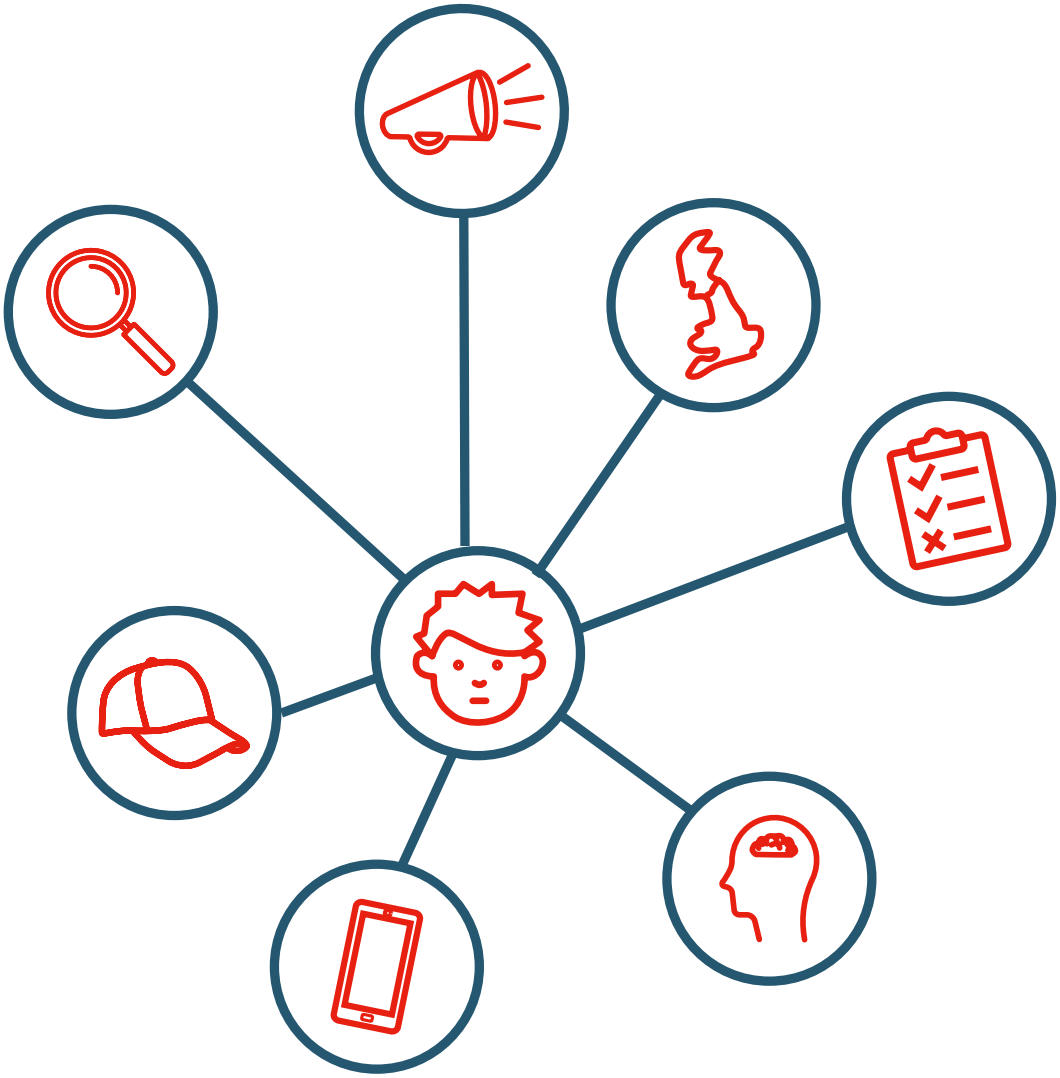
Developed in partnership with

Children and Young People's Centre for Justice

Action for Children



The Criminal Exploitation of Children

Scotland's Framework for Practice

Toolkit

Although all under 18-year-olds are viewed as children in line with UNCRC, those we've consulted with prefer to be referred to as 'young people'. That's why we use this language in case studies or quotes, but refer to'children' elsewhere in the framework.

This framework was created in June 2024.
It was updated in April 2025.

Children and Young People's Centre for Justice

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is rights-respecting, contributing to better outcomes for our children, young people and communities.

Safe and happy childhood

Action for Children protects and supports children and young people, providing practical and emotional care and support, ensuring their voices are heard, and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

Contents

Introduction 4

Who is the framework for? 5

1. Developing our understanding of the criminal exploitation of children 6

1.1 What is the criminal exploitation of children? 6

1.2 Key knowledge points in raising awareness around the criminal exploitation of children 7

1.3 Bringing context – shifting the narrative around the criminal exploitation of children 8

2. Identification 10

2.1 Identifying the criminal exploitation of children 10

2.2 Screening tool to support the identification of the criminal exploitation of children 12

2.3 Multi-agency working 13

2.4 Key stakeholders involved in identifying and responding to the criminal exploitation of children 13

2.4 Pivotal points for agencies to respond to children who are vulnerable to, at risk of, or being criminally exploited 14

2.5 Why is the criminal exploitation of children hard to identify? 16

2.6 How to improve early identification of the criminal exploitation of children 17

3. Assessment and analysis 19

3.1 Integrated approach to understanding and addressing the criminal exploitation of children 19

3.2 Legislation 24

3.3 Assessing risk and safeguarding 25

3.4 Practice reflections for agencies responding to child criminal exploitation 26

3.5 Information sharing – a barrier to protection? 28

4. Intervention 29

4.1 Practice principles 29

4.2 Roles and responsibilities 32

4.3 Example case studies 34

5. Conclusion 35

6. Tools for practitioners 36

6.1 Screening tool for the criminal exploitation of children 36

6.2 Multi agency self-assessment 48

References 53

Introduction

The criminal exploitation of children (sometimes also known as Child Criminal Exploitation or CCE) poses a significant national challenge, disproportionately affecting children and families.

Scotland's Serious Organised Crime strategy outlines four key domains for combating serious organised crime: detect, deter, divert, and disrupt.[1] **As part of our collective responsibility, agencies must prioritise safeguarding children who are criminally exploited.** To give clarity and confidence in identifying and responding to children at risk of exploitation, this framework offers guiding principles for agencies to apply in practice.

Criminal exploitation is a multifaceted area that cuts across several policy domains, with several pieces of legislation addressing different aspects of its harm. **This framework aims to consolidate core elements, relevant to different stages of a young person's journey through exploitation** offering direction and guidance to practitioners who might work with children at various points in this journey.

In Scotland, definitions, practices, and identification of exploitation vary across sectors and geographical locations. A joint research effort by Action for Children, the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ), and the Scottish government wanted to explore existing evidence and perspectives related to the criminal exploitation of children.[2] The findings highlighted the profiles and types of crimes children are coerced into committing, challenges around identifying and responding to children who are criminally exploited and the adultification and criminalisation of children. Data gathering and challenges in understanding the scale and extent of the issue in Scotland reflected wider UK findings around lack of consistent recording across agencies and sectors.

Practitioner guidance has been developed through the DIVERT workstream linked to the Serious Organised Crime taskforce, aiming to define the criminal exploitation of children and establish a consistent understanding across all agencies.[3] **Our collective responsibility is to identify and safeguard children at risk of exploitation,** with this framework offering support to practitioners in fulfilling that responsibility.

The framework was designed with key priorities in mind: **accessibility, simplicity, and applicability.** Focus groups and feedback from various agencies provided critical insights during the development process and has informed the content, making sure it will hold relevance for all partners in how to address concerns around the criminal exploitation of children.

Most importantly, **the framework reflects the perspectives of children and families**, in sharing their experiences and needs. This work was facilitated by our lived experienced and participation workers who worked with children and families in a way that felt comfortable to them. This included both formal focus groups and informal discussions. We recognised that children often did not see themselves as exploited, and so engagement centred around developing our understanding of their experiences and how best to support them when communicating concerns with them about their exploitation.

This work has been funded by The Corra Foundation through The Promise Partnership and delivered by Action for Children and the CYCJ. CYCJ has been actively engaged in policy around the criminal exploitation of children since 2017. They have worked alongside Action for Children who have delivered diversion services for criminally exploited children – and their families – across the UK since 2013, in addition to being engaged in developing policy.

Who is the framework for?

This framework is designed for practitioners who work with children up to 18 years old, or care-experienced young people up to the age of 26 years old. From various sectors including health, education, social work, police, voluntary organisations, children's hearings, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), residential care, and Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA).

It serves as a resource to support practice when dealing with the criminal exploitation of children across all stages of the system. It emphasises the collective responsibility of everyone to safeguard children from harm and abuse.

This framework does not seek to replace existing policy and guidance and should be used in conjunction with GIRFEC (Getting It Right for Every Child)[4] and the National Child Protection Guidance for Scotland.[5]

It is the intention to have an accessible, user-friendly document for agencies that brings together core elements of existing frameworks, policy, legislation and guidance applicable to criminally exploited children into a digestible format. Drawing out these core elements was identified by agencies as a barrier to effectively identifying and responding to the criminal exploitation of children.

The framework therefore seeks to document the accurate interpretation and application of these core elements to support more effective identification and responses to children and families.

1. Developing our understanding of the criminal exploitation of children

1.1 What is the criminal exploitation of children?

The criminal exploitation of children is defined in the National Child Protection Guidance for Scotland[5] as;

"The action of an individual or group using an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, or for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator. Violence or the threat of violence may feature. The victim may have been criminally exploited, even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation may involve physical contact and may also occur through the use of technology. It may involve gangs and organised criminal networks. Sale of illegal drugs may be a feature. Children and vulnerable adults may be exploited to move and store drugs and money. Coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons may be involved."

The criminal exploitation of children is often, although not always, linked to serious organised crime which is defined within Scotland Serious Organised Crime Strategy (2015) as;

"Involves more than one person, is organised; meaning that it involves control, planning and use of specialist resources; causes, or has the potential to cause significant harm, and involves benefit to the individuals concerned, particularly financial gain."

When considering the criminal exploitation of children, and/or its associations to serious organised crime it is important to note the lack of legal definition in providing clarity of understanding.

In the absence of a definition, the UK government leans towards the definition offered within the Serious Violence Strategy[6] which states:

"Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."

(HM Government, 2018a, p. 48).

Scotland has considered its position on defining criminal exploitation, and developed practitioners guidance on the criminal exploitation of children to foster a shared understanding across agencies in the absence of a legal definition. This guidance not only defines exploitation, but also aims to facilitate early identification of children and vulnerable adults. The overarching message is that agencies should perceive exploitation as harm and abuse, prioritising responses that view individuals primarily as victims.

The recently published Jay Review from Action for Children on the Criminal Exploitation of Children, 'Shattered Futures, Stolen Lives'[7] is calling on the UK government to develop a statutory definition based on the common descriptions across the UK, and in line with the definition of child sexual exploitation published in 2016;[8]

"The criminal exploitation of children occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child into criminal activity. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual."

1.2 Key knowledge points in raising awareness around the criminal exploitation of children

The criminal exploitation of children is a form of child abuse.

Children do not, and cannot, choose to be exploited. This includes consenting to being exploited.

The criminal exploitation of children should be seen across a continuum. Some children may be exploited but not come to the attention of police. Others may have significant offending histories and be deeply entrenched in delivering serious organised crime.

We should avoid waiting for indicators and vulnerabilities to stack up before we respond. By the time children are detected by police for crimes associated with organised criminality they have already been harmed through exploitation.

Exploitation always involves the role of another to facilitate, also known as 'the exploiter', often in exchange for something the exploiter believes the victim wants or needs. This can be physical needs such as money, drugs, gifts, or psychological such as sense of belonging, status, reputation.

