

Definition - What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is child abuse and children and young people who become involved face huge risks to their physical, emotional and psychological health and well-being.

The nationally agreed definition of child sexual exploitation which is used across Merseyside is:

Child 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, attention, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, or others performing on them, sexual act or activities.

Child Sexual Exploitation grooming 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"

Child Sexual Exploitation is an area of child abuse that can be overlooked, as evidenced in the Jay report into sexual exploitation in Rotherham, because of the perception of a relationship between the child and perpetrator(s). It is very important that a shared understanding of Child Sexual Exploitation as child sexual abuse which a child cannot consent to exists amongst professionals and the wider community. All children who experience any aspect of sexual exploitation are victims.

Why is it important?

Nationally, regionally and locally there is risk to children and young people of being sexually exploited. Child Sexual Exploitation is recognised nationally as one of the most important challenges facing agencies today. It has a serious long term and lasting impact on every aspect of a child or young person's life including their health, physical and emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, personal safety, relationships, and future life opportunities.

“Children who are sexually exploited are the victims of sexual abuse and should be safeguarded from further harm. Sexually exploited children should not be regarded as criminals and the primary law enforcement response must be directed at perpetrators who groom children for sexual exploitation.”

Baroness Morgan of Drefelin
Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (2009)

Child Sexual Exploitation maintains a very high national profile and remains a key priority area for the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) partnership. Partnership work to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation is led through the Child Sexual Exploitation strategic group and all organisations have a role to play in ensuring children and young people are protected from sexual exploitation.

The recent Jay report into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham highlighted that 'collective failures' of managers and professionals in partner agencies including Social Care and the Police to acknowledge and respond to the extent of sexual exploitation contributed to 14 years of abuse of children and young people. The report reminds us that we must not be complacent for one minute and we should use the report's recommendations to test our own responses to vulnerable children,

young people and their families, and the effectiveness of our multiagency systems to detect and respond quickly to each and every instance of Child Sexual Exploitation.

The WSCB is very clear that Child Sexual Exploitation is child abuse, and all children and young people who are subject to sexual exploitation are victims, regardless of whether they feel they have been abused or not.

Risk factors associated with child sexual exploitation

Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances. This includes boys and young men as well as girls and young women. However, some groups are particularly vulnerable. These include;

- Children and young people who have a history of running away or of going missing from home
- Those in and leaving residential and foster care
- Those with special needs and learning disabilities
- Migrant children and young people
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people
- Children and young people who have disengaged from education
- Children and young people who are abusing drugs and alcohol
- Those involved in gangs

What are the signs and symptoms of child sexual exploitation?

Grooming and sexual exploitation can be very difficult to identify. Warning signs can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour and/or development. However, parents, carers, school teachers and practitioners are advised to be alert to the following signs and symptoms:

- inappropriate sexual or sexualised behaviour
- repeat sexually transmitted infections; in girls repeat pregnancy, abortions, miscarriage
- having unaffordable new things (clothes, mobile) or expensive habits (alcohol, drugs)
- going to hotels or other unusual locations to meet friends
- getting in/out of different cars driven by unknown adults
- going missing from home or care
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- associating with other young people involved in sexual exploitation
- truancy, exclusion, disengagement with school, opting out of education altogether
- unexplained changes in behaviour or personality (chaotic, aggressive, sexual)
- drug or alcohol misuse
- getting involved in crime
- injuries from physical assault, physical restraint, sexual assault

Wirral's local CSE profile

Wirral is home to approximately 70,500 children and young people (0-18). The child population of Wirral is predominantly white British (93%) but significant ethnic minority groups exist, particularly Irish, Chinese and Polish. It is a key challenge for all agencies working in Wirral to eliminate the differences in outcomes for children and young people and to ensure our most vulnerable children receive help at the earliest opportunity.

