the police as this may reveal a picture or pattern that suggests the young person is being criminally exploited.

Police officers must use the first few minutes after stopping a young person to build a relationship and establish rapport with the young person:

“It’s all about engagement, it’s how you speak to them ... trying to make them feel comfortable enough to tell you” (British Transport Police interview)

Adopting a child first approach can be used to alleviate the young person’s fear of arrest. Police officers must be aware that criminally exploited young people are victims of child abuse. Exploiters will have told them to fear police officers and practitioners. They may have been threatened with what will happen to them if they are caught by the police. Any contact with the police may result in repercussions for the young person and/or their families. Where drugs or money are confiscated, young people are placed in debt bondage to the exploiter. If the young person does not repay this debt they can be subjected to kidnapping, sexual violence and torture (Robinson, McClean and Densely, 2019). Young people may allude to their fear or their concerns about the safety of family members. Criminally exploited young people are also still children. They may be frightened of parental responses and getting into trouble.

When taken into custody, ‘custody comfort boxes’ (County Lines Pathfinder, 2021) facilitate the creation of ‘reachable moments’ and can reduce the young person’s fear. The boxes could include a short film about their rights in custody, a weighted blanket, fidget toys, art supplies and playing cards. Police officers must ensure that the young person is safe. They should refer them to children’s services and work with other agencies to find a safe place for the young person on their release from the police station.

Multi-agency approaches are paramount to safeguarding the young person. Police officers must understand the service pathways for child criminal exploitation, modern slavery, trafficking and child sexual exploitation when referring young people to other agencies. Police officers must contribute to multi-agency discussions and meetings. They should give and receive intelligence that can be used at the individual level to safeguard young people and at the community level to identify patterns and trends to target those higher up the criminal exploitation chain.

Police officers must also receive training to fulfil their role as First Responders for the NRM. This includes making appropriate referrals to Independent Child Trafficking Guardians and working with other agencies to obtain sufficient evidence to complete the application. The police must adopt cross border working and utilise existing systems such as the National County Lines Coordination Centre’s case management system for sharing intelligence to ensure that when young people are trafficked, they do not become lost.

Warning signs for the police

There are a range of additional risk factors that police officers should be alert to.

According to parents, missing episodes were the main indicator of child criminal exploitation. Police officers should promote the use of existing systems such as the Philomena Protocol. They should ensure that parents, carers, residential home practitioners and housing practitioners complete the two application forms. More information and access to the form can be found on the Greater Manchester Police website: <https://www.gmp.police.uk/notices/pp/philomena-protocol/>.

Exploiters are adept at finding loopholes in the current system. For example, exploiters ensure that criminally exploited young people only carry up to £900 due to the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Under this act, non-specialist constable can only apply for detention and forfeiture of cash when young people have at least £1000.

Criminally exploited young people may be coached in what to say to police officers. As such, young people may present with similar stories and/or stories that appear rehearsed, similar in nature or obviously untrue. Rather than evidence of guilt, this can show that the child or young person has been told what to say by the people exploiting them. In addition, police officers may become suspicious when young people have a good working knowledge of police systems, the NRM and section 45 defence. Rather than being streetwise, this may be due to exploiter interest in ensuring young people are returned to the streets quickly.

Youth Justice Service

The Youth Justice Service plays a central role in safeguarding criminally exploited young people as they support young people who come into contact with the police, those who are at risk of criminality and those who have been charged and/or convicted. Further, youth justice practitioners support young people who may be unknown to services and/or do not meet service safeguarding thresholds. This places youth justice practitioners in an important position for identifying, supporting, and preventing young people from being criminally exploited. Moreover, they have a legal responsibility to prevent offending and reoffending and to provide a youth justice service for young people (Welsh Government and Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2015).

Youth justice practitioners must receive training regarding child criminal exploitation, including risk factors at the individual, interpersonal and community level as well as the impact of criminal exploitation on the young person's mental and physical health. Youth Justice practitioners should consider the young person's previous history and the long-term impact of abuse and trauma and the continued risk young people face from their exploiters while they are involved in the Youth Justice Service. Youth justice practitioners should adopt Complex Safeguarding as it addresses risk posed in community spaces and online and the influence of youth culture, peers and the norms within the young person's local community. Therefore, youth justice practitioners must have access to assessment tools that enable consideration of risks at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal level (see Child Criminal Exploitation Risk Assessment Tool). This must include the impact of poverty, social capital and perceived access to education, employment, and training opportunities as young people are groomed through the promise of easy money.

