

# Learning from Serious Case Reviews Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

**Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice around CSE**

National Serious Care Reviews highlight that child sexual exploitation can be particularly hard for professionals to recognise and respond to. Confusion around children's (under 18 year olds) rights and their capacity to consent to sexual activity means both children and professionals often wrongly view exploitative relationships as consensual. This means that sexual exploitation often goes unidentified and children can be reluctant to engage with services.

The learning from these reviews highlights that professionals need to be aware of the warning signs of potential sexual exploitation and consider the child protection implications of underage sexual activity. Practitioners need to persevere to engage with children and make sure the services provided are on-going and child-centred. The primary focus should be on ensuring children's safety, protection and wellbeing.

**Reasons case reviews were commissioned**

This briefing is based on learning from case reviews published since 2010 where children were the victims of sexual exploitation. The children in these case reviews became the subject of reviews following:

- ⇒ Serious or prolonged sexual exploitation
- ⇒ Murder or suicide following sexual exploitation which was not recognised prior to death

**Key issues in child sexual exploitation in case reviews**

**The fact that young people are engaged in what they view as consensual sexual activity does not mean that they are not being exploited.**

**Confusion around sexual activity & the issue of consent**

- ⇒ Victims of sexual exploitation may be coerced into sexual activity with the perpetrators or they may feel unable to say no.
- ⇒ Some children may not recognise they are being sexually exploited, instead believing they are behaving as they wish.
- ⇒ 16 and 17 year olds are often viewed as being more in "control of their own choices" and so less vulnerable to exploitation.
- ⇒ Sexual activity between young people of the same age is often perceived as being consensual, but exploitation may still be occurring.

**Victims of sexual exploitation often display challenging, offending or risk taking behaviour.**

**Child sexual exploitation and risk-taking behaviour**

Negative attitudes from professionals who view these children as "troublemakers" can prevent them from getting the protection they need. However, risk-taking behaviour is a key indicator of abuse.

- ⇒ When dealing with troubled children, practitioners need to see young people as vulnerable children in need of protection, rather than just focussing on their challenging behaviour.
- ⇒ Victims of exploitation who engage in offending behaviour should not be criminalised, but instead need protection and support.
- ⇒ Perseverance is required to engage with children. They may not realise they are being exploited, have had negative experiences with professionals in the past or be scared of the consequences of talking about their abuse.

**Being in care can make children more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.** Many have had difficult starts to their lives and experienced neglect, abuse or trauma. Perpetrators target children's homes because of the high vulnerability of the children placed there and how easily they can make contact with the children.

**Vulnerability of children in local authority care, foster care or residential care**

Children are unlikely to disclose sexual exploitation due to:

**Disclosure of sexual exploitation**

- ⇒ Fear of perpetrators
- ⇒ Lack of knowledge or acceptance that they are being exploited
- ⇒ Loyalty to perpetrators
- ⇒ Lack of trust and fear of authorities.

**Too often, even when children do disclose abuse, no actions are taken by agencies against perpetrators or to support the children, and the abuse continues.**

## Identifying & accessing CSE

### ⇒ **Be aware of warning signs of potential sexual exploitation and grooming**

Practitioners must be aware of the warning signs of potential sexual exploitation and grooming. Victims of sexual exploitation often display challenging or offending behaviour, but risk-taking behaviour is a key indicator of abuse.

**Warning signs of potential exploitation include:** *underage sexual activity; sexual health concerns; teenage pregnancy; getting involved in crime; concerning relationships, especially with unknown adults; alcohol and drug misuse; going missing from home or placement; truancy; exclusion and disengagement from school.*

### **Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Board devised an Aide Memoire to support professionals to identify potential risk of exploitation**

Although the majority of victims in case reviews involving CSE are girls, it is important to recognise that anyone can be exploited. Groups particularly at risk include: children in local authority care, foster care or residential care; and children who have had difficult early life experiences, including childhood abuse and domestic violence.

### ⇒ **Consider the child protection implications of underage sexual activity**

Professionals providing sexual health services (inc. contraception) should consider the child protection implications of possible abuse or exploitation whenever they become aware of underage sexual activity.

