



Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board

Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy

This strategy outlines the commitment of the Hounslow Local Safeguarding Children Board to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in a coordinated multi-agency approach. It recognises that this is often a hidden problem which is not easy to identify and measure. CSE preys upon the most vulnerable in the community and is a devastating form of abuse in which the perpetrators often evade prosecution.

Hounslow's approach is divided into four key strands and supported by a coherent proactive action plan. The four strands are:-

Prevention

Disruption

Protection and Support

Prosecution

Hounslow's Safeguarding Children's Board recognises the importance of the *See Me, Hear Me* framework which sets out the agencies, networks and stage-by-stage coordination of what is needed to enable effective practise. It ensures joined-up working and replicates all messages in Working Together guidance on CSE (DSCF, 2009) and all the major child abuse enquiries. It is underpinned by seven firm principles to ensure that children and young people who are victims of CSE or at risk of becoming victims, are seen, heard, attended to and understood.

Principles of effective practice

1. The child's best interests must be the top priority
2. Participation of children and young people
3. Enduring relationships and support
4. Comprehensive problem-profiling
5. Effective information-sharing within and between agencies
6. Supervision, support and training of staff
7. Evaluation and review.

Definition

Sexual exploitation of children and young people (CSE) under-18 is defined as:

‘exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person’s limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability’ (Department for Education 2012)

How do children and young people become involved?

There are numerous reasons and factors as to why and how children and young people become involved in CSE. Often vulnerable children and young people are specifically targeted by perpetrators however CSE is not exclusive to those who are vulnerable. Perpetrators will often target children and young people at venues such as hostels, food outlets, taxi ranks and outside schools. Young people who run away from home are recognised as being more at risk from this type of targeting. However, statistics show that the majority of CSE victims in London are actually living with their families. Technology plays a large part in CSE with children being groomed on line over a period of weeks or months. Peer on peer exploitation often involves filming or photographing of children either naked or engaged in some sexual act. These pictures/video clips could be shared voluntarily (sexting) without the realisation that this constitutes an offence or they can be used as a threat or coercive measure by the perpetrator who will threaten to share them more widely if the victim does not comply with demands.

Some children and young people do not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and do not see themselves as victims of exploitation, as they consider they have acted voluntarily. The reality is their behaviour is not voluntary or consenting. It is important to remember that a child cannot consent to his or her own abuse.

There is a link between trafficked children and CSE. Children are frequently trafficked for sexual exploitation and this can occur within the UK and across local authority boundaries as well as across international borders.

Who is at risk?

In 2006, Barnardo's published an evaluation of its work with young people in London which indicated the types of young people who tend to be most at risk of exploitation. This two-year study indicated that the peak age was 15, but children as young as 10 were identified as being at risk. Girls and young women were more than six times as likely as boys and young men to be identified as being at risk, but it was widely understood that actual risks to males were probably underestimated.

It is recognised that some young women who are associated with a gang can be sexually exploited as part of the gang culture such as initiation or paying debts.

Definition of a Gang:-

A relatively durable, predominantly street-based, social group of children, young people and, not infrequently, adults who see themselves and are seen by others, as affiliates of a discrete, named group who:

- engage in a range of criminal activity and violence;
- identify or lay claim to territory;
- have some form of identifying structural feature;
- are in conflict with other similar groups.

(Office of Children's Commissioner, 2012)

Hounslow has a significant intelligence gap in relation to its gang profile and this presents a further challenge in identifying peer on peer CSE as part of gang culture. What is known is that London wide there has recently been an increase of young women being connected to the gangs, not as members but as associates of gangs. These young women are frequently subject to domestic violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and involvement in criminality such as holding drugs and weapons. Again CSE as part of gang culture does not just involve girls but can involve boys as victims too.

Puppet on a String: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation (Barnardo's, January 2011), defined three broad categories of CSE:

1. Inappropriate relationships;
2. 'Boyfriend' model of exploitation and peer exploitation; and
3. Organised or networked sexual exploitation or trafficking.

Victims of exploitation may be used as agents to recruit other children and young people. In some cases a young person may be both a perpetrator and victim of CSE.

