



# Phoenix Community Care Ltd Foster Care Policy & Procedure

## **0236 - Safeguarding Against Child Sexual Exploitation Policy**

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# **Child Sexual Exploitation**

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# Child Sexual Exploitation

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Children who are sexually exploited are the victims of sexual abuse and should be safeguarded from further harm. Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual, emotional and physical abuse of children and young people. It is based on a deliberate imbalance of power between perpetrator and child. Perpetrators come from all age groups, social and ethnic backgrounds.

The sexual exploitation of children and young people has been identified throughout the Country, both in Urban and Rural areas and it affects boys and young men as well as girls and young women. It can be more difficult to detect when boys and young men are at risk, as they are less likely to disclose this type of information'. They may also find it harder to disclose that they are being sexually exploited by other men due to issues of sexual identity. Sexual exploitation can have devastating effects on children and young people and can rob children of their childhood. It also damages the lives of their families and carers.

The official definition from HM Government \_Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual

Exploitation' (2009) is a supplementary guidance to \_Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015):

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves 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'.

The safeguarding children and young people sexual exploitation guidance is issued under section 16 of the Children Act 2004, which provides that local authorities and each of their Board partner s take responsibility for safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation exercising their functions in relation to Local safeguarding children's safeguarding boards. PCc Foster Care Agency works in partnership with local authorities and therefore sees the guidance as good practice enabling the agency to fulfil their duties in cooperation with local authorities, and other agencies involved to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

## **1.1 PCC Foster Care Agency Commitment to Safeguarding Children and Young**

### **People from Sexual Exploitation~**

This policy will specify how to identify signs of sexual exploitation and how foster carers, supervising social workers, support workers and other professionals working at PCC Foster Care Agency can make a referral to the local authority. It will also look at good practice and actions supervising social workers and foster carers can do to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation.

Local Children Safeguarding Boards should have:

- A child sexual exploitation strategy
- Commissioned services for children who have been or may be sexually exploited
- A lead person responsible for co-ordinating a multi-agency response
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Therefore, operationally, managers in conjunction with their designated manager for safeguarding should have access to copies of the local safeguarding procedures manual for each authority in which they operate, and make these available to each member of staff. They have the responsibility to familiarise themselves with their own procedures and those within the relevant LSCB procedures manual. These procedures are likely to reflect the focus of the agency's work and any agreement it may have in force with the local authority around safeguarding children from sexual exploitation

Indeed, all agencies should be alert ,to the risks of sexual exploitation and be able to take action and work together when an issue is identified. This joint working should be underpinned by a strong commitment from leaders and senior manager s as set out in Working Together.

As an agency we are committed to:

- Providing safeguarding training;
- Providing training that raises awareness of sexual exploitation;
- Policies for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children which are attuned with the regional LSCB's policies and procedures that relate to sexual exploitation;
- Adhering to information sharing protocols to ensure that all relevant information regarding
- sexual exploitation and safeguarding is shared with other agencies, where this is in the best interests of the child.

## 2 The Nature of Sexual Exploitation

Any child and young person can be at risk of sexual exploitation. However, some groups are particularly vulnerable; these include children in local authority care, both foster care and residential care, those who have a history of going missing, those with special needs, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children involved in gangs, those disengaged from education and those misusing drugs and alcohol. Many of the children placed in foster care present with several of the above issues and are to be considered especially vulnerable. Also vulnerable are young people who have had difficult early life experiences such as childhood abuse and domestic violence.

Sexual exploitation can take many forms, from the seemingly 'consensual relationships' where sex is exchanged for attention, affection, accommodation and gifts to serious organised crime and trafficking. There is always a power imbalance as the perpetrator holds some kind of power over the victim and this dependency and fear increases as the exploitative relationship develops. Sexual exploitation involves varying degrees of coercion, intimidation or enticement, including unwanted pressure from their peers to have sex. Sexual bullying (including cyber bullying) and grooming for sexual activity. Young people can be groomed into sexually exploitative relationships, as detailed in the next paragraph. They could also be engaged in informal economies where sex is exchanged for drugs, alcohol, money or gifts. They may be threatened or bullied into sexual activities

or exchange sex for accommodation. Sexual exploitation often involves a stage of 'grooming' in which the child might receive gifts prior to, or as a result of performing sexual activities or having sexual activities performed on them. These gifts may be material gifts but it may be that attention and affection alone is sufficient to get the child's trust. Conversely, exploitation can also occur by the child being denied something, or isolated

until they perform certain sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation is often conducted with actual violence or the threat of violence, these threats may be towards the child or towards his/her family. These threats may be based on films or photographs of the child in sexual situations that could have been generated by the child themselves, posted on line and then used to control and manipulate them. In the cases of online sexual exploitation, the grooming process is often much shorter than the grooming discussed above and online grooming quickly escalates to threats and intimidation.

There is a presumption that young people (girls in the main), are sexually exploited by people that they do not know, but evidence shows that they are often abused by 'boyfriends' or people with whom they feel they have a relationship. Indeed, the perpetrators of sexual exploitation are often well organised and will target areas where children might gather such as shopping centres, parks, cinemas or popular Internet sites. Perpetrators may use younger people to build initial relationships and introduce them to others in the perpetrators networks.