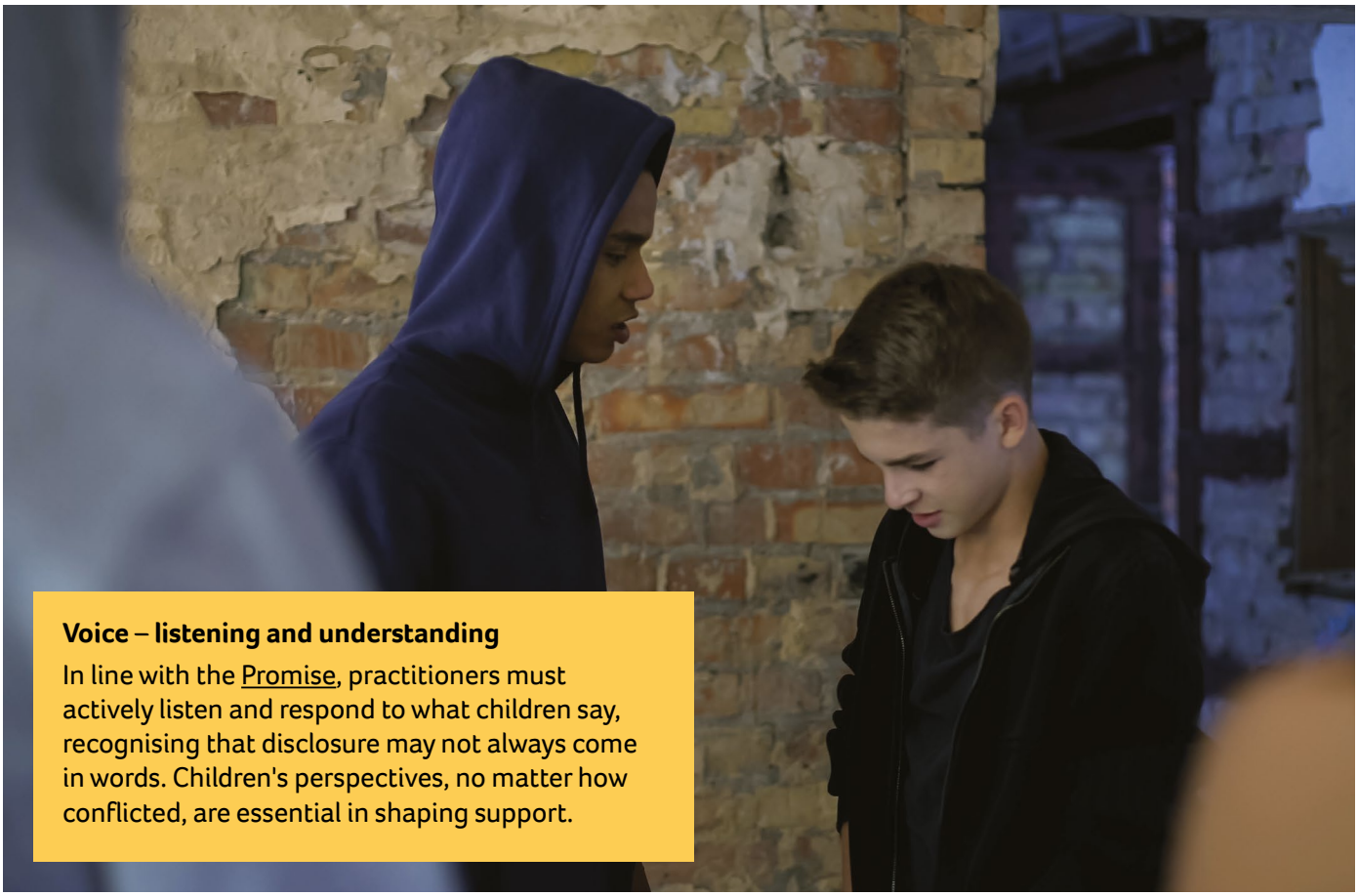
The criminal exploitation of children involves committing illegal activity for the benefit of another. Children will therefore perpetrate harm against others, as well as being harmed. Responding to this through the lens of exploitation is critical in making sure we don't unnecessarily, or further criminalise children.

Children who are criminally exploited are victims. However, the traditional 'victim' stereotype is not always helpful in understanding criminal exploitation.

Children will often not recognise their victimhood – nor do they need to, in order to be supported/have relevant legislation applied (see legislation section for further detail).

Not all children will see their exploitation as harmful or have the desire to move away from it. This should not lead to a different response. Children should be supported at the point they are at in their exploitation journey.

Families need support to understand exploitation and ways to promote their family's safety as active partners in partners in their child's plan.

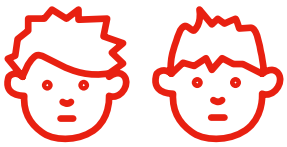


Voice – listening and understanding

In line with the Promise, practitioners must actively listen and respond to what children say, recognising that disclosure may not always come in words. Children's perspectives, no matter how conflicted, are essential in shaping support.

1.3 Bringing context – shifting the narrative around the criminal exploitation of children

The case studies of Ben and Kyle* illustrate the complexities in identifying and responding to concerns around exploitation.



It's important to understand that **whilst situations may appear risky or exploitative to professionals, children are invested in these relationships, believing they are reciprocal, positive and protective, only to be told by us that they are unsafe, exploitative and often dangerous.** Children describe the inner conflict of not wanting to talk with professionals, family and those who may expose them. Either for being exploited, or for engaging in illegal activity.

The emotional burden of carrying this around is something that should be considered by agencies responding to exploitation. Understanding how this may manifest itself will strengthen support offered, build trust between professionals, families and children therefore promoting engagement.

Identifying exploitation early can be difficult – as per the case study of Kyle. The exploitation of Ben is more identifiable however more challenging in that he is more entrenched in the exploitation process. Both Ben and Kyle are victims of exploitation and warrant further assessment and understanding of how their exploitation is impacting them and to consider the most appropriate responses to divert them. Neither Ben or Kyle admitted their exploitation, nor disclosed information that would make it easier for professionals to identify. **Confidence and ability to recognise the signs of exploitation are therefore critical skills across all agencies and sectors.**

*We've changed the young people's names and made some small amendments to their stories to protect their identities.

Ben's* story

17 year old Ben is a young person who has been criminally exploited.

But he wouldn't agree. He's been hanging around with a different group in another area of the city he lives in, dealing some drugs in return for some cannabis for his own use. He has a drug debt but is paying that off through his dealing. He realises this debt is increasing as he hasn't managed to sell the drugs he has been given in time as well as being caught by police with some drugs on him and them being confiscated. It doesn't worry him though, as he knows these guys will 'look out for him'. He has seen what they do to people that don't deliver for them, it's not pretty. But he won't be like the other ones.

He knows other young people that can help him out if he needs to shift some of the drugs. He usually carries a knife around with him as the older guys tell him he should. Just in case. Just in case he is faced with a situation he needs to use it. He has gained a few enemies as a result of who he's associated with and the business he is in, but he can handle himself.

He knows his parents worry about him but he can't back away from it all now – who knows what would happen? He has a social worker and support worker but he can't tell them anything. He's not a grass. Some of the professionals he has met thinks he's just trouble, and others have asked him if he is exploited. "Exploited?" he responds.

> ***"Absolutely not. I know what I'm doing. And anyway, even if I was. It doesn't help me does it. It wouldn't stop them wanting their money. If I moved away from it who would I hang around with? I'm better just sticking with what I know. It feels safer that way.***

Kyles'* story

Kyle is 15 and lives at home with his mum and two younger siblings.

He's started to miss days at school, and when he is in attendance is described as being disruptive and challenging towards teachers. He appears confident, has a peer group that he spends time with in the community and is often out in the evenings and weekends. He smokes cannabis and has been charged previously with anti-social behaviour offences such as vandalism, threatening and abusive behaviour and more recently was charged with assault against another young person.

Recently he's been coming home later at night and has been more secretive about his where abouts. He has a new phone and a new pair of trainers that he claims he bought himself. With no disposable income there are suspicions around how he is funding this, and his cannabis, but he repeatedly claims he spends his own money or friends give him the cannabis.

His associations in the community would suggest there's links to groups of individuals involved in dealing and distribution of drugs, and he has mentioned someone called 'Greg' that he knows. When pushed, he won't say more about Greg, but claims that he's offered him some work.

Kyle has a social worker as there are concerns around his behaviour at home, with his relationship with his mum at breaking point. She struggles to get Kyle to follow any rules or boundaries and feels he is constantly 'out or on his phone'. When he is at home, she describes him as 'on edge', secretive and will get up and go the minute his phone goes. As if his friends are more important than school or his family.

2. Identification

2.1 Identifying the criminal exploitation of children

Identifying children entangled in, or susceptible to involvement in Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) through criminal exploitation poses a significant challenge for practitioners across various sectors. There are multifaceted reasons contributing to this challenge.

Comprehension of the broader context surrounding their behaviours, and an increase in confidence in recognising exploitation will contribute to seeing children as victims of exploitation, instead of as perpetrators of criminal activities.

As part of the exploitation of children, exploiters exert considerable effort to conceal their activities and educate children on evading detection by authorities. Often, agencies respond only after the exploitation has already taken place, failing to identify early warning signs. Children may have vulnerabilities that do not invariably result in exploitation but may manifest in other ways. It is important to ensure a focus on prevention and early intervention responses to mitigate future likelihood of criminal exploitation.

Several warning signs may indicate a child is being exploited. Assessing the context and circumstances of these indicators will support safeguarding and intervention planning and should prompt a coordinated, multi-agency response.

Responses should start from a place of seeing families as protective partners, in line with the principles of family support. Only where this is not safe should this not be the case. Efforts must be made to identify relationships that the child considers family, and which are important to them. This aligns with the Promise's foundation of supporting families together to nurture love and address challenges.

The summary of potential indicators illustrates examples that could suggest a child is being exploited. The table has been taken from the scoping review: Understanding Child Criminal Exploitation in Scotland.[2]

Summary of the potential indicators of a child being criminally exploited

Behavioural

- School – truancy, disengaging, decline in performance.
- Misusing substances (e.g. alcohol, drugs, etc.).
- Going missing – frequent missing episodes, located in an area where the child has no obvious connections, unwillingness to share whereabouts, returning dishevelled.
- Carrying weapons.
- Being arrested for drug offences.
- Fear or mistrust of authority.
- Fear of reprisals and violence from gangs and others.
- Secretive, withdrawn, isolated.
- Holding drugs, money or weapons.
- Concerned about losing money or increased interest in money.
- Being in a state of 'fight' – (e.g. disruptive, hostile, aggressive, agitated, irritable, wary, angry, controlling or demanding).
- Being in a state of 'flight' – (e.g. running away, hiding, hyperactivity, disruptive, clumsy, 'silly', inability to concentrate).
- Being in a state of 'freeze' – (e.g. distracted, not listening, confused, forgetful, looking distant, poor eye contact, struggling to communicate).
- Being in a state of 'appease and submit' – (e.g. low mood, not questioning or answering questions beyond minimum, compliant, easily bullied).

Social

- Associating with other victims of exploitation.
- Receiving excessive texts and phone calls.
- Associating with older people.
- Isolation from peers.
- New peer groups.
- Associating with gangs and/or Organised Crime Groups (OCGs)
- Online connection to criminal networks.

Verbal

- Closed off, scared to talk.
- Sudden change in language.
- Using language related to drug dealing.
- Disclosure of sexual and physical assault, followed by withdrawal of disclosure.

Mental health

- Self-harm.
- Emotional changes.
- Low self-esteem.
- Psychological trauma.
- Other mental health issues.

Other

- Unexplained injuries.
- Malnourished.
- Increased or unexplained material items (e.g. gifts, money, clothes, etc.).
- Multiple mobile phones or sim cards.
- Parental/carer concerns.
- Drugs held internally (e.g. rectally, vaginally, orally).
- Lack of identification documents or identification held by exploiter.
- Sexual exploitation.
- Victims of abduction or forced imprisonment.
- Serious Organised Crime Matrix nominals being stopped out of area.
- Increase in children and young people being arrested for 'Possession with Intent to Supply' offences outside area.

References: Action for Children, 2022; HM Government, 2018a; Home Office, 2022g; Home Office, 2018; Human Trafficking Foundation, 2022; Ministry of Justice, 2019; National Crime Agency, 2021; National Crime Agency, 2019b; Skills for Care and Development, 2022; The Children's Society, Victim Support and National Police Chief's Council, 2018.

Additional indicators that were highlighted through engagement with children included:

– Talking about having a debt – personal as well as accrued debt that may carry over onto family members as a means of controlling engagement. This can present as children asking for money, stealing money, selling material goods/personal possessions.

– Talking about 'going to work' or going missing for periods of time during the day as well as at night or overnight. Missing episodes were described as concerning when they were uncharacteristic of usual patterns of behaviour, or being found out of area or in locations that are not 'typical'.

– Threats of violence or intimidation, whether this was online, face-to-face, or through others as enforcers. Feedback from children was they may not appear fearful following threats made to them but that doesn't mean they're not concerned about it.

– Having multiple phones or a burner phone. Constantly having to check phones or answer calls or texts immediately.

– Hanging around with older groups who may be controlling or demanding of how they spend their time.