Safeguarding role

Under the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019), youth justice practitioners must adopt a child first, offender second trauma-informed approach. Youth justice practitioners must be alert to be alert to child criminal exploitation and the different ways in which it manifests. This includes grooming and criminal exploitation within the secure youth estate as well as the wider community and the use of young people to target and groom their peers in return for drugs or to prevent violence to themselves or their families. At the individual level, youth justice practitioners must work with other agencies to ensure that practice is consistent and aimed at safeguarding the young person and ensure their unmet needs are addressed. This includes listening to the young person at all stages of the youth justice system. Youth justice practitioners should have a range of safeguarding tools such as peer mapping and safety planning. For the latter, youth justice practitioners should help young people to create safety plans, including safe routes to and from school, places to go, and/or where to go if they are at risk of harm in the local community. Although young people should not be expected to keep themselves safe from criminal exploitation. Youth Justice Services should have a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) with specialist training in child criminal exploitation so they can support youth justice practitioners to keep their knowledge up to date. When child criminal exploitation is suspected, youth justice practitioners should notify the Designated Safeguarding Lead and refer the young person to children's services using a Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF).

Youth justice practitioners must be aware that child criminal exploitation has a negative impact on the whole family. Most parents are not responsible for the criminal exploitation of their child, but

they may be blamed, stigmatised and/or threatened by the exploiters. Youth justice practitioners should adopt whole family approaches and work with parents, involving them in decision making, where appropriate, as they often hold vital information about the young person. Youth justice practitioners should be aware the siblings of a criminally exploited young person may be at an enhanced risk of criminal or sexual exploitation. In some cases, young people inherit drug debts from parents or siblings.

At the community level, youth justice practitioners must contribute to multi-agency approaches. They must have systems in place to facilitate data recording to facilitate the identification of patterns or trends and analysis so that this information can be used for safeguarding and prevention. Youth justice practitioners and probation officers must share information so that risks to young people from older adults leaving the secure estate and/or Serious Organised Crime offenders can be identified. They should also be alert to young people who are in a relationship with an older peer or adult and relationships with older peers or adults who are controlling or restrict the young person's activities or engagement with services. The early signs of child criminal exploitation are difficult to detect, especially as some young people are groomed into thinking that the exploiters are their friends and care about them. Youth justice practitioners must use their professional curiosity to embed safeguarding into routine practice.

Links between the Youth Justice Service and probation are also needed as young people may continue to be exploited beyond the age of 18. This requires transitional safeguarding to be embedded into practice. Youth justice practitioners should be aware that when young people are criminally exploited at an early age, they will be unable to safeguard themselves from persistent abuse. Therefore, consideration should be given as to Transitional Safeguarding so that youth justice practitioners continue to work with young people and their parents when young people are over 18. Parents play a critical role in safeguarding their children and remain caring and advocating for the young person into adulthood.

Warning signs

There are a range of additional risk factors that youth justice practitioners should be alert to.

Young people may not know or perceive their actions to be wrong or against the law. Exploiters may conceal or minimise the nature of criminal activities. Young people may be told they are dropping off something for a 'friend' or that they 'owe' the exploiter and must do a favour for them. Young people may be told they are helping drug addicts by giving them 'food' or they are committing a victimless crime when committing fraud or money flipping.

Young people under the age of 18 may be targeted as they may be frightened of service responses. They may worry about being arrested or being taken into local authority care. Young people may want to accept responsibility for the crime to avoid child protection and safeguarding responses. Therefore, youth justice practitioners must have clear service pathways for first offenders and young people who are coming to their attention for the first time.

Youth Justice: Policy and practice guidance

Crime and Disorder Act 1988

According to section 39 (5) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Youth Justice Services must include practitioners from a range of different agencies. These include:

- A representative from probation services.
- A social worker.
- A police officer.
- A health representative.
- An education representative.

