



# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

GUIDANCE FOR PRACTITIONERS

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**South Gloucestershire**  
Council

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# Introduction

This guidance is designed to assist practitioners who work in both statutory and non-statutory roles in South Gloucestershire in identifying and preventing child sexual exploitation (CSE), protecting children who are at risk of abuse or are abused through sexual exploitation, and disrupting and prosecuting those who perpetrate this form of abuse.

This guidance is relevant in the context of awareness raising and preventative education. The guidance is aimed at all Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) members and is relevant for all professionals working with children, young people and families.

This guidance document should be read in conjunction with [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), [Child Sexual Exploitation Definition](#) and a [Guide for Practitioners, Local Leaders and Decision Makers Working to Protect Children from Child Sexual Exploitation](#), the [South West Child Protection Procedures \(SWCPP\)](#) and [South Gloucestershire's threshold matrix - Journey of need: a child's journey of need including threshold matrix](#) .

**This document will be reviewed in November 2018.**

# Definition

The Department for Education (DfE) have produced an advice document for professionals entitled "[Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from sexual exploitation 2017](#)" (DfE, 2017). This advice replaces the 2009 guidance [Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation](#). This advice document should be read in conjunction with [Working together to safeguard children 2015: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children 2015](#), which continues to provide statutory guidance covering the legislative requirements on services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including in relation to child sexual exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation is defined as:

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. (DfE, 2017)

Further advice is offered in terms of understanding child sexual exploitation: It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which an exchange occurs when a child is sexually exploited. The receipt of something by a child does not make them any less of a victim (DfE, 2017). Children cannot consent to their own abuse. All children are entitled to protection and support. Safeguarding duties do not depend on a child's desire to be safeguarded (DfE, 2017).

This guidance applies to male and female children up to the age of 18 years irrespective of whether they are living independently, at home, with carers, or in a residential setting. All references in this guidance to children or young people mean those under the age of 18 as defined in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004.

Because of the vulnerabilities of care leavers and the need to address the issue of CSE holistically, this guidance also addresses our role, in liaison with other agencies, to tackle exploitation of care leavers up to the age of 25.

Disabled children are at significantly greater risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect than non-disabled children. All agencies need to share and build on existing knowledge and good practice and work together towards ensuring equal protection for disabled children. A review of case reviews from 2010 by the NSPCC highlighted concerns that capacity to consent is not always fully considered with disabled children as the chronological age rather than developmental age is focused on. (NSPCC)

# Key issues and principles

## Children are victims

Children and young people who are sexually exploited should not be regarded as displaying bad or criminal behaviour: they are the victims of sexual abuse. The responsibility for the sexual exploitation of children or young people lies with the abuser; either the person who engages in sexual activity with the child, or the person who grooms the child and/or organises the exploitation. The focus of police investigations and of prosecutions should be on those who coerce, exploit and abuse children and young people.

## A multi-agency response

Effective safeguarding depends on effective joint working between different agencies and professionals that work with children and young people, including education services, health services (including sexual health services), preventative services, therapeutic mental health services, and social care, together with criminal justice agencies and voluntary sector services supporting children and families. The commissioned specialist CSE service plays a key role in supporting young people who are being sexually exploited in South Gloucestershire.

All agencies should be alert to the risks of sexual exploitation and be able to take action and work together when an issue is identified.

Within that framework, tackling sexual exploitation requires a three-pronged approach: **prevention, protection** and **prosecution**.

## A proactive response

Action to tackle CSE should be proactive, focusing on prevention, early identification, intervention and protection, as well as on disrupting activity and prosecuting perpetrators. It is important for cases to be managed so that interventions to safeguard children and young people also support the gathering of evidence to increase the chance of successful criminal prosecutions of their perpetrators, thereby safeguarding potential future victims. It is important that information held by professionals concerning young people at risk of CSE, possible perpetrators / venues where CSE may occur is proactively shared with police under child protection information sharing arrangements.

## Early intervention

To help children and young people achieve good outcomes it is important to identify issues and problems early and to take prompt preventative action. Early intervention is likely to be far more effective than intervention at a later stage when the impact on the child or young person's health or development is likely to have escalated. Research by Coventry University (Brown et al, 2016) identified a number of potential vulnerability indicators of becoming a victim of CSE. These included: going missing, running away, family difficulties, association with gangs, first sexual contact at a young age, a poor relationship with parent, having fewer friends than peers, frequent

and particular use of social media and being isolated.