Indicators of CSE or vulnerability to CSE

Often children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation do not recognise that they are being abused. There are a number of signs that can indicate that a child may be at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation, and behaviours that can indicate that a child is being sexually exploited. (CSEGG interim report "I thought I was the only one, the only one in the world", 2012)

Risk Indicators

This is not a definitive list. These are signs to be aware of that highlight the possibility of CSE:

- Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance use, domestic violence, parental mental health issues, parental criminality);
- History of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of honour based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect);
- Recent bereavement or loss;
- Gang association, either through relatives or peers or intimate relationships (in cases of gang associated CSE only);
- Attending school with young people who are being sexually exploited;
- Learning disabilities;
- Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose their sexual orientation to their families;
- Friends with young people who are being sexually exploited;
- Homelessness;
- Lacking friends from the same age group;
- Living in a gang neighbourhood;
- Living in residential care;
- Living in a hostel, bed and breakfast accommodation or a foyer;
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence;
- Young carers.

Warning Signs

The following signs are usually seen in young people who are being exploited. Again this is not a definitive list.

- Missing from home or care;
- Physical injuries;
- Drug and alcohol misuse;
- Offending;
- Repeated sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, terminations;
- Absence from school;
- Change in physical appearance;
- Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking sites;
- Estranged from family;
- Receipt of gifts from unknown sources;
- Recruiting others into exploitative situations;
- Poor mental health;
- Self-harm;
- Thoughts of or attempts at suicide.

Evidence shows that any child displaying several vulnerabilities from the above list should be considered to be at high risk of sexual exploitation. In addition it is important to note that

children without pre-existing vulnerabilities can still be sexually exploited. Any child showing risk indicators in the second list but none of the vulnerabilities from the first list should be considered as a possible victim of sexual exploitation and assessed appropriately.

Groups at increased risk of CSE

- There is a very strong link between CSE and children who go missing. For some young people at risk of serious harm it is one of the factors in them running away. However statistics show that the majority of CSE victims in London are actually living with their families.
- Children who are already deemed vulnerable, particularly those looked after by the local authority, are at disproportionate risk of being sexually exploited.
- In some cases children may be drawn into sexual exploitation by peers who are already involved. Girls in particular can be coerced into sexual exploitation by an older man, who poses as, and who they view as their boyfriend.
- There is a link between trafficked children and CSE. Children are frequently trafficked for sexual exploitation and this can occur within the UK and across local authority boundaries as well as international borders.
- “Trafficking in Persons” of children and young people under-18 is defined as that which: ‘The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs’. (Article 3 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children, supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organisational Crime. This is also commonly referred to as ‘the Palermo Protocol’)
- Disabled children - as their disability increases they could become more vulnerable and children with learning difficulties should also be seen as a vulnerable group.
- Children with low self-esteem as they are more vulnerable to being targeted by exploiters.
- There is an overlap between CSE and domestic abuse, particular in relation to peer abuse and lone perpetrators. Children aged between 16-18 years are particularly vulnerable. However, each case should be initially assessed through the child protection model described here, but decisions about which is best legislation and intervention may vary for this group. Careful consideration should be given to which framework would offer the most appropriate response to the victim.

Prevention

Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board will:-

- Seek to raise awareness of CSE amongst children and young people ensuring that an education programme is delivered which will strengthen their resilience and self-esteem which will then act as a protective factor.
- Help to raise awareness amongst parents, professionals and communities to help recognise the risk indicators and warning signs and ensuring they know what to do if they encounter them.
- Ensure that professionals working at all levels have access to expert advice to enable them to recognise indicators and warning signs of CSE and to understand their responsibilities to ensure children and young people receive the appropriate support.
- Ensure each agency has an appointed CSE lead.
- Develop an effective Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meeting for CSE leads to come together to review progress of cases of CSE which have been identified ensuring appropriate action is being taken. Identify trends or problem locations. Look at cross border issues to ensure there is a coordinated approach.

Disruption

Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board will:-

- Ensure a comprehensive problem profile of CSE on the borough is created from intelligence gathered from the MASE and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Devise a programme of disruption tactics based on national and local learning.
- Identify “hotspot” locations where CSE is more likely or prevalent and encourage the deployment appropriate tactical interventions.

Protection and Support

Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board will:-

- Ensure appropriate and effective information sharing via the MASH
- Ensure staff trained and supported so they are able to provide a consistent relationship of trust with a child or young person over time.
- Safeguard the principle that the child’s best interest must be at the heart of any intervention.
- Guarantee the participation of the child or young person in decision making regarding their protection empowering them to make decisions over their future.
- Evaluate and review interventions to certify an evidence base of effectiveness.

Prosecution

Hounslow Safeguarding Children Board will:-

- Adopt the Pan- London Child Sexual Exploitation Operation Protocol
- Provide guidance and training to key professionals to improve the quality of evidence gathering and recording.
- Ensure that there is accessible, consistent and long term support of victims throughout the investigation, prosecution and post-court phases.