– Meeting in hotels, Airbnbs, flats or houses that may be used as locations to facilitate exploitation – criminal and sexual. Hotel keys, addresses on google maps and location apps can help to identify. Bus tickets, receipts for purchases – location and time are important as well as how purchases are funded.

– Drug paraphernalia suggesting drug use, or materials used for dealing – scales, bags etc.

– Increasingly disruptive behaviour that could be a sign of emotional distress, living up to a sense of status that has been gained through associations with certain groups.

– Weapon carrying or wearing multiple layers of clothes/ stab proof vest. Indicating a need for protection.

– Listening to drill music or using gang/violence/drug related language you wouldn't expect them to know or is out of character.

– Threats over social media between rival groups.

– Significant changes in emotional wellbeing/a disconnection from family/friends or becoming socially isolated.

2.2 Screening tool to support the identification of the criminal exploitation of children

Indicators/ signs of criminal exploitation

Indicator	Yes/No	Comments / evidence (include timescales)
Period/ periods of absence/missing (day and/or night), which may include being found out of area or in locations with no known connection to the child; or, where the absence is significant or out of ordinary for the child.		
Arrested/charged/convicted of possession with intent to supply drugs.		
Arrested away from own home area – particularly where arrested on public transport.		
Arrested/found at an address which appears to be 'cuckooed' or of concern.		
Arrested/found with or accompanied by older non-related people who may be believed to be involved in organised criminality.		
Arrested/found with a weapon particularly a knife; or in s are identified. Any child found hould also raise significant n.		
ntly and/or significant unknown numbers ide, pass off (secretive /texts immediately.		
ntities of money.		
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d but may		
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The screening tool on page 39 could help in considering whether exploitation is taking place. However, it should complement, not replace, existing practice.

2.3 Multi-agency working

Reflecting on how individual agencies identify and respond to the criminal exploitation of children is essential in defining clear roles and responsibilities within the partnership.

The intricate relationship between committing criminal acts and seeing children as victims of exploitation necessitates diverse responses from various agencies. In the absence of a national strategy to direct agencies, it's our responsibility to collaborate effectively to tackle the harms of the criminal exploitation of children.

2.4 Key stakeholders involved in identifying and responding to the criminal exploitation of children

The criminal exploitation of children is largely facilitated through Serious Organised Crime which is a pervasive harm across all aspects of society.

The ways in which exploiters work is constantly evolving, both in communities and online. Poverty, vulnerability and marginalisation are breeding grounds for exploiters, with no boundaries to who and how they exploit.

We have a collective responsibility across statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sectors to respond to, and address the harms caused by the criminal exploitation of children, including;

– Parents, carers.

– Local community groups, partnerships.

– Health.

– Education.

– Social work.

– Police.

– The voluntary sector.

– Children's hearing.

– Scottish Children's Reporter Association (SCRA).

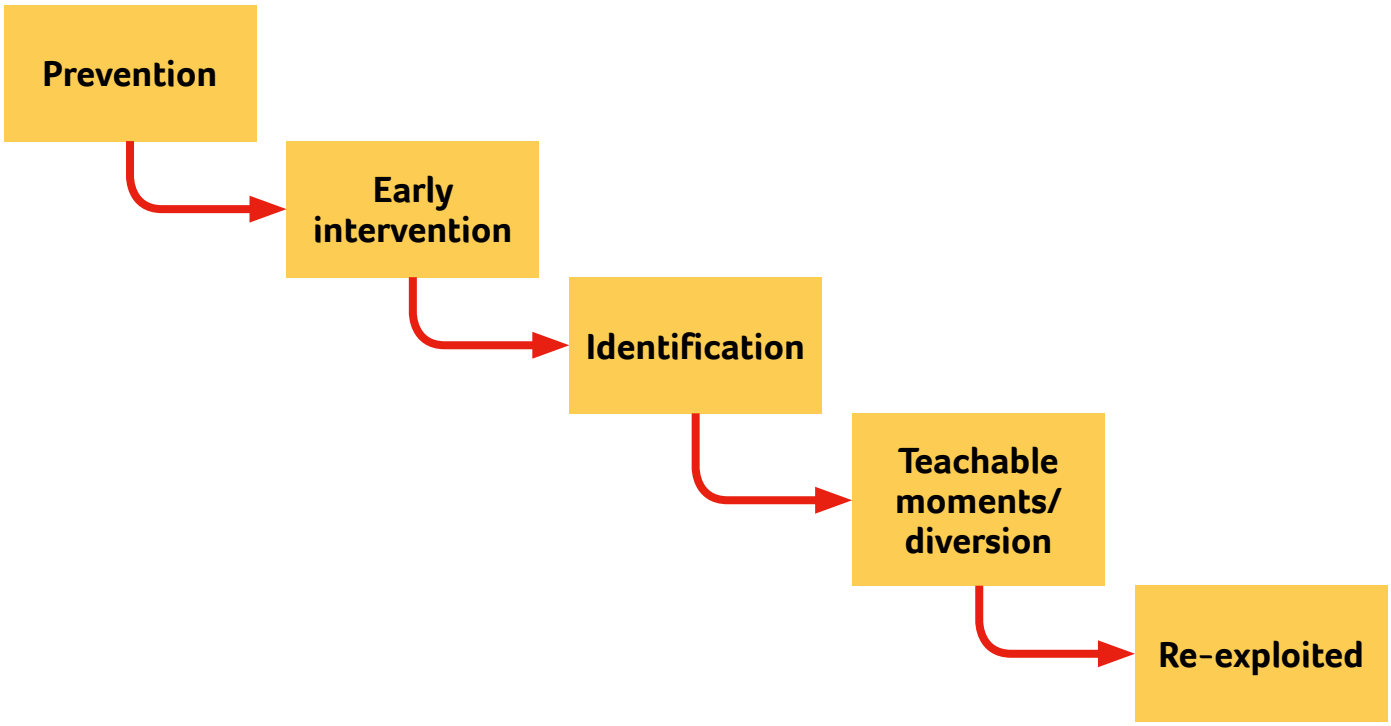
– Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service.

– Residential and secure care.

– Prison service.

While it's our collective responsibility, agencies should be clear about their individual roles and responsibilities to safeguard children who are criminally exploited.

2.4 Pivotal points for agencies to respond to children who are vulnerable to, at risk of, or being criminally exploited



1. Prevention.

Identifying vulnerabilities like poor self-esteem, neurodiversity, poverty or family relationship breakdowns is important in preventing future likelihood of exploitation. Further indicators such as aspiring to be like older children in the community who have a perceived sense of status, reputation and material wealth can also act as early indicators.

A child's vulnerability to exploitation may increase as a result of having large amounts of unstructured time, spending increased time in the community or in online spaces, or through substance misuse issues. Listening to drill or rap music that sometimes glamourise that lifestyle. Identifying vulnerabilities that could lead to future exploitation is key in preventing harm to children and should be addressed through the GIRFEC[4] framework. **Parents, carers, universal services, and those working in education may be best placed to identify concerns during this stage. However, all services should be alert to identifying vulnerabilities to future exploitation or early exploitation.**

2. Early intervention.

Changes in presentation, in peer group, being offered gifts, having increased sense of status, disengagement or difficulties in education and within family relationships may indicate that a child is being groomed. **Education, community partners, parents and carers** will be key in identifying and raising concerns with social work, or specialist services involved in offering support against future criminal exploitation. Where there are positive trusting relationships, these should be nurtured and supported as a means of building resilience to future exploitation. Good communication and information sharing between partners should be central to early intervention alongside consideration of contextual safeguarding responses like community and peer mapping and safety planning. **Children and families should be integral to finding solutions.**

> ***I thought selling drugs was cool and a chance to get a name for myself and make some dough. I can see it now that selling drugs isn't what it's cracked up to be and I will end up in prison or stabbed. I wasn't aware how it can affect not only me but my family.***
>
> **Young person**

3. Identification.

Children may be entrapped by their exploiters and coming to the attention of police because of their involvement in criminal activity. It's likely that while they may still be groomed and offered something in exchange for their involvement, they'll be experiencing high levels of threat, intimidation and violence. It's common for children not to want to move away from their exploiters or see the risks posed by them. This is part of their experience of exploitation and it's down to practitioners to meet children where they're at, as opposed to imposing their perceptions and making decisions about how to respond based on the child's willingness to admit to their exploitation.

Children do not need to admit to their exploitation to be seen as, or safeguarded as, a victim. They'll have increased anxiety about engaging with professionals for fear of repercussions. They may be managing high levels of emotional distress that manifests through emotional outbursts leading to family placement breakdown, aggression towards others, resistance and hostility to professionals and substance misuse issues. Each of these challenges offer exploiters a greater hold over their involvement. Child protection measures should be adopted if a child is identified as being exploited. An Inter-agency Referral Discussion (IRD) should be raised in line with standard child protection processes, as well as consideration of a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Wider supports in addition to statutory involvement should also be considered as a means of promoting engagement and addressing vulnerabilities linked to their exploitation.

There should be appropriate focus on disruption of perpetrators, alongside protection measures for exploited children. Local partnerships should consider a way of recording data around exploited children that highlights the number of children, responses offered and impact of the interventions.

4. Teachable moments and diversion opportunities.

Children who are exploited, may come to the attention of emergency services in need of medical attention or through arrest. This is especially true of children who have not been able to engage with services, and will only do so in times of crisis. It's in these moments that children may reach out for help, or recognise their involvement is too overwhelming to manage alone. They will often express fear for their own safety and wellbeing, or that of their friends and family. It's important to recognise that even if a child does not accept support at this stage, they are still being exploited.

Agencies need to recognise that children are groomed into exploitation and will therefore need time and support to move away from this in a safe way. Holding risk and working with children and families during this time is challenging. It requires strong communication, information sharing and collaboration between agencies. **Immediate protection measures** may be needed during these times, as well as consideration for wider support agencies that can promote engagement and work with children and their families to reduce risk. **Contextual safeguarding approaches** are also appropriate in these circumstances, in reviewing serious case incidents to identify potential opportunities to create safer environments and relationships for children.

Point of referral to specialist services:

"Selling drugs is a normal way to make money and nothing really happens – people have been doing it for years."

Post intervention:

"I now understand that selling drugs isn't wise. There are serious consequences like going to jail, or getting stabbed. It still doesn't stop people though."

Young person aged 17

5. Re-exploited.

Children who have previously been criminally exploited and moved away from exploiters are at risk of being re-exploited. If unmet needs have not been addressed, it can leave children at risk of being drawn back in, with exploiters being expert in identifying vulnerability.

Building resilience to these vulnerabilities is crucial in preventing re-exploitation. Building a positive support network around the child will also help to identify warning indicators that a child may be groomed back into criminal activity. Agencies should be alert to any changes in behaviour that would suggest regression towards exploiters and make sure support is sustained post exploitation.

2.5 Why is the criminal exploitation of children hard to identify?

Due to their exploitation, children will be drawn into criminal activities. In some instances it will be apparent their offending is directly linked to their exploitation, while in other cases, the connection may be less evident or not apparent at all.

Children rarely acknowledge or accept they are being exploited. Agencies should take account of this when identifying exploitation – not letting a child's perception of the situation impact their professional judgement. Instead it's vital to remember that children, as part of their exploitation, will have been groomed into believing they're part of a reciprocal, meaningful relationship with their exploiter(s).

> *To find out I was being exploited was the hardest thing. I had never thought that I was being used by other people and that I didn't matter.*
>
> **Young person, aged 14.**

> *I thought the older guys I was hanging around with were my friends and that they had my back. After working with the support programme, I now understand that they didn't really care about me. They were only using me.*
>
> **Young person, aged 15.**

Exploiters specifically target children who exhibit risk-taking behaviour and have skills and capabilities that appeal to them. Additionally, unmet needs make these individuals more susceptible to exploitation. Therefore, it's crucial to conduct thorough assessments and contextual analyses to identify exploitation as early as possible.

Certain offences, such as those requiring adult influence or facilitation, serve as strong indicators of exploitation. Similarly, offences committed in the presence of older adults or known associates raise red flags. These offences may include drug-related crimes, thefts, robberies, or fraud. Detecting large quantities of drugs or money on a child, their involvement in transporting high-value goods, or storing stolen items are also signs of potential exploitation.

Paying attention to associated activities, such as increased finances, frequent taxi use, hotel bookings, or train travel (especially if they lack a known income), is essential. Understanding the motivation behind these offences is vital in addressing exploitation effectively.