## A child centred approach

Children at risk of CSE will often be in high risk situations and could be isolated from protective, nurturing adults. They will need to be encouraged to express their wishes and feelings to make sense of their particular circumstances and contribute to decisions that affect them. Professionals need to support children to become an active partner in their recovery and reintegration (DfE, 2017). Of particular relevance is the impact of those who may have groomed, conditioned, coerced and abused them. Child sexual exploitation can impact on every aspect of a child's life, such as their:

- physical and mental health
- education and training
- family relationships
- friends and social relationships
- how they view others
- their relationships with their own children in the future

(Safe and Sound, 2013)

Children may also be under very strong pressure, intimidated, afraid and/or dependent (e.g. for love, affection, drugs) on those that have exploited them. Children may therefore reject offers of help and support and appropriate interventions need to be designed to address this. Professionals need to understand the impact of trauma on a child's presentation and behaviour and to look beyond the presenting behaviour(s) and exercise professional curiosity (DfE, 2017).

## Consent

Even where a child is old enough to legally consent to sexual activity, the law states that consent is only valid where they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or are fearful of what might happen if they don't comply (all of which are common features in cases of child sexual exploitation) consent cannot legally be given, whatever the age of the child (Child Sexual Exploitation. Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from sexual exploitation, 2017).

## Protecting 16 and 17 year olds

It should not be assumed that children aged 16 and 17 years are safe from CSE. A young person who has been subject to a complex pattern of life experiences including sophisticated grooming and priming processes that have brought them to a point where they are at risk of, or are abused, through CSE, are often not able to recognise the exploitative relationships and situations they are in. They may even present as being in control. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 relate to all children aged under 18 years.

## Information sharing

Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners 2015 provides guidance about sharing information. It states that in deciding whether there is a need to share information professionals need to consider their legal obligations, including whether they have a duty of confidentiality to the child. Where there is such a duty, the professional may lawfully share information if the child consents or if there is a public interest of sufficient force. This must be judged by the professional on the facts of each case. Where there is a clear risk of significant harm to a child, or serious harm to adults, the public interest test will almost certainly be satisfied. However, there will be other cases where practitioners will be justified in sharing some confidential information in order to make decisions on sharing further information or taking action – the information shared should be proportionate. The child's best interests must be the overriding consideration in making any such decision including in the cases of under-age sexual activity. Any decision whether or not to share information must be properly documented.

Staff should be aware that when a young person discloses sexual exploitation to them, they will need to take action, and this may include sharing information with the police and local authority children's social care. This should be explained to the young person.

In view of this, staff should be aware of the need not to ask leading questions to young people who make disclosures of exploitation. Questions should be open so this does not compromise the police investigation. Staff should also be mindful that their recording may need to be used in a subsequent criminal investigation. It is therefore strongly advised that staff keep any contemporaneous (i.e. handwritten) notes that have been made, these may be required in any subsequent court hearings.

## Involvement of parents/ carers

Parents and carers can feel excluded from work with children who are being, or who are at risk of being, sexually exploited by perpetrators external to the family. Where assessment shows it is safe to do so, parents and family should be regarded as part of the solution. It is crucial to work with them not only to assess the risks of harm faced by the child but to help them understand what the child has experienced, the risks they face and how they can be supported and protected. (Child Sexual Exploitation. Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from sexual exploitation, 2017). This working relationship can be difficult if the outcome of the S47 enquiries results in the need to convene an ICPC, particularly when the concerns relate to sexual exploitation and where there are not concerns about parental attempts to protect children– it is important that parents understand the reason for the ICPC and understand professional's concerns about where the risk to the child is coming from.

## A note about use of language

The way professionals talk about and to children and their families about sexual exploitation can have a profound impact on how children are viewed, understood and how they then view and understand themselves and the situations they are in. Using language like "choice" and "risk taking behaviour" is unhelpful, inaccurate and in no way focuses on the abusive nature of what is or could

be happening to children. Children and families need to be supported to understand issues around consent, grooming and the complexities children who are being sexually exploited can face. Children cannot consent to their own abuse. By using language that reflects the abusive, exploitative nature of situations that children encounter helps to develop a clearer understanding of sexual exploitation and firmly places the blame on the perpetrators of the abuse.