Keeping children and young people safe and protected from Child Sexual Exploitation is one of the key priorities of the Wirral Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB), the Local Authority, the Police and partners. Working together in partnership with the wider local community is key if we are going to recognise and effectively deal with CSE in Wirral.

All of the WSCB's safeguarding activity, including the response to CSE across the partnership contributes to ensuring that:

“Children and young people in Wirral feel safe and are safe”

The WSCB through its strategic group is developing a performance information dataset for Child Sexual Exploitation. The main source of data will be held by the Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation (MACSE) meetings which are held each month. All cases where professionals suspect or know that a child is a victim of or at risk of sexual exploitation are referred into the MACSE meetings where they are risk assessed and a plan is developed to protect the child and reduce the risk. Cases stay at MACSE until there is no further risk of sexual exploitation. The meetings are chaired by the police and are attended by professionals from key agencies including children's social care, youth services, children's safeguarding, education, health, Catch-22 and preventative services.

There is currently no national dataset for Child Sexual Exploitation so at present we are unable to compare Wirral's performance against other areas. Data currently available from the MACSE meetings is presented to the WSCB on a quarterly basis and informs the multi-agency action plan for combatting sexual exploitation. A common dataset has been agreed between the safeguarding boards in Merseyside and the new comprehensive dataset will be published each quarter from March 2015.

The main model of Child Sexual Exploitation in Wirral illustrated by the MACSE data is the boyfriend model and exploitation of younger girls by older men. There is little evidence of organised exploitation by groups or gangs. The available data for Wirral as at April 2015 tells us that:

- From August 2014 to March 2015 a total of 83 new cases were referred into the Wirral monthly MACSE meetings
- A proportion of young people were discussed several times throughout this time frame bringing the total number of cases discussed up to 195
- 93% of the referrals into MACSE have been made for girls and 7% for boys. Over 95% of young people describe themselves as white British
- Young people between the ages of 8 and 17 have been referred into the MACSE
- Over 60% of referrals have concerned young people (mainly girls) between the ages of 14 and 15
- Nearly 65% of the referrals into the MACSE are made by the police or children's services
- Main reasons for young people being referred into the MACSE include young people being at risk and becoming exploited through, going missing alone or with friends, being groomed through social media and associating and becoming exploited by older men
- 71% of young people referred into the MACSE live in the urban centres of Wallasey and Birkenhead with a further 29% residing in South and West
- 57% of the young people referred into the MACSE had previously been reported as missing from home

- 74% of young people referred into the MACSE are open to statutory social services; 27% of the referrals are made for children who are looked after (LAC)
- One third of the young people referred into MACSE had a disclosed learning disability, most often ADHD or an autism related condition. Nearly 29% of young people referred into MACSE were known to have mental health difficulties some of whom have self-harmed in the recent past.

Gaps in intelligence

With little national data and a relatively new local data set it is difficult at present to identify gaps in intelligence, although this should become clearer as the data picture builds.

The biggest current gap is not currently knowing exactly how many children and young people are victims of or at risk of sexual exploitation in Wirral. As the MACSE meetings become established this will help us develop an informed picture of Child Sexual Exploitation locally.

Equally it is difficult at present for the WSCB to give trend information or accurately predict what will happen in the future. It is expected however that the number of Child Sexual Exploitation cases will grow substantially over the next year as both local awareness and confidence in the support from local services increases. Barnardo's have highlighted one case where *"as a result of services being improved because of training, there was a five-fold increase in a period of three months of children and young people being identified as at risk."*

What Are We Doing and why?