2.6 How to improve early identification of the criminal exploitation of children

1

Definition:

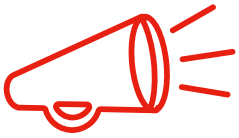
Be clear within your local partnership what the criminal exploitation of children is. In the absence of a statutory definition, local partnerships should agree on a definition that ensures accurate identification of children who possess warning indicators or vulnerabilities to suggest they may be at risk of, or are being criminally exploited.

2

Training and awareness:

Provide awareness-raising and training to professionals across sectors. This should include spotting the signs of exploitation and how to have conversations with children and families if they notice concerns.

3



Communication:

Make sure there is good communication between partners to share information and concerns. Approaches for information sharing should be coordinated to make sure preventative and early intervention have the greatest success in reducing harm.

4

Engagement:

Children who have positive trusting relationships with others find it easier to disclose any harms they are experiencing. This also makes it easier for adults around them to notice any changes in behaviour that may indicate concerns around criminal exploitation.

Identification takeaways

- Be vigilant for warning signs indicating vulnerability to exploitation.
- Identifying vulnerabilities/warning indicators does not always mean a child is being exploited. Conversely, action should be taken to explore any possibility of exploitation happening rather than waiting for indicators to build up. Context and analysis are vital in preventing and reducing significant harm and abuse from happening.
- Vulnerabilities often manifest in conflicting behaviours that make it challenging to detect. These behaviours often cross between law enforcement and need for protection, and should be addressed through a child first approach.
- Children will often not identify themselves as exploited. This is part of the grooming process where they're led to believe they're entering into reciprocal relationships, exercising rational choice and 'gaining' something from their involvement. That doesn't mean we should reinforce this narrative. We need to be adept in identifying and responding to warning indicators at the earliest opportunity to prevent children being groomed further along the exploitation continuum.

Implementation priorities – awareness and identification

Awareness priorities	Considerations for implementation	Complete: Y/N/In progress
1. Awareness raising/training for practitioners.	Recognising indicators and vulnerabilities.	
2. Awareness of how to progress concerns if a child is identified as 'at risk' or being criminally exploited.	Early Intervention pathways or child protection processes.	
3. Agency/partnership working towards an agreed definition.	National Child Protection Guidance for Scotland[5] Practitioner Guidance for Criminal Exploitation	
4. Agreed language and understanding around children who are criminally exploited.	Individual or agency bias, impact of language on responses, confidence to identify at early stage.	
5. Understanding of the touch points in the system where agencies can intervene/identify children at risk of, or being criminally exploited.	Clarity around services available, roles and responsibilities.	

3. Assessment and analysis

This framework does not dictate a set assessment process, but rather aims to bring together core elements of best practice, existing frameworks, and policy into a set of applicable practice principles.

Supporting children who are victims of criminal exploitation needs a delicate balance between:

Developing positive and trusting relationships.

Safeguarding children's rights.

Managing risks effectively.

3.1 Integrated approach to understanding and addressing the criminal exploitation of children

Addressing the criminal exploitation of children through child protection necessitates an amalgamation of methodologies and insights from various frameworks prominent in Scotland, such as GIRFEC[4], Framework for Risk Assessment Managing and Evaluation (FRAME)[9], National Child Protection guidance, alongside nationally recognised models of practice such as Contextual Safeguarding.

These frameworks provides the scaffolding for professionals to intervene early and consistently. As set out in The Promise, systems must work together to provide the right support at the right time.

When assessing the most relevant approach to support children at risk of criminal exploitation there should be recognition that children may pose a risk to themselves, others, or both simultaneously.

Understanding the multifaceted nature of each child's situation – acknowledging the unique drivers behind their behaviours and how they meet underlying needs – is crucial. This understanding informs the development of protective scaffolding that addresses both internal and external risk factors, fostering safer environments and enhancing children's capacity to meet their needs in non-harmful ways.

The following section aims to summarise the key policy and guidance documents available and how they can be used to safeguard against the criminal exploitation of children.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)[4]

Assessment of children who are at risk of, or being criminally exploited should follow GIRFEC[4] principles, ensuring firstly that children get the right support they need at the right time. SHANARI indicators alongside the National Practice model will support identification and holistic assessment of wellbeing.

National Child Protection guidance[5] in Scotland

The National Child Protection guidance[5] outlines responsibilities and expectations for everyone who interacts with children in Scotland, covering risk assessment, multi-agency coordination and child protection practices.

Agencies should use the guidance in line with the GIRFEC policy and practice model to inform multi-agency child protection procedures, processes and responses. The guidance clearly states its position on the criminal exploitation of children and processes that should subsequently follow. **The Inter-agency Referral Discussion process (IRD) should be instigated in the all instances where there are concerns around the criminal exploitation of children.**

The guidance offers insights into potential indicators of criminal exploitation for agencies to consider, with reference to the National Practitioner guidance on Criminal Exploitation[5] to support decision making on relevant safeguarding and procedural steps that should be taken. Specific to the criminal exploitation of children is reference to the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015[16] and the Lord Advocates instructions around the non-prosecution of victims.

Section 8 of the 2015 Act stipulates the requirement for the Lord Advocate to publish instructions for prosecutors around the prosecution of victims of human trafficking, clearly stating within the instructions **"a strong presumption against prosecution"** of a victim of human trafficking or exploitation who has committed an offence as a result of being criminally exploited or trafficked.

The practitioner guidance references the importance of child and legal protections for children who are victims of exploitation, recognising their increased likelihood of being unnecessarily criminalised if they are not treated accordingly in being seen as victims first and foremost.

Framework for Risk Management and Evaluation (FRAME)

The standards, guidance and operational requirements highlighted within the framework for risk management and evaluation (FRAME) outlines best practice for responding to children where aspects of their behaviour may pose risk of serious harm or, has caused serious harm to themselves or others.

Within the framework are the **'requirements for risk practice'** (also known as referred to as Care and Risk Management, or CARM) supporting practitioners to offer a developmentally, systemically and trauma-informed approach to children aged 12-18 years old, and their families, where aspects of their behaviour may cause, or have caused risk of serious harm to others. Responses within the framework mirror principles across many of Scotland's policies around protection of children; child-centred, rights-based, needs-led and appropriate and proportionate. Requirements for risk practice (CARM) should be applied within a child protection context and can take into account the impact on the child who may cause harm as well as those who may be harmed.

Within the context of criminal exploitation, practitioners should recognise that criminally exploited children are being harmed as well as causing harm to others. FRAME and the requirements for risk practice should therefore apply to children in this instance. The National Child Protection guidance[5] outlines risk of harm to others must be responded to as a child protection and be appropriate and proportionate to the assessed level of harm (actual or potential).

Any risk practice response must be defensible, evidenced based and informed by appropriate and proportionate information sharing, holistic assessment and multi-agency decision making.

Contextual safeguarding pathways

Contextual safeguarding[10] is an approach to extra familial harm that encourages responses from child protection processes and systems that target contexts where children experience, or are likely to experience harm. This includes the assessment of contexts and suitable interventions offered to mitigate risk.

The approach seeks to reduce the responsibility on children in managing risks posed to them, sharing the responsibility among partners to identify solutions that reduce the likelihood of children being exposed to harms in different contexts/relationships.

The voices of children and families should influence and support contextual safeguarding approaches, and be seen as active contributors to improving safety. Professor Carlene Firmin, who developed the approach, emphasises the need to adapt the principles to match local needs and does not mandate a certain method of implementation, but instead consideration around four key principles:

Target: Assessment and targeted interventions in contexts where children experience harm. This should be multi-agency and coordinated in a way that shares responsibility among partners.

Legislative framework: Consider how legislative frameworks intersect while maintaining a primary focus on protecting children from harm beyond the family. This is particularly relevant in cases of criminal exploitation, where children may face criminal charges alongside child protection procedures. Acknowledgement and recognition of how children navigate their way through opposing systems when developing contextual safeguarding approaches should be a key consideration.

Partnerships: Statutory and non-statutory or non-traditional partnerships like groups of children, community organisations, private sector business and other local businesses such as bus companies and taxis should be considered in how interventions can be coordinated and managed to make contexts safer for children. These partnerships should facilitate coordinated interventions to create safer contexts for children.

Outcomes: On going review of whether contexts have become safer as well as risk of harm being reduced to a particular child/group of children.

Risk Outside of the Home Child Protection pathway[11]

A Risk-Outside-of-the-Home (ROTH) pathway is a framework used by social workers to organise child protection responses and support plans for young people who are at risk of significant harm beyond their families. This harm is primarily or solely extra-familial.

When implementing a ROTH pathway, the following considerations outline the key principles:

1

Context:

When a child faces risks outside their home – such as violence, abuse, or exploitation in their neighbourhood, school, or online – the ROTH pathway would be initiated to coordinate responses to mitigating those risks amongst a multi-agency partnership. Consideration should be given as to whether this would be an appropriate action following an IRD to coordinate the ongoing risk management and protection of the child.

2

Process:

Threshold: ROTH pathways are developed when evidence shows that the threshold for significant harm (and it being extra-familial) has been met.

Multi-agency meeting: Similar to a child protection planning meeting, a multi-agency 'ROTH' meeting is convened. It is independently chaired to agree a suitable plan. ROTH meetings should not replicate child protection planning meetings, but consider whether it can compliment responses to reduce risk of harm to children by addressing harm in extra-familial contexts.

Plan considerations: The plan takes into account both the contexts where the child is at risk and where they are protected.

Outcome: The meeting results in a coordinated plan that enhances the child's safety and reduces the risks they face.

Why use Risk Outside of the Home Child Protection pathways?

Developing responses to extra-familial harm requires a **balancing act**. The types of harm experienced by children – criminal, sexual, peer-initiated sexual abuse, as well as serious violence – all warrant a child protection response.

Traditional child protection responses predominantly focus on the child and parents' capacity to manage risks posed to them, which may not always be the most effective in address the full range of risks associated with such harms. In the instance of criminal exploitation, responses should always consider the role of the exploiter and the contexts where this exploitation takes place. Traditional child protection processes do not often offer space for such considerations.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[12]

A comprehensive response to the criminal exploitation of children is underpinned by a set of interdependent principles, reflecting the ethos of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).[12]

These principles underscore the collective responsibility of all individuals and agencies involved in child welfare. They also emphasise the need for a balanced, inclusive, and dynamic approach to understanding and addressing the criminal exploitation of children.

Understanding and upholding the UNCRC is fundamental in shaping services offered to children who experience criminal exploitation.

The UNCRC[12] outlines several key rights relevant to children under these circumstances, including:

– The right to non-discrimination.

– The right to survival and development.

– The right to be heard.

– The right to privacy and confidentiality.

– The right to legal representation.

– The right for parents to receive state support in child-rearing.

Professionals need to be well-versed in a child's entitlements under Article 12 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the EU Directive (where applicable), and domestic legislation related to human trafficking and child protection. Advocacy for children, especially in situations where their rights and entitlements are not being met, is crucial. Resources such as Migration Scotland offer valuable information and support for tackling human trafficking within Scotland, providing a comprehensive view of policies, legislation, and resources dedicated to combating this issue and protecting affected children.

Incorporating a child-rights perspective into the policy and legislative framework would ensure that the response to children who are criminally exploited is not only robust and multifaceted but also deeply respectful of the individual rights and dignities of the children involved. This approach necessitates continuous education and advocacy to ensure all professionals involved in the care and protection of exploited children are equipped to navigate the complexities of rights-based, child-centred service delivery.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[13]

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[13] is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery.

Designated first responders can make referrals via an online process to the NRM to make sure victims receive the right support. NRM referral should always be considered if there are concerns that a child is being criminally or sexually exploited. Consent of potential victims for referral is not necessary for children but it is required for adults.

Two decisions will be made by the single competent authority responsible – a reasonable grounds decision that will be offered after five days, followed by a conclusive grounds decision after a period of further assessment. Support will be offered for a period of 90 days or longer if a conclusive grounds decision has not yet been made. However, where children are referred to the NRM it would be assumed there would be statutory support from social work, as any child perceived to be the victim of exploitation should be subject to child protection processes.

Support in Scotland is offered by the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA)[14] or Migrant Helpline[15] where appropriate, alongside statutory support through child protection measures. Support from specialist services should also be considered for any child identified as the victim of criminal exploitation to supplement any statutory support offered.

While there are well-documented challenges with the NRM, it is currently the only consistent measurement of the scale and extent of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK. Challenges include delays around decision making timescales, range of first responders being narrow as well as excluding key agencies who directly support victims being able to make referrals.