# Identifying, preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation – roles and responsibilities to all children

## South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board's role in preventing, identifying and responding to sexual exploitation and identifying young people at risk

South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (SGSCB) has a key strategic role to play in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in our area. SGSCB is responsible for coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of the work of its members. They should act in accordance with this guidance in carrying out their functions and should make arrangements to:

- actively enquire into the extent to which children are involved in CSE
- monitor and review local implementation of the CSE strategy and accompanying action plan
- provide appropriate [interdisciplinary training](#) to aid professionals who work with children and their carers and/or with adults who abuse children through CSE and to help them recognise the signs and symptoms of CSE

## Schools role in identifying, preventing and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation

Through their PHSE programmes schools will promote models of healthy and consensual sexual relationships. Empowering young people to make positive choices in their relationships is fundamental to them making informed decisions that protect them from sexual exploitation. This work will be targeted, particularly in schools which deal with more vulnerable pupil groups, for example a Pupil Referral Unit.

Schools will encourage a culture whereby children can discuss concerns they have about themselves or their friends in relation to sexual exploitation.

Schools will be aware of the risks associated with pupils with poor attendance records and will follow the available guidance on managing attendance, determined by the assessed level of risk.

Schools should be vigilant in being aware of any activities by adults towards pupils which cause concern. If schools have any concerns they must discuss this with ART.

## Health professionals role in identifying, preventing and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation

Health professionals have a key role to play. School nurses, CAMHS staff, sexual health services, pharmacists and other health staff will be mindful of the circumstances/concerning behaviours, linked with child sexual exploitation. They will be aware of their duty to confidentiality and to share

information in order to protect children and young people. Whenever there is a concern about a young person and it is not clear if there is a duty to share information, they should contact their designated lead for safeguarding to discuss the appropriate action.

### The commissioned specialist cse service's role in preventing, identifying and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation

The commissioned service will prioritise direct support to victims who are currently believed to be being sexually exploited or who are believed to be at high risk of sexual exploitation. (Completing a SERAF will help workers to identify whether a child is at risk of sexual exploitation). Referrers should contact the commissioned service in the first instance to discuss possible referrals meeting the above criteria before making a formal referral. Referrals can be made by any professional involved with a child.

The specialist commissioned service will work with other professionals providing advice, support and guidance which enables and empowers professionals to work to support victims where a referral to the commissioned service isn't applicable or appropriate.

The specialist commissioned service will work alongside the Local Authority to develop knowledge and information about cse in South Gloucestershire.

### Police role in identifying, preventing and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation

The police have a key coordinating role in achieving the disruption of activities carried out by sexually exploitative adults. The police use a wide range of legislation to achieve prosecution and disruption. See Appendix A for the range of orders, notices etc used by the police.

The police require close communication and co-operation from agencies to help protect individual young people and end the activities of perpetrators. The police rely heavily on partner organisations in the sharing of background information on victims, suspects and vulnerable young people so that informed decisions on joint action can be made.

It is a feature of the joint approach to dealing with safeguarding issues that staff other than police officers may at times find themselves in a position to secure and preserve vital evidence which could support a subsequent criminal prosecution. In such circumstances advice can be obtained from the police in respect of how to seize and preserve the integrity of such evidence. This is particularly important with sexual offences where it may be possible to secure forensic evidence from the victim or their clothing but also applies to any notes or diary entries made by a victim at the time the offences were committed. Additional supporting evidence from involved parties such as case records from professionals should also be considered.

### Preventative services role in identifying, preventing and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation

Any incident or situation in which a young person is assessed as being vulnerable to sexual exploitation but there is no evidence of exploitation taking place, should lead to the use of the

SAFeh process. The agency identifying the concerns should lead the SAFeh and involve partners in a Team Around the Child (TAC) approach where the young person or parents give consent. In such cases, a lead professional will be agreed and a plan of early intervention and prevention support will be developed. This will be based on the key principles outlined above. SAFeh support can be obtained from ART.

Preventative services will need to complete the SERAF at regular intervals to monitor the level of risk for the child.

It may be that it is necessary to refer to children's social care due to the need to intervene to safeguard the welfare of the child or young person. A SAFeh approach may not be suitable in all cases especially where the risks are high. Referring to the threshold matrix and a child's journey of need will help practitioners to consider the level of intervention appropriate.