To support the work of the Youth Justice Service, other specialist partners may also be included, such as:

- Careers Wales Advisors.
- Community Safety Partnership Officers.
- Housing providers.
- Psychologists.
- Substance misuse workers.
- Voluntary Sector Practitioners.
- Youth workers

This multi-agency team are responsible for:

- Assessment of young people who have offended, including safeguarding and risk management.
- Supervision of young people in the community or remanded to custody
- Providing pre-court interventions
- Supervision of young people who have been given court orders to be carried out in the community
- Planning sentences for young people in custody and their supervision when released.
- Planning for how people will settle back into their lives after the sentence.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 does not state how Youth Justice Services should be delivered. However, under section 39(7) they should:

- Coordinate Youth Justice Service provision

- Carry out the functions outlined in the youth justice plan written by the local authority in which it is based.

Under section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, each local authority should set out a youth justice plan. This plan will outline how:

- Youth Justice Services are provided in the area
- Youth Justice Services will be staffed, funded and what tasks it will carry out.

The youth justice plan will also set out how the Service will:

- Prevent young people from offending.
- Develop strategic links with other initiatives

The Youth Justice Service has legal responsibilities under a range of different laws, including:

- Section 325 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. The Youth Justice Service must work within Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).
- Section 10 (4) of the Children Act 2004. The Youth Justice Service must work with Children's Services to improve child and young person well-being.

The Youth Justice Service must also work with local safeguarding children's boards.

Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales (2019)

While the UK Government is responsible for youth justice in Wales, many of the services needed to prevent and rehabilitate are devolved. That means that the Welsh Government is responsible for services such as health, housing, education and social services. These services are guided by the Social Service Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Welsh Government has published a 'Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales' (2019) which sets out the aims and principles for young people in - or at risk of entering - the criminal justice system (Figure 9). The legal duty is to prevent young people from offending. It is based on four key principles. The adoption of a child first approach where the young person's needs are identified, and service responses are in the best interests of the young person. A trauma-informed approach based on understanding and recognising the impact of early experiences on young people and complex needs. Consistent practice across all parts of the community and custodial practice and service alignment where all agencies have a shared vision, values and approaches regardless of whether they are overseen by the UK or Welsh governments.

Drawing on the guiding principles and aims, the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales uses a whole system approach to deliver effective practice across the six main areas.

Figure 9: Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales



County Lines Exploitation Practice Guidance

The 'County Line Exploitation guidance for youth offending teams and frontline practitioners' (Ministry of Justice, 2019) outlines the role of Youth Justice Service Practitioners in England and Wales. The guidance states the main aim of the Youth Justice Service is to safeguard young people using a 'child first, offender second' child-focused approach.

When young people have been criminally exploited, the guidance says that they should be seen as “exploited victims and not perpetrators” (Ministry of Justice, 2019:5). This means they should receive a safeguarding response and consideration should be given as to ‘how and why’ they became criminally exploited.

Assessing risk

Youth justice practitioners must have sufficient knowledge and understanding of child criminal exploitation in order to capture the risks and protective factors for young people. They must gather information from schools, children’s services, young people and family members. They may also request information from other agencies who are able to comment on the young person. The information collected in four main areas:

- Personal, family and social factors. This includes living arrangements, education, training, employment and risk in the community around the child or young person.
- Offending and/or antisocial behaviour. This includes current offending, patterns and the young person’s views about these behaviours.
- Foundations for change. This includes opportunities, goals, views, how the young person takes part and any other factors that affect changing the problem behaviours.
- Self-assessment. The young person and parent or carers have an opportunity to share their views on the risk and protective factors.

For example, AssetPlus uses a rating scale to identify whether the risk of harm to the young person is low, medium or high. If child criminal exploitation is suspected and there is strong evidence, the young person will be given a high rating.

Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System (2019)

The Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System (2019) set out the minimum requirements that statutory services must deliver. There are five standards:

1. Out-of-court disposals
2. At court
3. In the community
4. In secure settings
5. On transition and resettlement

The standards are based on the principle of ‘child first, offender second’. Therefore, youth justice practitioners must prioritise the best interests of the young person and build on the young person’s strengths. They should encourage young people to take an active role in social inclusion and promote a childhood away from the youth justice system so that young people are not stigmatised by previous contact.