There is a well-recognised inconsistency across the UK of referrals made, which can be attributed in part to different thresholds and perceptions of what constitutes the criminal exploitation of children and gathering the relevant evidence. The NRM therefore should not be relied on as an accurate measure of exploitation, nor should it be used to support the defence of exploitation in criminal proceedings. While it should be raised within legal proceedings to indicate where exploitation has been identified, it should not be relied on as a sole measure of evidence.

3.2 Legislation

Scotland's primary legislation in relation to trafficking and exploitation is the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015.[16]

The act aims to address criminal offences, sentencing and victim support relating to human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour within Scotland. This includes the criminal exploitation of children.

Under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015[16], the offence of trafficking involves someone taking a relevant action towards another person being exploited.

Relevant action relates to any of the following circumstances:

a) The recruitment of another person.

b) The transportation or transfer of another person.

c) The harbouring or receiving of another person.

d) The exchange or transfer of control over another person.

e) The arrangement or facilitation of any of the actions mentioned in a) to d).

It should be noted that children can't consent to any part of the relevant action.

When considering the offence of human trafficking, the person executing the 'relevant action' must do so with the intention of exploitation.

There are four types of exploitation relevant under the offence of human trafficking:

1) Slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour.

2) Prostitution or sexual exploitation.

3) Removal of organs.

4) Securing services and benefits.

While any or all of these types can be relevant to criminal exploitation, securing services and benefits or forced or compulsory labour may be most commonly associated with children who are criminally exploited.

3.3 Assessing risk and safeguarding

The following practice principles offers guidance to agencies on developing appropriate responses to children identified as at risk of, or being exploited through serious organised crime/into criminal activity.

While it's valuable to identify vulnerabilities and indicators related to exploitation to support early identification, it's essential to recognise that such lists are never exhaustive and further assessment and analysis is often needed across agencies. Sharing of information to support assessment and analysis is critical, with agreed information sharing processes prioritised within local partnerships.

The information below offers prompts to consider when formulating assessments.

The first point of contact where vulnerabilities or indicators of exploitation are present should prompt further investigation. It's essential to consider underlying and wider contextual factors that may impact on the child's presenting behaviours. Exploitation involves two or more people – the child and exploiter(s). Assessment should not only focus on the child but on the role of the perpetrator.

Understanding the underlying rationale or motives behind these relationships serves as a crucial starting point for practitioners.

Here are some core questions to consider:

1. Are there any known vulnerabilities that could increase likelihood to exploitation?
2. Why and how has this relationship between the child and the exploiter been established?
3. What unmet needs does the child have that could be driving these behavioural changes in their day-to-day activities?
4. What perceived benefits are associated with their involvement in this situation?
5. How does the child view their own participationin thisrelationship/activity?
6. Does the child view themselves as exploited?

Informed by the Promise, responses must be trauma-informed, relational and grounded in the principle that care-experienced children have a right to consistent, loving relationships. That exploited children must be understood and treated as victims with the care they receive upholding their rights and dignity.

At this stage, it's strongly advised that practitioners delve beyond the visible vulnerabilities and consider additional factors like:

- Identifying the specific unmet needs that are being fulfilled and how these can be addressed in alternative, safer, more protective ways.
- Exploring the nature of the relationship with the exploiter (if known). If this information is lacking, it should be part of the ongoing assessment.
- Assessing whether there have been recent changes to their day-to-day routine. Are they using online platforms or mobile phones more frequently? Change of peer group? Daily structure? Do we understand the daily routines, relationships and behaviours?
- Evaluating any shifts in self-esteem – both positive and negative –such as changes in their sense of status, belonging, acceptance, or efficacy.
- Considering any financial changes in their circumstances.
- What information do we not know about the child and the potential exploitation they are experiencing? How can we get to know?

Ongoing assessment and analysis gives us opportunity to identify areas of vulnerability that can be addressed through prevention and early intervention approaches, as well as responding to harms that may be live and present in a child's life through child protection processes.

Reflection

Children may tell us it's 'their choice' to be involved in criminal activity, and are not being exploited. While they may feel they're exercising choice, the grooming process is such that they will not recognise their own exploitation. Therefore, it's the role of professionals to firstly recognise this as a characteristic of criminal exploitation, and secondly respond to criminal exploitation of children through the child's lens. Children will not present as stereotypical 'victims' however this should not deter agencies from recognising warning indicators that may suggest exploitation and taking effective action.

This narrative is further supported in the Lord Advocates Instructions which sit within the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015[16] that states children can't consent to their own exploitation.

3.4 Practice reflections for agencies responding to child criminal exploitation

Responding to children who are criminally exploited can present a variety of complex dilemmas for agencies. Namely, how to coordinate and respond to children who are engaged in illegal activity as a result of exploitation alongside their primary need for protection.

The following reflections should serve as a reminder to agencies, both individually and collectively, to consider and plan their responses to these situations.

Children will cause harm and be harmed simultaneously.

In cases of child exploitation, children may find themselves caught in situations where they both inflict harm on others and suffer harm themselves. Striking the right balance in responding to these children is a challenging ethical dilemma. Approaches should consider the wellbeing of both the exploited child and the individual harmed. Making sure proportionate responses are taken that align with the public interest and prioritise welfare. Good communication between partners makes sure there's common understanding of what constitutes the criminal exploitation of children and agreed thresholds for responding to children as children first despite being in conflict with the law.

Rational choice and survival decisions.

Children and parents often face constrained choices as result of exploitation, including decisions made for survival, like paying drug debts, avoiding criminalising themselves/family members, getting rid of drugs or weapons leading to increased drug debts and managing financial difficulties. Reflecting on the significant turmoil these choices can have on families should be considered in assessments. Considering the impact of these decisions helps in understanding the context of children's actions without assigning blame, fostering a supportive risk management response.

> ***I don't want drugs in my house, and I don't want them dealing drugs. If I get rid of them or flush them down the toilet then they are in debt. But I can't sit back knowing they are going out selling for these people and what might happen.***
>
> **Parent**

Professional curiosity and judgment

The role of professional curiosity and judgment is paramount in identifying victims of exploitation. Due to its hidden nature, it's often not obvious on initial engagement that a child is being exploited. This, alongside traditional presentation of children who don't identify themselves as exploited, can lead to misdirected assessment that children are 'choosing' to be involved in criminal activity, and opportunities to protect from exploitation being missed. A proactive, inquisitive stance, combined with informed judgment, helps professionals to uncover and respond to signs of exploitation effectively. Ongoing training and awareness to sharpen skills in identifying exploitation alongside challenge of traditional stereotypes of 'victims' should be a priority for early identification.

> ***I highlighted to him that he was being exploited and he just laughed in my face and told me 'I'm no dafty, I'm not being exploited by anyone. I know what I'm doing, don't worry.'***
>
> **Practitioner**

The impact of language

The language used in communicating and documenting children's experiences plays a critical role in how they are perceived and supported. It's crucial to use language that respects a child's dignity and avoids stereotypes or criminalisation, which can damage trust, discourage openness, and hinder the engagement with agencies who are there to offer support. The Children's Society has developed a helpful guide on **appropriate terminology** when discussing children who have been exploited, or are at risk of exploitation. Child Exploitation Appropriate Language Guide 2022.pdf (childrenssociety.org.uk).[17]

Agencies should avoid using language like 'offender' or 'perpetrator', recognising children as victims in conflict with the law as a result of their exploitation. In addition, children should not be referred to as 'involved in serious organised crime' which suggests an element of choice around their involvement.

Children are criminally exploited into serious organised crime, or harmed by serious organised crime through exploitation. Lastly, children do not **'choose'** to be exploited despite how they may present. Children may communicate they know what they're doing or are choosing to be involved, however experienced responses to this would determine that this perception is the experience of the child and not reflective of the reality.

Challenging bias and stereotyping

Professionals must be vigilant of, and challenge internal biases and stereotypes – including the adultification of child victims, which can obstruct the accurate identification and appropriate support of those exploited. Understanding personal or agency biases is a step toward more equitable and effective responses to criminally exploited children.

Children who have been groomed into exploitation will be encouraged by the person/people exploiting them not to cooperate with authorities, or disclose information about their exploitation. This should not deter or alter agencies' responses in evidencing exploitation, but should deter them from over criminalising children. This includes placing criminal measures or statutory orders on children as a means of securing involvement or subsequently removing orders that have been placed on a child to protect if it's felt children are not cooperating with these effectively. **Children do not need to consent to, or disclose their exploitation for protections to be offered.**

Evolving nature of exploitation

Recognising that the nature of exploitation and trafficking is not static but evolving is vital for adapting strategies and interventions to effectively combat the criminal exploitation of children. Children can be exploited to commit crime, whilst also committing crime not linked to exploitation. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't respond through a welfare-first approach, or change tack in not seeing children as victims.

Diversion from exploitation comes from building resilience to exploitation, not through criminalisation and punitive approaches. This understanding encourages a dynamic response that can keep pace with changing tactics of exploiters.

Disruption strategies

Understanding and implementing methods of disruption are essential for mitigating the risk of re-exploitation. The role of perpetrators should be considered in all assessments of child criminal exploitation. Exploiters should also be responded to in a way that holds them accountable for the abuse of children. Exploiters will use children to deliver low level, high risk activity to avoid their own detection. They're constantly seeking new ways to adapt and evolve their business, so effective information and intelligence sharing between agencies is key in keeping pace with the ever-changing nature of criminal exploitation and serious organised crime.

Supporting children through complex systems

Supporting children to understand complex legal systems is crucial for promoting their understanding and subsequent engagement with agencies. Children often report their confusion of being involved in two systems – one that seeks to safeguard and protect them, and another that criminalises and punishes them. Providing clear explanations and guidance through these processes can really help them feel more secure, and therefore willing to participate in protection and legal proceedings. Children should also be offered suitable legal representation, and information should be shared with legal representatives to make sure their exploitation is well understood in contextualising their offending.

Children coming to the attention of police for offences linked to serious organised crime should be considered for child protection procedures, given the role of adult facilitation. Contextual safeguarding approaches such as ROTH can support agencies in bridging the gap between protecting children and understanding how exploiters are exploiting them. Mapping relationships, events, safe spaces and places for children can expose where risks and exploitation may happen. Exploring alternative routes and strategies ensures a comprehensive approach to safeguarding children from further harm.

> ***I just thought selling drugs was a way to make money. After I done the focused work, I now realise that I was being used by older people who didn't care about me.***
>
> **Young person**

3.5 Information sharing – a barrier to protection?

Effective information sharing between agencies is a cornerstone of the multi-agency response to the criminal exploitation of children. However, the nuances of what information should be shared, and how, can often create conflict between agencies.

Sharing information that could improve safeguarding responses is critical to making sure the rights of the child are not infringed upon. Research[18] highlights the dilemma faced by social care professionals regarding the extent of information shared between themselves and law enforcement.

Given the role of policing in disrupting organised criminality, whilst also protecting the public, there can be difficulties in balancing potential rights infringements with protecting on-going criminal investigations. This dilemma raises important considerations about balancing the need for shared understanding and responses to the criminal exploitation of children in a way that respects and promotes their rights.

The same study discusses the challenges with information shared by social work to police that is often then categorised as 'police intelligence' and valued primarily for its relevance to criminal activities. This perception can inadvertently undermine the social care perspective, and further criminalise children who are not brought to the attention of social work at the earliest opportunity. This emphasises the need for clear guidelines and mutual respect between agencies to make sure the welfare and rights of the child remain paramount.

Agencies should establish their legal basis for sharing information, with relevant information sharing agreements developed as required.

Developing partnership responses to criminally exploited children

Assessment and analysis priorities	Considerations for implementation	Complete: Y/N/In progress
1. Understanding of available policy and legislation to support children who are criminally exploited.	Exploitation of children cuts across various policy areas, complex area of practice. Legal framework can be challenging to navigate. Bringing context to assessments that considers extrafamilial harm and its impact.	
2. Understanding that children who are criminally exploited will commit crime as a result of their exploitation and so require child protection responses, not punitive approaches to criminalise.	Bringing context to assessments that considers extrafamilial harm and its impact.	
3. Information sharing protocols should be well-established across the partnership.	Ensure effective information sharing to inform assessments.	

4. Intervention

4.1 Practice principles

The following principles, as underpinned by GIRFEC[4] and the Promise, offer support to agencies in considering their interactions and responses to children and families impacted by Serious Organised Crime and criminal exploitation.

A well-supported, relational workforce is vital in protecting exploited children. In line with The Promise, staff across all sectors must be nurtured, trained, and supported to "bring their whole selves to this work."