# Social care role in identifying, preventing and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation in relation to a child not currently receiving a social work service

When a parent, professional, or another person contacts ART with concerns that a child is being sexually exploited, children's social care will complete a SERAF and decide on the course of action within 24 hours. (Unless a practitioner involved has recently completed a SERAF.) This will normally follow discussion with any referring professional or service, and involve other professionals and services as necessary, including the police as a criminal offence may have been committed against a child.

This initial consideration of the child's needs and circumstances should address, on the basis of the available evidence, whether there are concerns about impairment to the child's health and development (including actual and/or potential harm) which justifies further enquiries, assessment and/or intervention. If further action is needed, a decision is required on when enquiries and/or intervention should begin and how best to undertake them.

# Social care role in identifying, preventing and responding to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation in relation to a child currently receiving a social work service

When a parent, professional, or another person contacts the allocated social work team with concerns that a child is being sexually exploited, children's social care will complete a SERAF and decide on the course of action within 24 hours.

Agencies with statutory child protection powers must, at all stages, consider whether the child may be in need of urgent action to secure his/her safety because of the risk to the child's life or likelihood of serious harm.

The [South West Child Protection Procedures \(SWCPP\)](#) sets out the process which must be followed if there are concerns that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. One of the ways in which a child could suffer significant harm is through sexual exploitation.

Consideration needs to be given as to whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm. If this is the case a strategy discussion between the statutory agencies must take place to consider whether the criteria for initiating a Section 47 inquiry are met. Consideration should also be given to consulting and including the commissioned specialist service.

A separate strategy discussion should be convened to consider the safeguarding needs of the perpetrator if they are under the age of 18. (For further information see section - [When the perpetrator of CSE is under 18.](#))

Any assessment of a child who may be/ has been sexually exploited must involve obtaining relevant information from professionals and others in contact with the child and family. It should include professionals who have expertise in working with children and young people involved in sexual exploitation.

The single assessment needs to ascertain:

- is this a child in need? ( S17 of the Children Act 1989)
- is there reasonable cause to suspect that this child is suffering, or is likely to likely to suffer significant harm? (S 47 of the Children Act 1989)
- If there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm at the end of section 47 enquiries the [South West Child Protection Procedures](#) must be adhered to. An ICPC must be convened in these circumstances including when the child is a looked after child.

Social workers should be particularly aware when undertaking single assessments of

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) of the risk of sexual exploitation and child trafficking.

# Trafficked children

Social workers should be particularly aware when undertaking single assessments of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) of the risk of sexual exploitation and child trafficking.

All practitioners who come into contact with children and young people in their everyday work need to be able to recognise children who have been trafficked and be competent to act to support and protect these children from harm.

# Missing children

It is important to recognise that children who go missing may be at risk of sexual exploitation. A high proportion of children nationally and in South Gloucestershire who are at risk of sexual exploitation have had at least one missing episode. Professionals need to have this in mind when thinking about and talking to children who have been missing from home, school or care. In South Gloucestershire every child who goes missing is offered an independent Return Home Interview (RHI). The professional completing the RHI will talk sensitively to the child and try to develop an understanding of the reasons behind the child's missing episode. This will include an exploration of the push and pull factors. Attention should be paid as to whether there are other indicators that the child is at risk of sexual exploitation. If there are, either the independent RHI worker or the allocated social worker should complete a SERAF, if not already done so. If a child at risk of sexual exploitation also goes missing a Missing Management Meeting is likely to be required to make a clear plan around potential future missing episodes and to ensure appropriate information regarding vulnerabilities, information about possible whereabouts, contact details etc appear on the police database. If there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm a strategy discussion must be convened.

Refer to the SGSCB protocol for missing children for further information at [sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/children](https://sites.southglos.gov.uk/safeguarding/children)



# Peer on peer abuse

Peer-on-peer abuse is captured in four key definitions (Firmin, 2013)

1. The definition for domestic abuse (Home Office 2013) relates to young people aged 16 and 17 who experience physical, emotional, sexual and/or financial abuse, and coercive control, in their intimate relationships. In reality children of a much younger age have had these experiences in their intimate relationships.
2. The definition for child sexual exploitation (DfE, 2017) captures young people aged under 18 who are sexually abused in the context of exploitative relationships, contexts and situations by a person of any age - including another young person.
3. The definition for young people who display harmful sexual behaviour refers to any young person, under the age of 18, who demonstrates behaviour outside of their normative parameters of development (this includes, but is not exclusive to abusive behaviours).