Government guidance it is clear that sexually exploited children should not be regarded as criminals and that they are victims of sexual abuse and that the responsibility for the sexual exploitation lies with the perpetrators. Therefore, the response from the Police

must be directed at perpetrators who groom children for sexual exploitation.

Children and young people, who are themselves the victims of exploitation, may introduce other young people to their abusers. This may not be a deliberate attempt to groom others, but rather a

way of ensuring attention is deflected from themselves. They may also experience pressure from the perpetrator to introduce them to other young people (networking). These children and young people are themselves victims.

Sexual exploitation should not be regarded as an isolated issue. There are links to other types of crime, including, child trafficking, grooming (offline and online), abusive images of children, drugs related and gang related activity.

## **2.1 Warning Signs and Identifying those at Risk of Sexual Exploitation**

Case reviews highlight that sexual exploitation can be particularly hard for professionals to recognise and respond to. This is because confusion exists around young person's rights and their capacity to consent to sexual activity which means both young people and professionals often wrongly view exploitative relationships as consensual. As a consequence sexual exploitation often goes undetected.

16 and 17 year olds are often viewed as being more in control of their own choices and so less vulnerable to exploitation and professionals need to balance a young person's rights with the need to protection. However, a young person being 16 or 17 years old and of a legal age to consent to sex should not be taken as a sign that they are no longer at risk of sexual exploitation. These young people are still defined as 'children' under the Children Act 1989 and 2004. They can still suffer significant harm as a result of sexual exploitation and their right to support and protection from this exploitation should not be ignored or de-prioritised because they are over the age of 16 years.

Therefore supervising social workers, foster carers, support workers and other professionals working with children at PCC need to be aware of warning signs of potential sexual exploitation. Firstly, careful consideration needs to be given as to whether relationships presented by teenagers as being consensual are in fact

consensual and appropriate, or whether they are being sexual exploited. Children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation can often display challenging or offending behaviour but risk-taking behaviours can be a key indicator of sexual exploitation. They may appear antisocial and be involved in bullying and exploitative activities towards others.

The warning signs and indicators listed below are not exhaustive and the presence of any of the indicators should not be taken as proof of involvement or as predictive of future involvement in sexual exploitation, but they should give rise to a consideration as to whether the young person is at risk:

- Be involved in abusive relationships, intimidated and fearful of certain people or situations
- Hang out with groups of older people, or antisocial groups, or with other vulnerable peers
- Get involved in gangs, gang fights, gang membership
- The acquisition of money, clothes, jewellery or goods that the young person can't account for
- Being missing from home
- Truancy from school
- Hanging around a household where it is known young people congregate
- Having a relationship with an older man / woman
- Loss of contact with young people their own age and associating with older people
- Being threatened or physically assaulted by an adult
- Concerns about sexually transmitted diseases
- Teenage pregnancy
- A young person using or obtaining large quantities of contraceptives
- Self-harming
- Drug and / alcohol use
- The focus and priority should always be on ensuring a child or young person's safety and protection and wellbeing rather than just focusing on and trying to manage their challenging or risk taking behaviours.
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There may also be factors in the behaviours of caregivers that lead to concerns about children and young people.

These include:

- Expressing a sexual or violent interest in children
- Having a number of children visiting the household regularly and appearing to use it as an open house
- Giving children treats, money and favours
- Harboring children truanting from school
- Having or suspected of having a relationship with a child

'Sexual exploitation can have a serious impact on the life of children and young people. It can lead to difficulties in forming relationships with others, a lack of confidence or self-esteem and can affect their mental and physical health. Sexual exploitation can create feelings of worthlessness within children and young people, which can lead to acts of self-harm, including cutting themselves, overdosing and eating disorders. It can put the young person at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV, unwanted pregnancy and abortion, as well as long-term sexual and reproductive health problems. It can also ultimately impact on their parenting capacity in the future. Where children or young people manage to recover to some extent from sexual exploitation they will sometimes feel unable to stay in

their local area because of the associations it holds for them (or because of very real threats from networks around their abusers) leading to family break-ups and isolation from family and friends '(HM Government \_Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation' (2009).

### **3.Responding to a safeguarding concern regarding sexual exploitation**

This procedure applies to all foster carers, supervising social workers, support workers and any other professionals working with children and young people who they think may be at risk of sexual exploitation or are being sexually exploited. We share a legal duty to safeguard these children and young people. Therefore, foster carers and any other professionals working with children and young people need to be aware of the signs of sexual exploitation and grooming and know the process to follow if they have concerns.