The Child Sexual Exploitation action plan is aligned to the Pan Cheshire and Merseyside CSE strategy for 2014-2017. The purpose of the strategy is:

- To focus and co-ordinate multi agency resources in tackling child sexual exploitation
- To ensure that children and young people and the wider community across Cheshire and Merseyside, in particular with parents and carers, are aware of child sexual exploitation and its effects
- To enhance training for professionals
- To ensure that young people and the community are made aware of the issues around exploitation
- To bring to justice the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation and to ensure that young people are properly safeguarded in the course of any criminal proceedings

To achieve this, the partnership has set five key strategic priorities:

- **Self-Assessment** – Each area maps service provision for children and young people who are victims of or at risk of sexual exploitation, and profiles sexual exploitation in their area
- **Prevention** – There are three aspects to this priority; awareness raising and community engagement; training for professionals and disruption of perpetrator activity
- **Safeguarding** – This priority focuses on developing a coordinated response to Child Sexual Exploitation which ensures victims are identified and responded to at the earliest opportunity
- **Bringing Offenders to Justice** – Each area will work closely with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to ensure abusers are swiftly brought to justice and held to account
- **Governance** – Good governance ensures that Local Safeguarding Children Boards can develop the policies, procedures and practice to ensure an effective multi-agency response to Child Sexual Exploitation.

Key recent activity by the WSCB partnership to combat Child Sexual Exploitation includes:

- Commissioning of the *Chelsea's Choice* theatre production in February 2015. *Chelsea's Choice* tells the story of a teenage girl who was groomed and exploited by an older man. 20 performances have been commissioned and all secondary schools have been invited to show *Chelsea's Choice* to their Year 9's
- An audit has been undertaken of Wirral children who are looked after and are placed out of borough. Evidence tells us that looked after children are very vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation particularly those who regularly go missing. The audit will help us identify whether appropriate support for looked after children is in place
- An audit will be completed in February 2015 across Merseyside of the cases which have been referred into the MACSE meetings on more than one occasion. This audit will identify the reasons for re-referrals and help the partnership test the effectiveness of its response to Child Sexual Exploitation
- The WSCB Child Sexual Exploitation strategic group has published the Merseyside protocol for sexual exploitation which sets out the purpose and operation of the MACSE meetings and the referral pathway. The group has also published Wirral practice guidance to support professionals using the protocol. The practice guidance has been launched through a series of briefings
- The charity Catch-22 are commissioned by the WSCB to deliver the missing from home/care and Child Sexual Exploitation contracts thus identifying and supporting young people who go missing and may be victims of or at risk of being sexually exploited. Catch-22 are also commissioned to deliver multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation training to professionals
- Two multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation workshops have recently been held to identify and focus actions reviewing services, identifying gaps and ensuring current and future services to support young people are effective. The workshops also explored how the voice of the child/ young person can be captured and used to inform the development, commissioning and review of services

What do we still need to do?

A lack of awareness and understanding of this issue on a national level has previously allowed Child Sexual Exploitation to go unrecognised and unreported or not responded to effectively. There is substantial evidence showing the potential negative impacts of an under-developed approach to Child Sexual Exploitation.

Learning from serious case reviews has shown problems common to these reviews have included; confusion about sexual activity and the issue of consent (assuming those aged over 16 are engaged in consensual activity); linking Child Sexual Exploitation to risk taking behaviour (rather than viewing that young person as vulnerable); and a lack of action following disclosure, meaning that abuse was allowed to continue.

Recent research has also highlighted the potential negative health consequences associated with not identifying risk soon enough – including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance misuse, self-harm, STIs, depression, eating disorders and flashbacks.

The WSCB and partners are unaware of how many children and young people in Wirral may be victims of or at risk of being sexually exploited. Once developed the Child Sexual Exploitation Performance Information dataset populated by MACSE data and information from individual agencies will help the WSCB establish a clear picture of the nature and extent of sexual exploitation.

Online/ social media technology forms part of most people's lives, especially those of young people. As a result it has been rare to identify cases of child sexual exploitation where the use of technology has not been a factor. This fact is significant, as information technology is having a direct impact in a multitude of ways on the means by which people are able to sexually exploit children. An e-safety strategy needs to form part of a robust response to Child Sexual Exploitation.