1. Establishing clear roles for agencies responding to criminal exploitation should service as a foundational step. Clarity of roles is crucial to ensure coordinated support that avoids duplication, upholds the rights of children and doesn't overwhelm families.

> ***I don't want loads of professionals and appointments. It doesn't help. I just want to work with someone I can trust.***
>
> **Young person**

2. Welfare-first approach: Putting children first. Making sure the welfare and rights of children are paramount in all actions and decisions.

3. Recognising and challenging inequalities: Actively addressing cultural bias, exclusion and discrimination to create a more equitable environment for tackling the criminal exploitation of children.

4. Hearing the voice of children. Valuing the experiences and insights of children and their parents/carers, meeting them where they are at, making sure they're integral to decision-making processes.

Young people won't share their struggles or the criminality they are involved in and will not admit to being exploited. Young people told us that 'social work and police are not to be trusted'. We (as practitioners) become just 'another professional'. We need to meet them where they are at and understand their point of view before helping them to see things in a different way.

Lived experienced practitioner

5. Strengths and relationship-based practice: Focusing on the strengths of children and their families, and building meaningful, trusting, supportive relationships.

6. Trauma-informed practice: Recognising the impact of trauma and adopting approaches that minimise further harm and support recovery.

7. Curiosity and evidence-informed: Being open and inquisitive about exploitation, basing actions on a combination of direct evidence, informed knowledge, and professional judgment, seeking advice from others where needed.

Sometimes, helping parents is going on the journey with them. Holding the risks with them, working with them to understand the day to day activity of their child, and understanding how they are being exploited and thinking of ways to balance the risks whilst also supporting them to move away from exploitative relationships.

Practitioner

8. Seeing parents and carers as active partners in planning: Engaging parents and carers as partners to children's plans, recognising their crucial role in the child's support system.

9. Creating safer spaces: Making sure physical and emotional environments are secure and nurturing, promoting the wellbeing of children. This can be through physical spaces and, emotionally, through trusting relationships.

Ask us. Ask us where we feel safe and where we don't rather than assuming we are the ones that aren't safe. Sometimes we don't have a choice on where we go and what we do... we get told off for not going to school but can't say I'll get jumped if I'm seen out or I can't get across town to meet my social worker in case I'm spotted.

Young person

10. Role of trusted adults: Identifying positive, supportive relationships in a child's life to build trust that will support children experiencing exploitation to work with them in reducing risk and moving away from exploitative relationships.

11. Transitional safeguarding: Recognising the increased vulnerability and fluidity of needs as children transition into adulthood, through services, and other significant transition periods avoiding arbitrary age cut-offs or threshold requirements.

12. Safeguarding: Efforts should prioritise prevention and early identification. Identifying vulnerabilities and enhancing resilience can mitigate the risk of exploitation. Consideration should be given as to whether traditional safeguarding methods are sufficient in addressing the harms that may exist in extrafamilial contexts. Contextual safeguarding[10] approaches necessitates considering harm across various contexts and responding to these in a way that shares responsibility across agencies and away from children.

> ***The criminal exploitation of children is a safeguarding issue. Yes they commit crime but that's the point. They are exploited to do that.***
>
> **Practitioner**

13. Children hold rights: Children have the right to a safe and healthy childhood, and exploitation violates these rights. Upholding children's rights under the UNCRC and making sure they understand and can exercise their rights in different contexts is essential.

It is necessary for professionals to understand exploitation as a process involving grooming, coercion, threats and intimidation across various contexts. This underscores the challenges agencies face in protecting children and navigating the balance between engagement, protection and children's rights.

4.2 Roles and responsibilities

Agencies supporting children who are criminally exploited have critical roles and responsibilities in safeguarding.

The following progression considers the key responsibilities of agencies who may encounter a child at risk of, or being, exploited. While this is written as a staged process to ease understanding, it's worth considering that stages may not happen in a set order, but will always require ongoing assessment and review.

These stages will not often follow a set format as children may not flow through all stages in an ordered way. Due consideration should be given to meeting children where they are at in their exploitation journey. Where possible, agencies should work towards identifying children at the earliest opportunity to avoid later entry in stages three or four.

Stage one:
Identification and assessment to highlight children at risk of exploitation or being exploited.

Stage two:
Share concerns and information with relevant partners that can support mitigation of risk, including work to disrupt criminal networks, and increasing safe places and relationships.

Stage three:
Consider the impact of exploitation on the child and their family – immediate risk, requirement for child protection procedures.

Stage four:
Child protection procedures to be followed in parallel with any on-going criminal proceedings/outstanding offences. Agencies should collaborate to coordinate responses (ensuring a child-first response).

Stage five:
Consider threshold decisions – agreement between agencies on escalation processes, tolerance for managing risk between agencies. Additionally there should be consideration around ethical dilemmas that may present around prioritising welfare, need for protection and crime prevention.

Remember that this timeline emphasises a holistic, collaborative approach, considering the wellbeing of the child while addressing the complexities of the criminal exploitation of children.

Implementation priorities – intervention

Intervention priorities	Considerations for implementation	Complete: Y/N/In progress
1. Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.	Multi-agency meetings identified. Roles and responsibilities at each stage of the child's journey established and agreed.	
2. Suitable support agencies identified.	Clear referral pathways. Avoidance of duplication. Focus on team around the child/team around the worker.	
3. Escalation procedures established/agreed.	To monitor and address any potential barriers.	
4. Audit and review processes established/agreed.	Review processes agreed to share learning/improve responses to children who are criminally exploited.	

4.3 Example case studies

The following case studies illustrate the quick response needed due to the unpredictable nature of exploitation. It's important to illustrate that exploitation may not always be visible to agencies on first contact and is not likely to be supplemented with a disclosure from a child about their involvement. This should not deter agencies from initiating child protection responses.

Brian*

Brian was identified at stage one by Education as at risk of exploitation.

Vulnerabilities listed included reduced attendance at school, information gathered that he was associating with older peers involved in criminality and had recently been gifted a Canada Goose jacket by a 'friend'.

Concerns were shared at stage two and managed appropriately by partners and relevant support offered.

Kacey*

Kacey was identified at stage four after disclosing to her support worker that she was being asked by her boyfriend (older male) to hold a knife and drugs for him as she was less likely to get searched.

When she refused to do this he threatened her. An IRD was immediately called for Kacey and a Child Protection Planning Meeting (CPPM) held to consider appropriate safety measures. Kacey was referred to a specialist service for individual support and action taken against the perpetrator. The ongoing management of Kacey's plan was managed by an allocated social worker.

Ali*

Ali was identified at stage one following arrest for possession of drugs and a bladed weapon.

This was immediately escalated to stage four where an IRD was raised. Stages two and three then followed to make sure the appropriate information was fed into the IRD to aid decision making.

*We've changed the young people's names and made some small amendments to their stories to protect their identities.

5. Conclusion

Reframing the narrative around child protection in the context of child criminal exploitation calls for a holistic, agile, and welfare-first approach. By integrating various approaches and emphasising the multifaceted needs and rights of children, practitioners can develop more effective strategies for protecting children from exploitation and harm, making sure that child protection remains fit for purpose in addressing the complex challenges of children who are criminally exploited.

6. Tools for practitioners

6.1 Screening tool for the criminal exploitation of children

The criminal exploitation of children is a type of child abuse where children are manipulated or forced into criminal activities.

Identifying it can be difficult as signs might overlap with other forms of exploitation, mimic typical developmental behaviours, or not be readily visible. Practitioners must stay alert, recognising that various factors could indicate a child's risk of exploitation.

There is no definitive list of these factors, emphasising the need for practitioners to remain open and curious about a child's experiences and surroundings. This screening tool requires a structured professional judgment approach that leverages expertise to evaluate the evidence and relevance of these factors and their interactions to assess the risk or presence of exploitation.

Understanding that no child can consent to their exploitation, regardless of their involvement or the benefits they perceive, is crucial. Managing the criminal exploitation of children necessitates a child protection lens, recognising that involvement in criminal activities does not lessen their status as victims. The screening tool uses the term 'child' intentionally to emphasise that all individuals under 18 years old should be treated as children in need of protection, rather than as young adults making poor choices.

This tool helps practitioners identify potential cases of child criminal exploitation by considering the child's broader context, including their behaviour, family environment, peer relationships, educational background, neighbourhood, and online presence.

It's important to note that some behaviours might reflect other types of exploitation or normal adolescent development and not necessarily that this child is being criminally exploited. The tool is designed to supplement, not replace, existing local child protection protocols and assessments in effectively identifying, understanding, and responding to the criminal exploitation of children.

When using the screening tool, detailed information such as names, locations, and specific circumstances is essential to assess and address potential harm. This data is also critical for identifying exploiters and can be used in police disruption strategies. It is vital to use appropriate language that does not imply the child's complicity or responsibility for the exploitation.

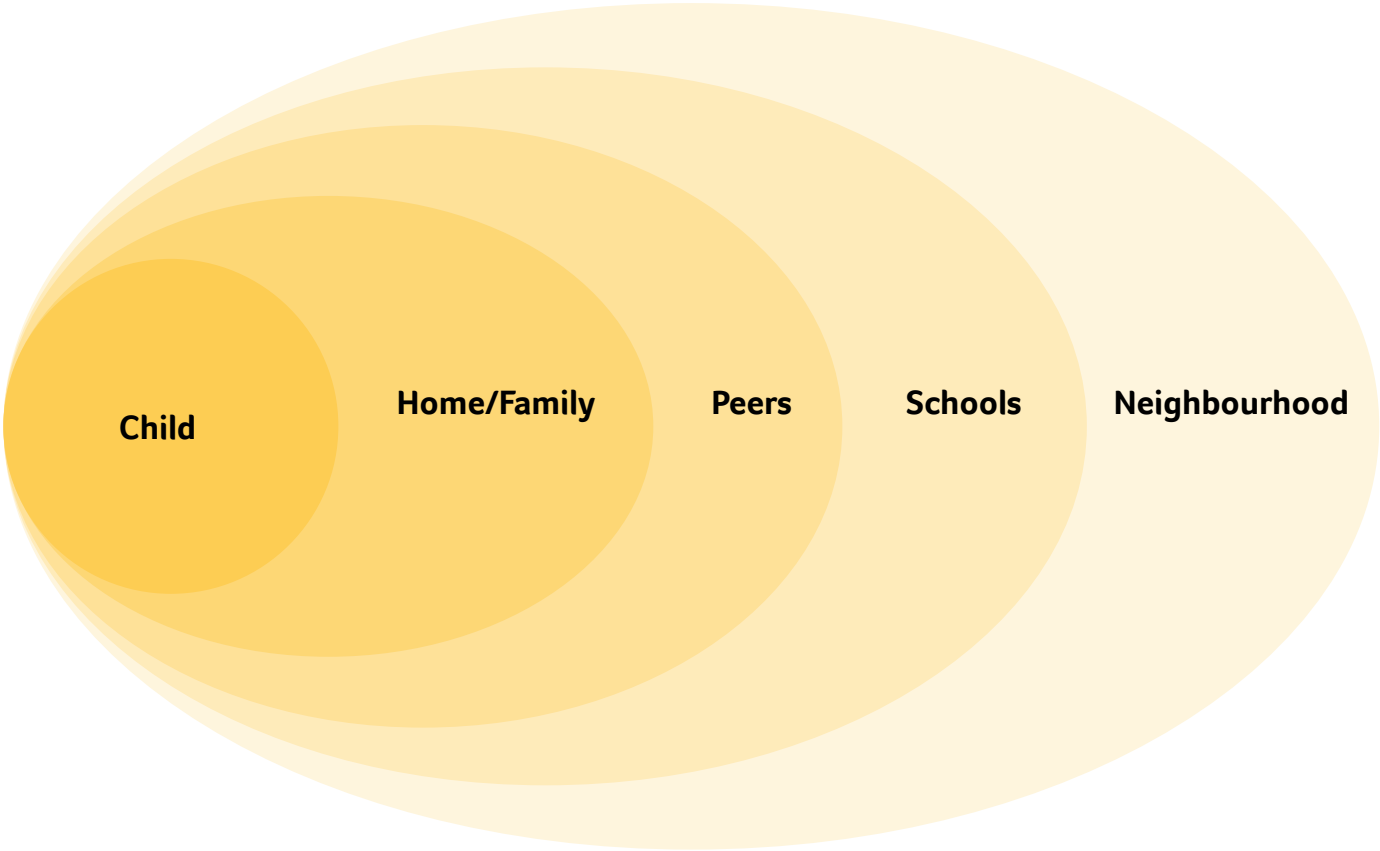
The screening tool aims to reflect an integrated approach, which combines the principles of contextual safeguarding (see image opposite) and the FRAME guidance. This approach emphasises understanding both the internal and external risks of harm to children, making sure interventions are holistic, developmentally appropriate, systemically informed, and trauma-aware. This means strategies are both proportional and appropriate, aiming to identify, mitigate and reduce risks whilst building capacity and strengths across the different environments a child may encounter.