#### **3.1 Process to follow if you have safeguarding concerns**

- Any concerns regarding a child or young person who you think is being sexually exploited, firstly speak with your line manager, who will then pass on the information to the operations manager/designated manager.
- The supervising social worker / operations manager will adhere to the safeguarding procedures of the relevant local authorities and notify the local authority's children's social care team by telephone immediately.
- If the child has an allocated social worker the referral should be made to the social worker with responsibility for the child, or their team manager or senior practitioner; Where the child does not have an allocated local authority social worker, a referral should be made to the children's social care team covering the area where the child usually resides but also contact the placing authority;
- Make a written record of the information received, sign and date the written record on PCC significant incident sheet and send within 24 hours to the



Local Authority. This form also need to be sent to the operations / designated manager immediately. All initial conversations and decision making must be logged on the significant incident sheets;

- The registered manager will need to notify Ofsted within 24 hours;
- The local authority will determine how to proceed. However, it would be expected that the local authority social worker would ensure that a multi-agency meeting or strategy meeting is convened under their procedures for safeguarding children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The purpose of this meeting should serve to share information and to devise strategies to assist the young person to exit sexual exploitation;
- Where any child has been involved in sexual exploitation their care plan must be set out how the local authority, their carer and other services will work together to provide the necessary help, support, guidance and advice to respond to their needs, ensuring that their welfare will be safeguarded. The child's wishes and feelings must be taken into account in developing this plan.

#### **4 Good Practice and Actions taken at PCC Foster Care Agency to reduce the level of risk**

It needs to be noted that 90% of children who are subject to sexual grooming go missing from their home or placement at some point. This may be because they have been groomed by those wanting to sexually exploit them. Or it could be young people who have already run away and are 'befriended' by inappropriate adults offering young people a warm and a dry place to stay, and are subsequently sexually exploited.

The vulnerability of this group of young people and the difficulties often experienced by professionals seeking to support them in exiting sexual exploitation cannot be overemphasized. Despite numerous interventions and intense efforts from professionals, they may still continue to be involved in sexually exploitative behaviour. It needs to be recognised this may be because of fear, emotional vulnerability, social networks or continuing financial gain from the behaviour.

When a young person is resistant to moving away from these people and activities which constitute a risk to sexual exploitation, the supervising social worker must work with the foster carer to ensure that they all work to an agreed plan for the child. The agreed plan must work to reduce risk to the young person and to minimise the harm the young person is causing to themselves and that advice is given on safety and sexual health issues. Supervising social workers, foster carers and support workers need **perseverance** and **patience** to help disengaged young people engage with them to build a trusting relationship.

#### 4.1 Actions to reduce the level of risk:

- When a child or young person goes missing from the placement, or does not return at the agreed time, the foster carers will immediately inform the agency's On-Call supervising social worker. The supervising social worker will then contact the local authority emergency duty team and then advise the foster carer to call the police. (If another service is involved such as any protect teams, they may need to be notified as well). It is essential that all foster carers of PCC liaise with their supervising social worker and then the local authority and the police, and provide them with all required information to help locate the young person.
- When a child has been identified at 'high risk' of sexual exploitation the foster carer may need to report the child missing when they fail to attend school or return from the school but any changes in the protocol for reporting 'missing' will be agreed by the multi-agency team involved.
- Supervising social workers should ensure that foster carers are keeping sufficiently detailed records. These records should contain details of any acquaintances of the child and where there are concerns, the registration number of any suspect vehicles, records of occasions where the young person has unusual amounts of cash or gifts, clear records of all periods of absconding and any information that may have arisen about where they were.
- If deemed necessary and in agreement with the children's social worker, the young person will only be allowed minimum access to the Internet and their Internet usage will be fully supervised by foster carers and the foster carer will supervise all telephone calls which the child / young person makes or receives
- The child/young person must have a child specific safer caring policy and risk assessment that the supervising social worker, local authority social worker and foster carer has signed and if appropriate the young person has signed.
- The supervising social worker and foster carer will encourage and support the child / young person to access intervention services. Which will include transporting them to any intervention services necessary.
- Supervising social workers to monitor that foster carers comply with reporting all safeguarding incidents relating to a foster child immediately. This information sharing will allow professionals to explore any triggers/patterns and share information to safeguard that child/young person.

Foster carers and supervising social workers and any other~ professionals at PCC, need to understand that some young people may not even realise that they are being exploited and due to previous negative experiences with professionals disengage. Furthermore, their 'risk-taking / troublemaking' behaviour can prevent them. from getting the protection they need as their behaviours can take the primary focus. Therefore, when dealing with sexual exploitation and children and young people that present with challenging behaviours as well, a child-centred approach is fundamental to ensure that children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation are viewed as vulnerable children/young people in need of protection and support. Children need to be listened to and their experiences accepted, to enable support and trust to develop.

## **5 Further links to local and national external safeguarding guidance on sexual exploitation**

**Local Safeguarding Children Board Websites for the local authority area in which you work.**

**Operation and Designated managers will provide the guidance for the area that you cover.**

Department of Education - Information sharing guidance  
[www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/intergratedworking/a0072915/information-sharing](http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/intergratedworking/a0072915/information-sharing)

The Child Exploitation and online protection (CEOP) Centre tel  
08700 000 3344  
Barnardos and LGA - Tackling child sexual exploitation: Believe  
in Children

Rotherham - Independent **Inquiry** into child sexual exploitation in  
Rotherham(1997 - 2013)