Work is developing with the Police and Crown Prosecution Service to develop a Wirral and pan Merseyside problem profile which will include an assessment of activity undertaken to pursue and prosecute offenders.

The voice of young people must be included in the review and development of services. The WSCB is looking at models of young people's participation and a model will be recommended to the WSCB in March 2015.

The WSCB commission Catch-22 to deliver the Missing from home and Child Sexual Exploitation service which includes counselling and working with young people to build resilience. This work is mainly undertaken in the short term Literature suggests that appropriate therapeutic support should be available for young people who are at risk or suffering from sexual exploitation. This support should be delivered for as long as individuals need it.

Engagement and awareness raising across all community groups is essential to ensure a coordinated and successful response to Child Sexual Exploitation. Work has begun to engage with groups in the 'night-time' economy such as taxi drivers but this engagement needs to be widened to include community leaders and leaders of minority groups.

Community / stakeholder views

Key engaged stakeholders in the Wirral Strategy to combat Child Sexual Exploitation include:

- The Wirral Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB). The WSCB partnership includes the local authority, police, health organisations, education, voluntary, community and faith groups and youth services etc. The WSCB has set CSE as a partnership priority for both 2013-14 and 2014-15 and is the lead strategic organisation in Wirral for combatting sexual exploitation. Work is co-ordinated through the multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation Strategic group (silver) and the MACSE operational group (bronze)
- Pan Merseyside Strategic Group (Gold). The pan Merseyside group coordinates the activity undertaken by the respective local silver groups. This helps ensure a sharing of good practice and resources and a consistent approach taken to combatting Child Sexual Exploitation. The group should become increasingly influential with commissioning services for Child Sexual Exploitation
- Catch-22. They are commissioned by the WSCB to deliver the Missing from Home and the Child Sexual Exploitation service to children and young people. Catch-22 identify young people at risk of being sexually exploited and work to engage with them to educate and build resilience to enable them to make healthier and better informed choices to protect them from becoming sexually exploited. Catch-22 typically works with 12-15 cases at any time and is also engaged in outreach work. The service also runs a GIRLS group which aims to work with vulnerable girls who may be at risk of becoming sexually exploited. Catch-22 is also commissioned to deliver the multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation training for professionals on behalf of the WSCB. The full day training is delivered monthly.
- Merseyside Police. The police chair the monthly MACSE meetings and are responsible for ensuring the meetings are well attended and effective.

Evidence of what works

1. Nationally

The Nine Foundations of Good Practice

The Office of the Children’s Commissioners’ (OCC) 2013 Inquiry into gang and group-based Child Sexual Exploitation identified pockets of good practice across a number of LSCBs. Based on primary research with those areas that are being particularly proactive in tackling sexual exploitation, the OCC identified nine key foundations of good practice that have contributed to *“exemplary approaches to protecting children and young people against exploitation at the hands of gangs and groups”* (p32).

Even though the report focuses specifically on gang and group sexual exploitation, the nine principles are considered transferable to all forms of Child Sexual Exploitation. They are shown in the diagram below:

Essential Foundations for Good CSE Practice



The first of the nine foundations; “focus on the child” states that the child should be at the centre of any professional decision making regarding their safety, welfare, care and protection. Importantly however, the guidance warns against placing too much emphasis on a victim making a full disclosure about the extent of the abuse they suffered. The second priority links to this; by building up a relationship of trust (in order to gain a child’s confidence) from the initial point of contact.

The OCC’s research identified leadership as a priority, and found that 77% of key agencies have appointed a lead Child Sexual Exploitation professional; but that fewer than half have Child Sexual Exploitation leads from local authority education and youth offending teams. Areas showing strong

operational practice have focussed on creating the conditions (at school, at home, for example) in which *“everyone is alert to the signs that a child may be at risk”*. Based on evidence of how to achieve these conditions, the OCC published their “Recognition and Telling Framework” to help adults to understand what might be going on for a child or young person.