### ⇒ **Carry out early and comprehensive assessment**

An early and comprehensive assessment should be carried out. Without a comprehensive assessment, practice becomes task focussed so that individual incidents are addressed, for example sexual health concerns, but the bigger picture of CSE is missed.

### ⇒ **Establish a complete picture through assessments from different agencies**

Assessment should draw on knowledge from different agencies so that a complete picture can be established in cases where sexual exploitation is suspected.

### ⇒ **Assess the child's capacity to consent**

The fact that children are engaging in what they view as consensual sexual activity does not mean that they are not being exploited. Victims of sexual exploitation may be coerced into sexual activity with the perpetrators or they may feel unable to say no. Other children may not recognise they are being sexually exploited, instead believing they are behaving as they wish.

Sexual activity between children of the same age is often perceived as being consensual, but exploitation may still be occurring.

## Making Interventions

### ⇒ **Balance a child's rights with the need to protect**

16 & 17 year olds are often viewed as being more in control of their own choices and so less vulnerable to exploitation. Practitioners need to balance the child's right to make their own decisions and assess their own risk, with the need to protect the child from exploitation. Even when a child is unaware or doesn't accept that they are at risk, or when risks to the child's safety arise from their own behaviour and the decisions they make, professionals still need to intervene to prevent exploitation.



### ⇒ **Engage children with services**

Practitioners need perseverance and patience to help disengaged children engage with, and remain involved with, services aimed at protecting and supporting them.

### ⇒ **Consider the wider context of children's risk taking behaviour**

When dealing with troubled children, practitioners need to see children as vulnerable children in need of protection, rather than focussing on their challenging behaviour. Victims of exploitation who engage in offending behaviour should not be criminalised, but instead need protection and support.

Services need to embed a child centred approach where children at risk of exploitation are viewed as vulnerable children in need of protection. Children need to be listened to and their experiences accepted, so trust can develop and children can feel supported and able to disclose their experiences.

### ⇒ **Provide on-going support**

Victims of sexual exploitation may need on-going support to ensure they are protected from further exploitation in the future.

## Identifying & dealing with perpetrators

⇒ **Take disclosures seriously**

Children are unlikely to disclose sexual exploitation due to fear of, or loyalty to, perpetrators, lack of knowledge or acceptance that they are being exploited, lack of trust and fear of authority.

Too often, even when children do disclose abuse, no actions are taken by agencies against perpetrators or to support children and the abuse continues.

Disclosure from children of underage sexual activity or sexual exploitation needs to be taken seriously and potentially considered as a crime. Actions taken following disclosure should not depend on the victims willingness to act as a witness in a criminal trial.

⇒ **Identify perpetrators and prevent child sexual exploitation from continuing**

Perpetrators need to be identified quickly and a case built against them by the police. They need to be prosecuted so that victims can feel safe, have trust in the authorities and feel confident that agencies can protect them. In Buckinghamshire our CSE strategy recognises that where children are perpetrators, they are also victims and should be supported as such.

⇒ **Collect profiles of victims to help identify ways to reduce future exploitation**

To reduce future exploitation, victim profiles should be compiled and collated. This information can be used to identify local hotspots or methods that are used to target potential victims.

**Information source:** [NSPCC Preventing Abuse - Serious Case Review - Child Sexual Exploitation](#)

Published November 2013. Accessed by BSCB on 4th July 2017

## Learning specific to Buckinghamshire from the Serious Case Review of Young Person J

What the report said	More credibility was given to J's retractions than allegations	What the BSCB did	We included retraction of allegations, the role of family pressure in retractions, and cultural and language barriers to disclosure in our CSE training.
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**What you should consider in your agencies** Listen to what children are saying and consider why they are saying it, including retractions. Take into account where you are talking about children, can the conversation be overheard? Is the child comfortable to disclose information in that environment?