Serious youth violence is defined with reference to offences (as opposed to relationships/contexts) and captures all those of the most serious in nature. The term peer-on-peer abuse can refer to all of these definitions. Any response to peer on peer abuse needs to cut across these definitions and capture the complex web of young people's experiences. In situations whereby victims of child sexual exploitation appear to also be perpetrators or facilitating the sexual exploitation of other children a nuanced approach is needed that recognises and engages with the child's perpetration within the context of their own victimisation. It is important that children who perpetrate child sexual exploitation receive a different response to adult perpetrators. (DfE, 2017).

Our response to peer on peer abuse needs to include a holistic assessment of the needs of all of the young people involved; an assessment of the 'perpetrator' of the abuse will also be required if they are under the age of 18.

The assessment of risk, and subsequent interventions with young people, needs to recognise that individual experiences do not cause the abuse that they experience, but may be used by others who have power over them.

Further information/ research about peer on peer abuse can be found on the MsUnderstood partnership website. <http://www.msunderstood.org.uk/>

# Identifying, preventing and responding to individual children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation using the SERAF

## The Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF) - attached at Appendix B

The SERAF has been developed to support professionals' thinking around children who may be at risk of or currently being sexually exploited. The tool has been created to support, rather than replace professional's judgement. Professional curiosity and professional judgement are key to understanding a child's lived experience and to understand the nature and level of risks they are facing at any given time. Child sexual exploitation is a complex form of abuse and it can be difficult for those working with children to identify and assess. The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly and that appropriate support is given (DfE, 2017). The SERAF tool should initiate debate and discussion. It should support practitioners in considering the specific risks a child is facing, to support their thinking around whether a child is at risk of significant harm and whether the current plan addresses the child's needs and if not what areas need to be explored/ covered further.

## When to complete a SERAF

A SERAF should be completed when there is some thoughts/ concerns that a child may be at risk of or be subject to child sexual exploitation. It is not meant to be a screening tool that can be used to identify children at risk of child sexual exploitation with no prior concerns in this area.

- a SERAF should be carried out at regular intervals (at least every three months) to record any increase or reduction in risk and should inform appropriate intervention
- a SERAF should always be carried out following a change in circumstances. For example, a change in placement as this can have a significant impact on risk
- the lead professional is responsible for ensuring the SERAF is updated by the most relevant professional – usually the professional with the best working relationship with the child

## How to complete a SERAF

It is essential that all available information is recorded on the SERAF. The reasons why each vulnerability, moderate and significant risk factor has been ticked should be explained by the person completing the SERAF.

The SERAF should include the child's voice and understanding of their situation. Where there are differences of opinion between the professional completing the SERAF and the child this should be noted but professionals need to be clear about their views.

Views of other professionals and parents/ carers should be sought in order to complete the

SERAF.

## Vulnerabilities

This section of the SERAF includes factors that we know may render children and young people vulnerable to being targeted for child sexual exploitation. Each vulnerability is a scaling system with vulnerabilities recorded as 1.

## Moderate risk indicators

This section of the SERAF includes indicators that are associated with risk of, or that may indicate abuse through, sexual exploitation. These should be ticked if they are currently present or have been present during the past six months. Each moderate risk indicator should be recorded as 1.

## Significant risk indicators

These risk indicators are very prevalent in cases where children and young people are at risk of, or are being abused through, sexual exploitation. In order to monitor any change in risk over time as a result of intervention or a change in circumstances it is important to know whether the risk indicator is current (on date of referral or in past six months) or recent (between 6 and 12 months ago). If the risk indicator is current or has occurred in the past six months record as 5 (right hand column). Where the risk indicator was present between 6 and 12 months ago but has not been present in the past six months record as 1 (left hand column). If a significant risk factor has been present during the past six months and was present between 6 and 12 months ago both columns should be ticked and recorded as 6 in relation to that significant risk indicator.

Each significant risk indicator should only be ticked in relation to those for adults outside the family (unless it was a family member who was facilitating/coordinating the exploitation). For instance, emotional abuse by controlling adult - should not be ticked in relation to a parent - it is asking about any exploitative relationships the child/ young person is involved in outside of their family.