In November 2013, the NSPCC published the briefing “Learning from case reviews around Child Sexual Exploitation”. The briefing notes that *“it is clear from these reviews that CSE can be particularly hard for professionals to recognise and respond to.”* There were a number of key issues or failings common to several of these serious reviews:

Firstly, in several instances confusion about sexual activity and the issue of consent was cited; a failure to recognise that ***“the fact that young people are engaged in what they view as consensual activity does not mean that they are not being exploited”***. Victims may be coerced; some may believe they are behaving as they wish; in addition, 16 and 17 year olds were sometimes viewed (by the authorities) as being more in control of their choices.

Linking Child Sexual Exploitation to risk taking behaviour was raised as a common factor. ***“When dealing with troubled children, practitioners need to see young people as vulnerable children in need of protection, rather than focussing on their challenging behaviour”***.

Finally, disclosure of sexual exploitation was identified; in several of these cases, no actions were taken by agencies against perpetrators following disclosure (further, in some instances, no subsequent support was provided to the young person, meaning the abuse continued). The briefing goes on to identify lessons for improving practice; ‘an early and comprehensive assessment’ must be carried out once warning signs are recognised. Such assessment must include issues of ‘capacity of consent’, taking into account the grooming process and issues of coercion which may be experienced.

In terms of interventions, the briefing states that practitioners must balance the young person’s right to make their own decisions and assess their risk, with the need to protect the young person from exploitation. Disclosures must be taken seriously and dealt with as a crime. Actions taken following disclosure should *not* depend upon the victim’s willingness to act as a witness in trial.

The literature suggests that a model of good practice for Child Sexual Exploitation can only be achieved through a clear multi-agency partnership approach and cannot be solely led by one agency. Key features of good practice from recent publications research includes:

- Publication of a clear action plan against which progress, performance and the contributions of partner agencies can be measured
- Clear partnership commitment to combatting Child Sexual Exploitation underpinned by a common understanding that sexual exploitation is sexual abuse which children and young people cannot consent to even if they do not always see themselves as victims
- Development of a clear referral pathway which is shared and understood across the partnership
- Development of an action to ensure high quality Child Sexual Exploitation training exists within agencies and for multi-agency and community partners
- Development of an action to ensure schools raise awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation with young people and work to protect young people at risk or victims of sexual exploitation
- Establishment of a method to proactively share information and intelligence about Child Sexual Exploitation
- Development/adoption of a Child Sexual Exploitation risk assessment tool for use with young people
- Publication of a local Child Sexual Exploitation problem profile

- Inclusion of young people in the assessment, planning and commissioning of services

2. Locally

Since September 2014 Wirral has had an operational Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The MASH is an information sharing hub where key agencies including CADT (children's social care 'front door' for referrals), police, health and Catch-22 are co-located. In relation to Child Sexual Exploitation Catch-22 have identified a case study:

One example of good practice is we have completed a return home interview for a young person and we were previously made aware that the young person had visited a flat where an adult male lived. The adult male and the young person had been discussed at the monthly MACSE meeting. The young person that we spoke to then told us that another young person had also been visiting his property. As a result of this we were immediately able to share this information with Social Care and Police, a strategy meeting was held and the young person who was named has been supported by us to attend a video interview. There is already an on-going Police investigation in relation to the male and the information that has been shared has hopefully been able to strengthen this investigation and has also safeguarded 2 young females

In terms of awareness raising the WSCB has had positive feedback from partners for the following activity:

- Publishing Wirral practice guidance including detailed information about the referral pathway, models of Child Sexual Exploitation, signs and symptoms and mythbusting, particularly views often held about victims by professionals.
- Multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation training and briefings
- Publication and dissemination of a series of Child Sexual Exploitation posters and leaflets
- Establishment of the Child Sexual Exploitation strategic group and publication of the action plan
- Commissioning of *Chelsea's Choice* drama production

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