Screening checklist

This checklist, while not exhaustive, aims to include a range of indicators – common behaviours, situations, and characteristics/traits often seen in cases of child criminal exploitation. Information gathered through completion of this screening tool should contribute to wider assessments such as START-AV and My World assessment to inform intervention and safety planning. Whilst applicable to individuals under the age of 18 years old, it can also be useful for those over 18 in certain contexts, providing a standardised method for evaluating the risk and severity of exploitation.

It's important to recognise not all indicators may be relevant for every child and to consider the interaction between indicators, which may escalate and/or compound risk of or impact of exploitation.

Contexts of adolescent safety and vulnerability (Firmin 2013:47)



Information for this figure is taken from Context of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability (Firmin 2013:47)[19]

As you work through the checklist, keep in mind:

– Anyone can be a victim of criminal exploitation, regardless of gender.

– Children may suffer from multiple forms of exploitation, including criminal and sexual.

– When exploited children harm others, a child protection approach is still needed, incorporating principles from FRAME and Contextual Safeguarding to ensure a rights-respecting, proportionate and appropriate response.

– Children might commit crimes not obviously linked to organised crime because they are exploited to do low-level tasks.

– The effects of exploitation might influence a child's behaviour and worldview, even if their offences don't seem related to exploitation. Understanding the underlying needs will guide appropriate interventions.

– Children can be forced or intimidated into committing crimes for rewards like money or drugs. Choosing to participate does not change their status as exploited victims.

– Times of change, such as moving schools or family disruptions, are high-risk periods for exploitation.

– Young people often do not see themselves as victims of abuse or exploitation.

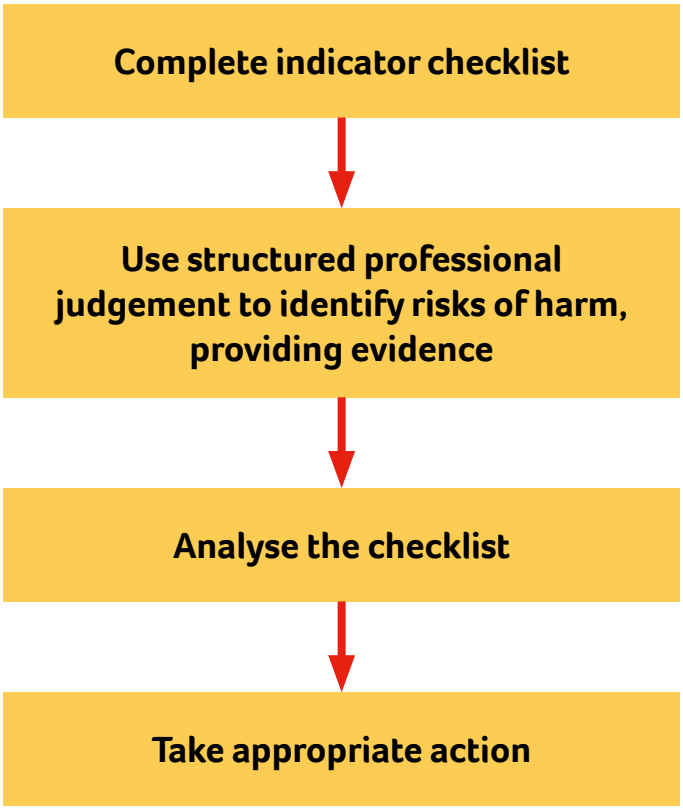
– Protecting children under 18 years old from exploitation is a critical responsibility, and protective measures should be activated if there is a risk of criminal exploitation.

– Not all signs of exploitation carry the same weight; they must be evaluated in the context of each child's situation. Sometimes, a single indicator may be enough to suggest a serious risk.

– Documenting the reasoning behind the identification of risk factors is crucial for understanding and tracking changes over time.

– Paying attention to new or unusual changes in behaviour is essential for spotting potential exploitation.

Process to follow:



Screening Tool – identifying child criminal exploitation

Worker completing tool		**Agency**	
Date of completion		**Contact details: number/email**	
Child's name		**Gender**	
Date of birth		**Address**	
Ethnicity			

Description and analysis of concerns

Indicators/ signs of criminal exploitation (continued)

Indicator	Yes/No	Comments / evidence (include timescales)
Period/periods of absence/missing (day and/or night), which may include being found out of area or in locations with no known connection to the child; or, where the absence is significant or out of ordinary for the child.		
Arrested/charged/convicted of possession with intent to supply drugs.		
Arrested away from own home area – particularly where arrested on public transport.		
Arrested/found at an address which appears to be 'cuckooed' or of concern.		
Arrested/found with or accompanied by older non-related people who may be believed to be involved in organised criminality.		
Arrested/found with a weapon particularly a knife; or in situations where weapons are identified. Any child found with a gun and/or ammunition should also raise significant concerns for potential of exploitation.		
Multiple mobiles/changing phones frequently and/or significant increase in phone calls/texts/messages from unknown numbers which they are unwilling to explain or try to hide, pass off (secretive behaviour). Feeling pressured to answer calls/texts immediately.		
Increased wealth/possession of significant quantities of money.		
Possession of material goods out with financial means. No known source of income.		
Recruitment of others to be exploited – exploited but may also have transitioned to act as an exploiter.		
Significant changes in behaviour – increased aggression/ violence/emotional outbursts.		

Indicators/ signs of criminal exploitation (continued)

Indicator	Yes/No	Comments / evidence (include timescales)
Unknown whereabouts or associations – secrecy about who they are with/areas they are going to.		
Multiple police reports for incidents in the same or similar location.		
Stealing to order – some offences may be more indicative of potential criminal exploitation like stealing cars, motorbikes, e-scooters etc; high value or high-volume theft/shoplifting, robbery, and fraud.		
Getting into trouble with the police – suddenly picking up numerous charges or high number of charges in short space of time.		
Expressing that they have a level of protection from their exploiters, due to risky involvement in criminality. They have a sense of status as a result in their associations.		
Use of new language and phrases e.g. sexual, gang, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know.		
Unexplained physical injuries. May be reluctant/unwilling to seek/receive medical treatment. Or to disclose any details of how injuries were sustained.		
Difficulty walking or sitting, as a result of 'plugging' or banking drugs internally.		
Signs of restraint, such as rope burns or handcuff marks.		
Physical injuries without reasonable explanation.		
Physical appearance suddenly changed.		
Significant changes in emotional wellbeing.		
Disclosure of sexual or physical assault, followed by withdrawal of the allegation.		
Signs of neglect.		

Indicators/ signs of criminal exploitation (continued)

Indicator	Yes/No	Comments / evidence (include timescales)
Close association with peers supportive of offending behaviour and/or may also be involved with organised criminality/or also criminally exploited.		
Pick up/drop off by unknown vehicles/drivers.		
Agencies unable to engage with child, and the child persistently avoiding all attempts by agencies to engage with them.		
Substance misuse issues – starting or increasing drug use or starting or increasing alcohol use.		
Known drug debts, with an inability to pay these off.		
Found with drugs inside rectum or vagina.		
Reports of being taken to parties, people's houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adults or other young people.		
Abduction or forced imprisonment.		
Child's family members or home being targeted. For example, family members assaulted (in same house as child/young person or perhaps in prison estate), home attacked/vandalised.		
Parental/carer concerns. Seems withdrawn/emotionally 'switched off' from family.		
Parent's withdrawal from engagement or retracting information.		
Financial difficulties – either individual or family.		
Recent family relationship breakdown/poor sense of belonging.		

Indicators/ signs of criminal exploitation (continued)

Indicator	Yes/No	Comments / evidence (include timescales)
Unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation/'sofa surfing'/ financially unsupported/migrant/refugee.		
Going through a period of change like moving area, starting new school, or disruption at home.		
Increase in fixed-term exclusions, especially for physical and verbal abuse.		
Excluded from education/no structure to day or loss of interest in school and significant decline in performance.		
Possession of hotel key cards/keys to unknown premises.		
Increased interest in making money.		
Avoiding certain areas, people or situations.		
Information that child/young person is visiting prison estate, particularly when never done so before and would have no reason to.		
Online presence or withdrawal from online, posts, connections online, getting into trouble online (e.g. sexual behaviour, threats to others, gaming profile, tech skills).		

Child specific considerations

	Yes/No	Comments / evidence (include timescales)
Sense of self: Is the child seeking a sense of belonging acceptance reputation		
Do they have high self-esteem – feel untouchable/protected/ safe – expressions of invincibility or not caring what happens to them?		
See themselves as exploited?		
Fearful of repercussions/reprisals – sense of hypervigilance?		
Fearful of being alone with certain individuals?		
Self-harm (self-injurious non suicidal intent)/suicidal intention?		
Do you need to consider needs related to neurodivergence?		
In the care of the local authority – placed out with the family (be specific).		
Mental health – diagnosis/assessment in process.		

Brief analysis of risk of child criminal exploitation and level of harm

Please be explicit in terms of whether the child is at immediate risk of or experiencing exploitation and the level of harm to the child in terms of from others and/or to others from aspects of the child's behaviour.

Actions identified

Be explicit about next steps and actions with specific reference to whether child protection process has been initiated, and if not, the reasoning.

Warning signs

Child criminal exploitation

Arrested for drug offences/offences related to serious organised crime.

Fear or mistrust of authority – conditioned not to talk.

Drugs held internally.

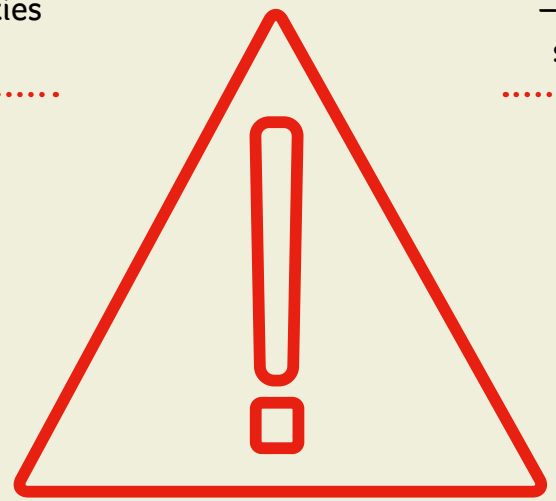
Misusing substances – source, personal use, drug debt.

Withdrawn, low self esteem, emotionally distressed.

Missing episodes.

Will not see themselves as exploited.

Non attendance/ behavioural difficulties with education.



Changes in presentation – increased sense of status/reputation.

Reluctance to engage with services/fearful of reprisals.

Unexplained materials goods/cash/multiple mobiles phones or sim cards.

Associating with other victims of exploitation or serious organised crime.

Use of language relating to serious organised crime/dealing/ glamorisation of that lifestyle.