1. Out-of-court disposals

When a young person commits a crime, the police have a range of options available to them:

- No further action. If a young person is arrested and the police choose not to take the case further, they will decide to 'take no further action'.
- Community resolution.
 - This is used for minor offences or anti-social behaviour.
 - It allows the police to assess how serious the crime was, the young person's admission of guilt and their prior history, and the victim's views.
 - For a young person under the age of 18, a parent or guardian must agree to the issuing of a community resolution.
 - In some cases, this will include restorative justice, where the young person meets the victims to discuss the impact of the crime and to decide how the young person can make amends.
 - These are only recorded at a local level (not on 'PNC', the police national computer) and do not form part of a criminal record.
 - The young person can choose whether they work with the Youth Justice Service.
- Youth caution.
 - This is a formal out-of-court disposal.
 - It is used when the young person admits that they committed the crime and there is enough evidence to take the case to court but where it is not in the public interest to do so.
 - The Youth Justice Service must be told when a youth caution is given.
 - The Youth Justice Service will assess the young person and put together a rehabilitation plan.
 - Young people must take part in the interventions included in the plan. If they do not, they will face a separate penalty.
 - A youth caution is recorded on the PNC and forms part of a criminal record.
- Youth conditional caution.
 - This is a formal out-of-court disposal that consists of a youth caution plus 'conditions' they must engage with for up to 3 months.
 - It is used when the young person admits that they committed the crime and there is enough evidence to take the case to court and when the public is best served by the young person complying with suitable conditions rather than being prosecuted.
 - These conditions can be reparative (where the young person makes up for what their actions), rehabilitative or punitive.
 - The young person must agree to the Youth Conditional Caution and the conditions attached.

- The Youth Justice Service must assess the young person and advise on interventions.
 - The Youth Justice Service is responsible for monitoring the young person takes part in the conditions. If they do not, they can be prosecuted for the original offence.
 - A Youth conditional caution is recorded on the PNC and forms part of a criminal record.
- Charge.
 - The young person is put forward for prosecution in court.
 - The police may charge any summary-only offence regardless of whether the child or young person admits the offence.

2. At court

Youth Justice Service practitioners help young people and their families to prepare for going to court. This includes understanding their rights, what will happen in court and how they should engage with the court.

The Youth Justice Service will also:

- Provide assessments for young people that are focused on their best interests, promote their potential and meet their needs.
- Ensure that court is only used where young people cannot be dealt with by other less formal means.
- Provide people with information to help and support them throughout the court process.
- Ensure that the young person's voice is heard and they are able to take part

Custodial sentences are used for the most serious offences. Sentences will be carried out in a range of settings including secure children's homes, secure training centres or youth offender institutions.

If a young person aged between 12 and 17 years is sentenced, they may be given a:

- Detention and training order.
 - This is a custodial sentence typically currently recommended for serious crimes, such as violent crimes.
 - These sentences can last between 4 months and 2 years.
 - The first half of the sentence will be served in custody while the second half will be served in the community.
 - While serving the sentence in the community, the young person will be placed under supervision.
 - They may need to wear an electronic ankle tag for a period of time after they are released from custody.

- Bail and/or remand. Youth justice practitioners are responsible for supervising those young people who have not been found guilty but have been put on conditional bail by the courts or remanded in custody/to the local authority.

3. In the community

The following community sentences can be used by the court for children and young people:

- Referral order. A panel of local community members and youth justice workers may ask a young person to agree to a programme of work to address their behaviour.
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- Reparation order. The young person must make up for their actions either directly to the victim or to the community as a whole. The young person must have clear guidance about what activities they must do, supervision during the activities and meaningful contact with victims. To be most effective, reparation orders should be linked to developing employability skills and gaining accreditation.
- Youth Rehabilitation Order. The court can add a range of requirements to a Youth Rehabilitation Order. They can be completed individually, at the same time or one after another. The court will decide on a course of action that the young person must undertake for up to 3 years. If they do not, they can be returned to court with the possibility of getting a custodial sentence. There are a range of requirements that can be included. Here a few examples, a full list can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-use-community-interventions/how-to-use-community-interventions-section-6-case-management-guidance>:
 - Supervision Requirement. The young person has to meet a supervising officer from the Youth Justice Service. The number of sessions will depend on the AssetPlus assessment and practitioner views. Supervision requirements are often used to address the young person's attitudes and/or behaviours towards committing crime.
 - Programme Requirement. The young person has to take part in an established Youth Justice Service intervention. This can be done alone or in a group. The programme will be chosen based on the assessment.
 - Attendance Centre Requirement. The young person must attend an Attendance Centre.
 - Curfew Requirement. The young person must remain in a specified place during certain hours. This can include a few places or different places on different days. A curfew is not monitored by tagging but it must still be monitored by police or practitioner check-ups.
 - Electronic Monitoring Requirement. The young person must remain in a specified place during certain hours and is tagged to ensure that they remain there. The

assessment must show that the young person is able to manage the reduced freedom.

- Education Requirement. This can be given to school aged young people only. It states that young people must take part in the education activities made by the local authority. However, it can only be given when school attendance played a part in the offence and where engagement has an impact of preventing future offending behaviours.
- Residence Requirement. The young person must stay with a particular person or in a specific place.

4. In secure settings

According to the 'Placing young people in custody: guide for youth justice practitioners' (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, 2020):

When a child or young person under 18 is remanded or sentenced to custody, the Youth Custody Service (YCS) decides where they should be placed. This will be either at a secure training centre, secure children's home or under-18 young offender institution (for young males only).

When a young person is remanded to youth detention accommodation under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPOA) 2012, they are classed as looked after by the local authority. The Youth Justice Service will work with the Youth Custody Service Placement Team to decide where the young person should be placed. (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, 2017). This will be based on an assessment of the young person's needs, available accommodation, and the young person's best interests.

Young people can be placed in three types of secure accommodation:

- Secure Children's Home or Secure Training Centre. Placement here will be based on the young person's support needs, age, maturity and ability to function in large groups.
- Youth Offending Institute. Placement will be based on the young person's need to access interventions such as, Life Minus Violence, where they will need to transfer to adult custody and whether they are mature and resilient.

Welsh young people should be placed within Wales.

Young people who turn 18

According to the Youth Custody Service Placement Team's overview of operational procedures (Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, 2017):

- Detention and Training Orders. When young people turn 18, they should remain in the youth custodial estate unless it is in their best interests to move into the over 18 estate.
- Other sentences. When children and young people turn 18 under other sentences, they will be transferred into the young adult or adult estate. A transition plan should be developed based on the young person's best interests.

Where the young person's risk factors suggest they should not move to the young adult or adult estate, a multi-disciplinary meeting is held to decide what actions are in their best interests. For more information see:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647093/Placement_Guidance_Sept_2017_YCS.pdf

Further information about secure settings can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/placing-young-people-in-custody-guide-for-youth-justice-practitioners>

5. On transition and resettlement

The Youth Justice Service must make a plan tailored to the young person's individual needs to help them move from one service or area to another. For example:

- Moving from one place to another
 - From one local authority to another
 - From child to adult provision
 - From secure accommodation to their home

- Moving from one service to another
 - Into adult services

- Health
 - Health provision to community services or secure services
 - Learning disability services
 - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

- Education, Training and Employment
 - From mainstream to alternative provision
 - From school to further education college, training or employment

- Accommodation
 - Young people who have finished their youth justice order
 - Young people who have finished their secure order but not their sentence.

Conclusion

Child criminal exploitation refers to the manipulation, force or coercion of children and young people into committing criminal activities by more powerful individuals or groups. While children and young people with existing vulnerabilities are at a heightened risk of being criminally exploited, these vulnerabilities are wide ranging. At the individual level, children and young people with limited social capital, difficulties at home, additional learning needs and/or those who are looked after are at particular risk. At the interpersonal level, children and young people with difficulties at home are often targeted. These difficulties may be due to the challenges associated with parenting adolescents, parenting problems such as mental health or substance misuse, or other factors such as neglect, abuse, parental separation or parent absence. At the community level, poverty, housing stability and the area in which children and young people live can heighten susceptibility to criminal exploitation. Further, children and young people may be groomed by family members, peers, local adults or strangers either in person or via social media. They may be subject to different forms of exploitation, including financial, sexual or criminal exploitation. This poses unique challenges for practitioners.

