

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

WARNING SIGNS AND VULNERABILITIES CHECKLIST

Telford and Wrekin have a robust Risk assessment that is completed by CATE (Children Abused Through Exploitation) practitioners that is taken to a Multi Agency Risk Panel in order to ascertain the risk level of each individual referred.

If you are considering a young person for CATE referral please be aware of the information contained in this paper in order to inform your referral and help the assessment to identify the immediate presenting issues.

Your CATE referral should clearly identify all elements below that you consider to be an issue once the case is assessed.

The following are typical vulnerabilities in children prior to abuse:

- 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, peers or intimate relationships (in cases of gang associated CSE only).
- Attending school with young people who are sexually exploited.
- Learning disabilities.
- Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their families.
- Friends with young people who are sexually exploited.
- Homeless.
- Lacking friends from the same age group.
- Living in a gang neighbourhood.
- Living in residential care.
- Living in hostel, bed and breakfast accommodation or a foyer.
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence.

- Young carer.

The following signs and behaviour are generally seen in children who are already being sexually exploited:

- Missing from home or care.
- Physical injuries.
- Drug or alcohol misuse.
- Involvement in offending.
- Repeat sexually-transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations.
- Absent from school.
- Change in physical appearance.
- Excessive and secret use of the internet and/or mobile phone. (Potential for grooming!).
- Mood swings and changes in behaviour.
- Having several SIM cards, frequent mobile phone top ups.
- Being unusually secretive. I.e. where they have been? Who they have been with? Who their friends are?
- Alcohol/Substance misuse.
- Unexplained injuries.
- Lacking self-esteem, leading to a change in personal appearance.
- Excessive washing or bathing particularly when returning from missing episodes.
- Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking sites.
- Estranged from their 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 lists should be considered to be at high risk of sexual exploitation. Professionals should immediately start an investigation to determine the risk, along with preventative and protective action as required.

However, it is important to note that children without pre-existing vulnerabilities can still be sexually exploited. Therefore, any child showing risk indicators in the second list, but none of the vulnerabilities in the first, should also be considered as a potential victim, with appropriate assessment and action put in place as required.

It is very important to remember that ALL children are vulnerable and a 17year old is still a child.

It is also very important to acknowledge that boys and young men are equally vulnerable and the same considerations should be afforded to males as well as females in this arena. We are considering Risk not Gender.

It should be noted that there could be other innocent explanations for these behaviours and further exploration with family, carers, friends and other information gathering systems could prove useful to clarify this.

If a child confides in you or another member of staff it is important that you believe them and make it clear that confiding in you was the right thing to do.

If you are concerned then act with immediate effect.