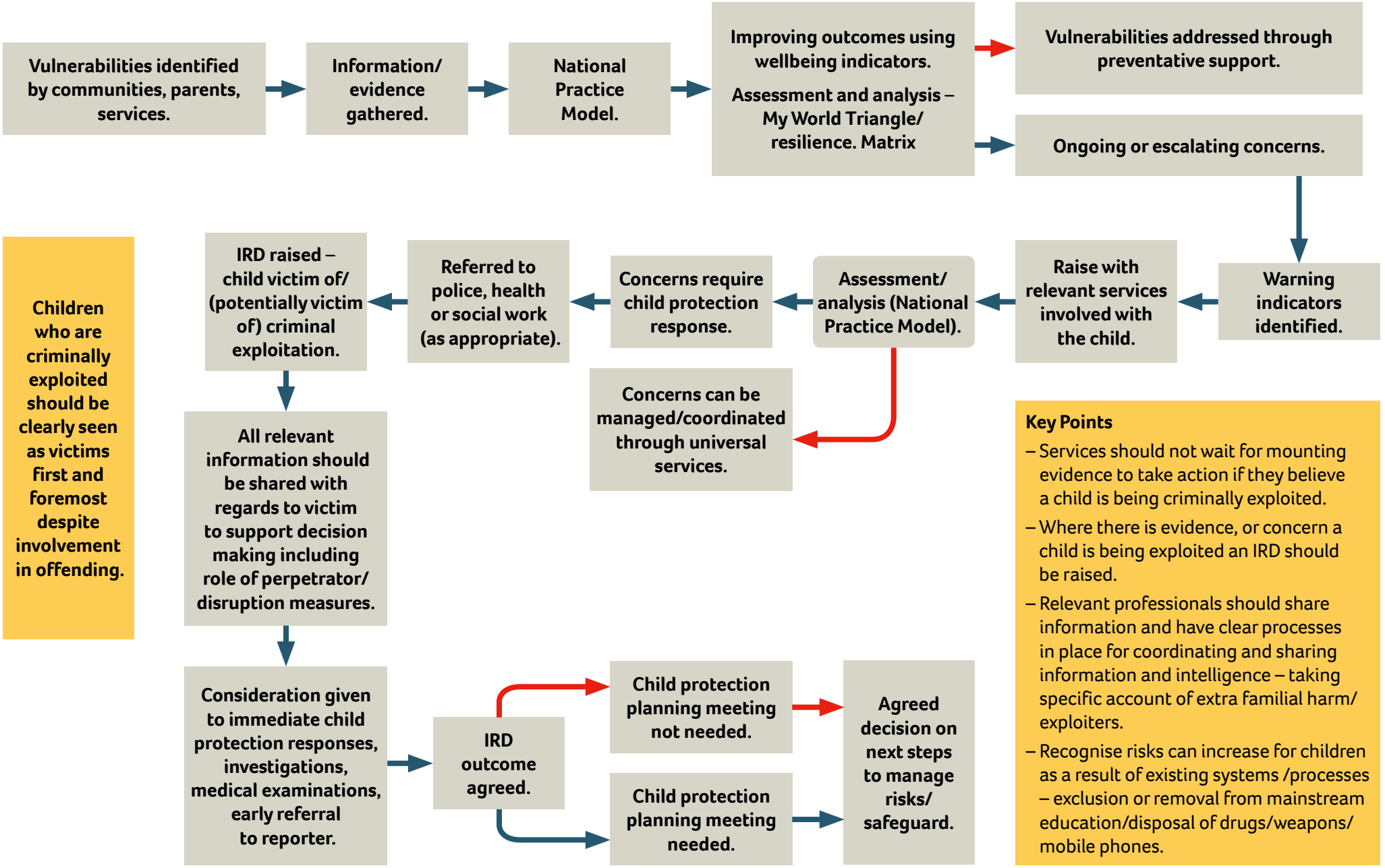
Disclosure of sexual/ physical assault followed by withdrawal of disclosure.

Weapon carrying/ involved in serious violence.

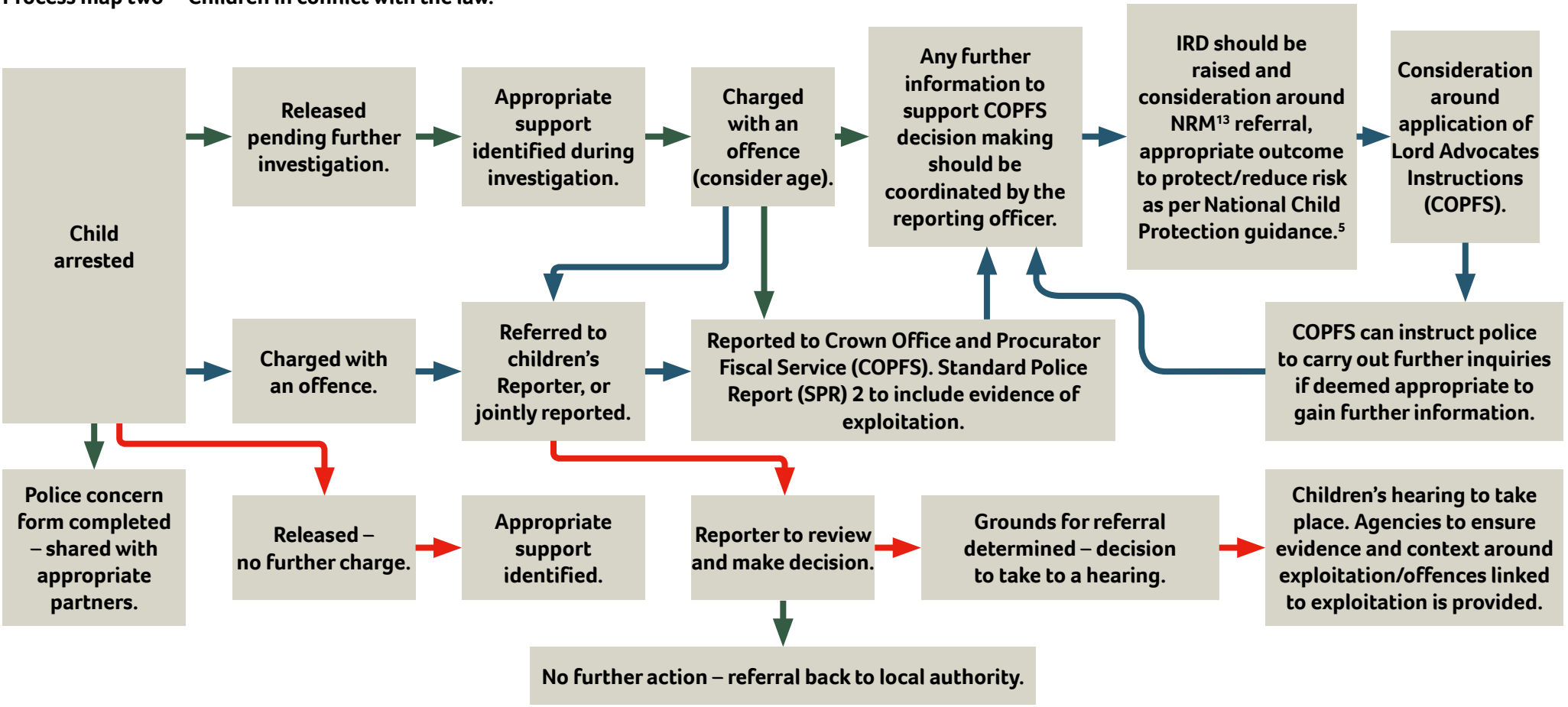
Secretive or avoidant about whereabouts/ actions.

Attending A&E with injuries that could be related to involvement in serious organised crime.

Process map one – Identifying and responding to children at risk of, or being criminally exploited – vulnerabilities.



Process map two – Children in conflict with the law.



Children in conflict with the law should have access to appropriate legal representation that protects and strengthens their rights.

6.2 Multi agency self-assessment – responding to children who are criminally exploited

This multi-agency tool aims to support partnerships consider the effectiveness of responses to children who are at risk of, or being, criminally exploited.

The self-assessment tool can also be used by individual agencies to consider their own responses to risk of harm to children experiencing extra familial harm, and/or the criminal exploitation of children.

The tool focuses on the following areas:

Service response/collaboration.

Do responses effectively address the needs of children experiencing extra familial harm/criminal exploitation?
Do agencies have the right tools they need?

Information sharing.

Evidence of effective information sharing between partners that supports early identification, assessment and response?

Risk management/safeguarding.

Evidence that partners are working collectively to understand and address risk of harm to, and by children as a result of extra familial harm/exploitation.
Are safeguarding responses robust and responsive to the needs of children experiencing extra familial harm/ exploitation?

Recording.

Do agency records include all relevant information and use appropriate language about decision making and tools used in assessment of risk for future reference?

Partners should identify the correct forum to consider completion of the self-assessment, making sure there is relevant evidence provided for each area.

Action plans or exploitation strategies are ways of ensuring responses to risk outside of the home/criminal exploitation are progressed and address local needs and priorities.

Service response/collaboration

		Some evidence	Good evidence	No/minimal evidence (indicate which)
1.1	Is there a shared understanding across the partnership/your organisation of what the criminal exploitation of children is? (Include what definition your organisation works to).			
1.2	Does the partnership/your organisation recognise the signs and vulnerabilities of the criminal exploitation of children?			
1.3	How well does the partnership/your organisation respond to concerns of the criminal exploitation of children?			
1.4	Are there appropriate escalation procedures If concerns are not progressed by relevant agencies?			
1.5	Does the partnership/ your organisation have suitable training and awareness raising to support early identification and intervention with children who are criminally exploited?			
1.6	Does the partnership/your organisation feel confident in how to respond to a child that has been criminally exploited?			
1.7	Are there suitable support services to support children who are at risk of, or being, criminally exploited in your area?			
1.8	Is there evidence of multi-agency collaboration to identify ways to respond to extra familial harm within the partnership?			
1.8	Is there evidence that children and families voices are heard in decision making, service design and are active partners within their plans?			

Information sharing

		Some evidence	Good evidence	No/minimal evidence (indicate which)
2.1	Are there clear information sharing protocols within the partnership that work well to support children who are at risk of exploitation/at risk of extra familial harm?			
2.2	Does your agency feel able to share information with other agencies confidently as a means of working together to safeguard children.			
2.3	Is there evidence children, families and partners are clear about how exploitation/risk outside of the home will be managed; what needs to happen and by whom?			
2.4	Is there evidence within the partnership/your organisation that information around the criminal exploitation of children/ extra familial harm has been shared in a timely way, and at the earliest opportunity?			

Assessment of risk/child protection

		Some evidence	Good evidence	No/minimal evidence (indicate which)
3.1	Are there clear child protection processes in place within your agency/the partnership to address extra familial harm/criminal exploitation of children?			
3.2	Is there evidence within the partnership/your organisation that children are treated as children who are victims first and foremost – avoiding the unnecessary criminalisation of children?			
3.3	Have all relevant influences been considered when assessing risk of harm to the child? For example, perpetrators, influence of others and ways to address these risks?			
3.4	Does your organisation/the partnership have an agreed approach to the ongoing management of risk to children? This should include individual responses to children as well as responses to groups of children/extra familial spaces.			

Recording

		Some evidence	Good evidence	No/minimal evidence (indicate which)
4.1	Is there evidence within the partnership/your organisation of how many children are at risk or, or being, criminally exploited (through flag system, marker etc)? Or Experiencing other forms of extra familial harm?			
4.2	Is there suitable evidence of recording within your organisation that captures concerns around criminal exploitation? Or Risk outside of the home?			
4.3	Is there clear understanding within the partnership of how to share information that can be collated and recorded in instances where multi-agency recording is needed?			
4.4	Does your agency record include clear flags/markers for risk of criminal exploitation?			
4.5	Is the voice of children and families accurately recorded by your organisation/the partnership?			
4.5	How does your organisation/the partnership use the voice of children and families?			

References – Framework

1 Scotland's Serious Organised Crime Strategy - Serious Organised Crime Strategy (www.gov.scot)

2 Understanding Child Criminal Exploitation in Scotland: A Scoping Review 2023Understanding-Child-Criminal-Exploitation-in-Scotland.pdf (cycj.org.uk)

3 Practitioner Guidance on Criminal Exploitation - Practitioner Guidance on Criminal Exploitation (www.gov.scot)

4 Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

5 National Child Protection Guidance for Scotland - national-guidance-child-protection-scotland-2021-updated-2023.pdf (www.gov.scot)

6 Serious Violence Strategy (2018) Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

7 Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children – 'Shattered Lives, Stolen Futures' – Home Office – Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

8 CSE definition 2016 8

9 Framework for Risk Assessment Management and Evaluation (FRAME) for Local Authorities and partners for Children and Young People under 18 - Framework for Risk Assessment Management and Evaluation (FRAME) for Local Authorities and partners (www.gov.scot)

10 Contextual Safeguarding – Contextual Safeguarding Research Durham University

11 Risk Outside of the Home Child Protection Pathways: Learning from Phase 2 Pilots - Risk Outside of the Home Child Protection Pathways: Learning from Phase 2 Pilots (contextualsafeguarding.org.uk)

12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNCRC - Layout 1 (unicef.org.uk)

13 National Referral Mechanism – National referral mechanism guidance: adult (Northern Ireland and Scotland) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

14 TARA – Tara Scotland

15 Migrant helpline (migranthelpuk.org)

16 Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 – Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 (legislation.gov.uk)

17 The Children's Society – Appropriate Language in Relation to Child Exploitation - Child Exploitation Appropriate Language Guide 2022.pdf (childrenssociety.org.uk)

18 Dorien Van Haute, Griet Roets, Michel Vandenbroeck, Complexities in the Exchange of Private Information in Inter-Organisational Networks: The Challenge of Justification, The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 50, Issue 3, April 2020, Pages 797–813, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz040

19 Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf (oscb.org.uk)

Notes

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