To address these challenges, the Complex Safeguarding Wales Toolkit has been co-produced with young people, parents and practitioners with direct experience of child criminal exploitation. This process was underpinned by findings from a wider research study that examined how child criminal exploitation manifests in Wales and what approaches and interventions were most effective. Findings demonstrated that child criminal exploitation manifests differently in different areas, depending on pre-existing models of drug supply, local infrastructure, and service responses (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021). Yet regardless of the child criminal exploitation model (Harding, 2020), effective responses are based on efficient and effective multi-agency working which involves parents in information sharing and decision making at all stages. This is particularly important given the emerging trend towards the targeting of “ghost children” who are unknown to services.

Reiterating the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014), all practitioners working with children and young people have a role and responsibility for safeguarding. To fulfil this role, they must be equipped with the knowledge, understanding and appropriate tools to work with children and families who are experiencing criminal exploitation. This toolkit has been developed to inform, support and enhance practitioner responses based on research findings from Wales. It is only if we work together – parents and practitioners - that we can protect our children and young people from the people who are criminally exploiting them.

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Appendix A: Complex Safeguarding

The toolkit has adopted the name ‘Complex Safeguarding Wales’ as it draws upon the work carried out in Greater Manchester to address risk and harm from peers, partners, or adults from the wider community rather than inside the family (Manchester Safeguarding Partnership).

Complex safeguarding is defined as:

“Criminal activity (often organised), or behaviour associated to criminality, involving vulnerable children/young people, where there is exploitation and/or a clear or implied safeguarding concern”

(Manchester Safeguarding Partnership)

Complex safeguarding addresses risk that occurs in community spaces and online through social media. It is influenced by youth culture, norms, and peers. Consequently, parents have reduced or minimal influence over adolescent young people and little control over what happens outside the home environment. Child criminal exploitation is rarely instigated by parents. Yet they are often blamed despite being secondary victims from the adverse effects of child criminal exploitation to their child and family. This often includes threats or actual violence from their child and/or the exploiters to their child and themselves.

Complex Safeguarding complements the policy and practice guidance landscape in Wales. The toolkit is based upon the fundamental need to adopt a child-centred, child rights approach. Young people must be heard and be included in decision-making. This is particularly pertinent given that exploitation takes control away from the young person. Practitioners must not do the same. They should safeguard and not criminalise these young people and help and support them to take back control over their lives and reach their full potential. This means working with young people, establishing rapport, developing trust and building relationships where young people feel safe and able to share their views.

Principles

Complex Safeguarding encompasses an integrated approach that is:

- Based on a child first, safeguarding approach
- Child-focused so that the young person’s needs are identified and addressed.
- Delivered in the community to young people and their families.
- Aimed at prevention, early intervention, and diversion.
- Able to include parents as a resource rather than a risk.
- Includes the identification, investigation and prosecution of individuals or groups exploiting young people.

In addition to Complex Safeguarding, Transitional Safeguarding and Contextual Safeguarding are valuable additions to protecting young people from child criminal exploitation. Both approaches complement Complex Safeguarding. The following sections provide a summary of each approach.

Transitional Safeguarding

Transitional Safeguarding is an approach for safeguarding young people from adolescence into adulthood. Transitional safeguarding is defined as:

“an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children’s and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives”

(Holmes and Smale, 2018:3)

It recognises that adolescence is not a defined period; a child’s journey into adulthood is a process rather than an event. This is based on evidence that young people’s brain development continues to mature both cognitively and emotionally into their twenties. According to Transitional Safeguarding, support should be tailored to a young person’s needs rather than their age. This goes beyond the transition from child to adult services. It involves practitioners from child and adult services working together to support young people with their individual circumstances and experiences. In alignment with the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Transitional Safeguarding aims to foster a more joined-up approach between children and young people and adult safeguarding. It promotes a rights-based approach so that young people are included in decision-making and in accordance with the Care Act 2014, practitioners consider the individual’s circumstances and not just their age, behaviour or diagnosis. Transitional Safeguarding acknowledges that adult social work focuses on people who may find it difficult to protect themselves from harm due to their care and support needs. This is pertinent to child criminal exploitation as young people who have been criminally exploited from a young age, and those with unmet or additional learning needs may be unable to protect themselves or unwilling to accept help and support.