What the report said	All professionals working with young people must attend training on CSE. The training should equip them to understand the complex relationship between the victims and abusers and include issues of victim-blaming and labelling	What the BSCB did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ We added CSE training to our initial training pathway to increase access and we continue to offer CSE training as part of our core offer.</li> <li>⇒ We devised a short course for school DSLs / youth services to take away and deliver within their own agency.</li> <li>⇒ We carried out a training challenge event to identify barriers to people accessing training.</li> <li>⇒ We are planning 1:1 interviews to identify what single agencies cover during their safeguarding training.</li> <li>⇒ The BSCB training includes an element from RUSafe? on how victims are supported to recognise that they are victims and not to blame.</li> <li>⇒ Our CSE Sub Group offers challenge where there is evidence that agencies do not have sufficient training in place.</li> </ul>
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**What you should consider in your agencies** Have a training pathway that demonstrates different levels of training needed for different roles, to include volunteers. Consider whether your agency can evaluate the impact and effectiveness of training. Ensure your agency maintains records of who has attended training.

What the report said	All agencies should make referrals to Children's Social Care whenever there are safeguarding concerns about a child. Agencies must not assume that another agency will make a referral or deal with the concerns	What the BSCB did	<p>We have devised a referral flow diagram and distributed this alongside adverts and posters to raise awareness of CSE and how to report any concerns.</p> <p>The BSCB has wallet cards outlining what to do if you are concerned about a child in Bucks. These can be distributed as requested.</p>
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**What you should consider in your agencies** Display the Thresholds documents and referral flow diagram where staff can see them. Discuss how to report concerns during supervision with staff.

The full document "[Lessons learnt from Young Person J](#)" can be accessed by clicking on the hyperlink

## Recommendations from the Buckinghamshire Serious Case Review into CSE between 1998 & 2016

- ⇒ Information sharing is still problematic. There needs to be improved clarity about when, how and with whom agencies can share information relating to CSE. This is particularly the case where the concern is below level 3 on the thresholds document, where information is partial or anecdotal and where it relates to a location or a group of people, rather than an individual. Reassurance is needed that necessary, proportionate, relevant, adequate, accurate and timely information can be shared securely, but this needs to be a two way process between organisations.
- ⇒ There is a lack of support for parents and carers of children who are at risk of being, or have been, exploited. A recommendation has been made to have a family worker within the Swan Unit in order to support families.
- ⇒ There needs to be more support for children transitioning into adulthood. A coordinated, effective and appropriate response should be available to victims as they become adults.
- ⇒ Finally a similar response to the above should be available for adults who make delayed reports of child exploitation.

The full report can be found by clicking this link: [BSCB Serious Case Review: CSE  
www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/serious-case-review/serious-case-review-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-buckinghamshire-1998-2016/](http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/serious-case-review/serious-case-review-into-child-sexual-exploitation-in-buckinghamshire-1998-2016/)

The BSCB is committed to ensuring learning from this review is acted upon and ensure children in Buckinghamshire are effectively protected from exploitation. We will continue to make this one of the Board's priority areas for further work as outlined below.

PREVENT	PROTECT	PURSUE
Buckinghamshire Communities can easily access information, advice and support, and know how to report a concern about child exploitation	Data around child exploitation, including local trends and patterns, is used effectively to challenge and inform practice and services	Good information-sharing, local intelligence, surveillance and proactive joint operations mean that partners put in place appropriate disruption activity in relation to both perpetrators and locations / hot spots
Our school population know the signs of child exploitation and how to get help	There are effective services in place to assess the needs of, and provide support to, victims and their families	Perpetrator behaviour is disrupted through the full use of legislative powers
Children who are vulnerable to child exploitation received early and coordinated help	There is an effective & coordinated partnership response to child exploitation	Local offending profiles are used to inform practice and services.

## Buckinghamshire CSE Documents & Resources

- ⇒ Buckinghamshire have produced a **multi-agency strategy** to tackle CSE entitled '*Buckinghamshire Strategy for Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (2016 - 2019)*' which can be accessed here: <http://bscb.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/5/Documents/32.%20Child%20Sexual%20Exploitation%20Buckinghamshire-wide%20Stragegy.pdf>
- ⇒ The Buckinghamshire Practice Guidance for Child Sexual Exploitation can be accessed here: <http://bscb.procedures.org.uk/hkqtl/exploitation/child-sexual-exploitation-guidance/#s1068>
- ⇒ Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board developed an 'Aide Memoire' to help identify signs of potential CSE. This resource can be accessed here: <http://bscb.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/5/Child%20Sexual%20Exploitation%20Aide%20Memoire.pdf>