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding provides a framework for working with risk and harm outside the family. It focuses on the people and places in the community where risk occurs. It recognises that parents have limited influence over their child’s friends and the places and spaces their child spends their free time.

Contextual Safeguarding provides a framework for addressing extra-familial harm tailored to the local context. This includes the need for holistic assessments that go beyond child criminal exploitation to identify the young person’s unmet needs. These assessments should determine the contexts and relationships that pose a risk to the young person and inform the development of safeguarding plans. Contextual Safeguarding includes the identification of protective factors so that they can be strengthened and used to reinforce the young person’s resilience. Further, Contextual Safeguarding informs safety planning by sharing information contexts with the police and community safety teams and the police so that disruption techniques can be employed. Hence, Contextual Safeguarding develops partnerships with agencies that can enhance child safety and protection from risk outside the home risks, such as leisure providers, public open spaces and businesses.

Appendix B: Language use

Careful consideration is needed regarding the language used (Figure 10). Child criminal exploitation occurs even when the activity appears consensual as exploiters capitalise on young people’s vulnerabilities, poverty, lack of social capital and/or fear. Therefore, practitioners must not use language or terms that explicitly or implicitly attribute blame to young people (Figure 10). They must ensure they use strengths-based, inclusive language. When speaking with young people and parents extra care is needed as they may be unfamiliar with commonly used practitioner terms, such as ‘child criminal exploitation’, ‘county lines’ or ‘trafficked’. This can be confusing. It can also be detrimental to young people who may not realise or be ready to accept that they are being ‘exploited’. Further, young people may reject the notion of victimhood. They may perceive their actions as entrepreneurial and/or the result of having limited legitimate opportunities to earn money for themselves and/or their families. Moreover, young people may be so low down the hierarchy, they may not realise they are part of an organised crime group. Therefore, practitioners should use language that young people feel comfortable using.

Figure 10: Victim blaming versus strengths-based language



Common terms

The terms associated with child criminal exploitation vary according to region. As many of these terms have entered the youth vernacular, not all young people using these terms will be criminally exploited. However, practitioners should understand the key terms (Table 1).

Table 1: Common child criminal exploitation terms

Branded line	A mobile phone line that is used to take orders from customers. It is controlled by older youths higher up the drug dealing chain. Branded lines can be given the name of a young person or place, e.g., 'the Barry line'
Clean skins	Young people unknown to the police or children's services. These young people are targeted by exploiters as they are less likely to be suspected of being criminally exploited.
Cuckooing	The process where young people are used to take over houses acquired from vulnerable adults, including class A drug addicts
Debt bondage	Young people are robbed by members of their own network so they become indebted to the exploited and must repay the debt. Exploiters impose large rates of interest to trap young people.
Elders	Young people who are one higher than street runners. Elders generate sales and build an active customer base. They criminally exploit other young people.
Food	Exploiters refer to drugs as 'food' to minimise their actions. This means young people believe they are 'feeding' vulnerable drug addicts and helping them.
Going country	Where young people are groomed and recruited in large cities and urban areas, they may be trafficked into rural or coastal areas.
OT	'Out trapping' or 'out of town' which means being away (trafficked) dealing drugs in urban or rural areas.
Plugging	Hiding drugs internally within the gastrointestinal tract, vagina, or cheeks. Young people may be held down while drugs are hidden or retrieved from their bodies.
Road man	A drug dealer
Runners	Young people at the bottom of the drug dealing hierarchy. Runners are criminally exploited into transporting and selling drugs.
Shank	A knife
Strapping or on tick	Where young people are given free drugs.
Taxing	Where violence is used as a form of control. Young people who have 'done wrong' may be marked or injured as a lesson to others.
Trap house or bando	This is a building that is used as a base to sell drugs. It is often occupied by drug users.
Trapping	This refers to selling drugs on the street



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