Cases involving children under the age of 13 who have one or more of the significant risk indicators present should score an additional 5 to be added to the total to reflect the additional vulnerability of their age.

Once the form is completed a total score can be worked out. This generates a category of risk:

- 0-5 = Category 1: (Not at risk)
- 6-10= Category 2: (Mild risk)
- 11-15= Category 3: (Moderate risk)
- 16 + = Category 4: (Significant risk)

## **Analysing the information within the SERAF and professional judgement**

It is not the numerical score at the end of the SERAF which is the most important but a careful analysis of the information contained within the SERAF. There are times when the "score" can be relatively low and yet a professional is very concerned for that child - this needs to be articulated within the SERAF, clearly explaining why the professional remains concerned. There may be other

vulnerabilities not listed on the SERAF which the professional considers important and this should be written about and discussed in the SERAF. Professional curiosity is what enables practitioners to gather the information needed to complete the SERAF and it is with professional judgment that the practitioner explains their views on whether a child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm in the form of sexual exploitation or in some other form. When completing a SERAF other vulnerabilities for a child may be highlighted and these will need consideration and follow up.

Attention should be paid as to whether the score mainly relates to vulnerabilities / moderate risk factors/ significant risk factors. Consideration should be given as to what this tells you about the child's current situation.

The SERAF is a very specific risk assessment tool which can be used to explore the risk of sexual exploitation. The numerical point scoring should only be used with professional judgement to assess the level of risk a child may be at from sexual exploitation. It is from the professional judgement that recommended actions and plans are made to reduce the risks. South Gloucestershire's threshold matrix, A Child's Journey of Need should also be used to consider the appropriate level of intervention/action. If a child is being sexually exploited this will require a Tier 4 response. Thresholds cannot be decided on the basis of the numerical score of a SERAF alone. Following a SERAF assessment professionals can match the child/young person's needs and vulnerability with the appropriate assessment and provision of support and services, based on the best outcomes for them. See [Threshold Matrix, A Child's Journey of Need](#) for further information.

## Responding to the SERAF

Providing an appropriate response requires a protective network for children and young people and effectiveness depends heavily on a multi-agency response.

If any of the significant risk indicators are identified but the child is categorised as 'not at risk' or as at 'mild risk' a discussion with the team manager and any other professionals or carers involved in the child's life should take place and a record should be made regarding whether there are reasonable grounds to suspect the child is suffering/ is likely to suffer significant harm. If the judgement is that there are reasonable cause to suspect significant harm a referral needs to be made immediately to ART/ allocated social work team so that a strategy discussion can be convened.

The suggested associated actions and suggested interventions regarding each category of risk are set out below. As outlined above it is not the numerical score that is the most significant part of the SERAF and the professional judgement within the SERAF should indicate the level of intervention/ response needed and what the plan will need to contain.

## SERAF categories of risk framework

SERAF Category of risk	Description	Associated actions and suggested interventions
Category 1 (Not at risk) (0-5)	A child or young person who may be 'in need' but who is not currently at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Educate to stay safe. <b>Consider discussion with school and accessing support via their PHSE.</b> Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 2 (Mild risk) (6-10)	A vulnerable child or young person who may be at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Work on risk awareness and staying safe should be undertaken with this child/young person. <b>Should a SAfeh be undertaken, would a referral to FYPS benefit the young person?</b> Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 3 (Moderate risk) (11-15)	A child or young person who may be targeted for opportunistic abuse through exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc.	<b>Refer to ART/ inform allocated social worker (if there is one). There should be a record on the child's file to consider whether there are reasonable grounds to suspect the child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm in the form of CSE or any other form of abuse or neglect. If so, a strategy discussion must follow. The PSW/ CSW team should be invited to all strategy discussions when there are concerns regarding CSE.</b> If child is known in relation to CSE concerns and this is a review SERAF consideration should be given to whether there is any new information that needs to be shared and if so a strategy discussion may be needed. If not it may be a good time to bring forward a multi-agency meeting to discuss the child's needs e.g. core group, TAC meeting etc. Work should be undertaken with this child/young person around risk reduction and keeping safe. Alert PSW/CSW team and consider whether child/ young person should be included on South Gloucestershire CSE list.

SERAF Category of risk	Description	Associated actions and suggested interventions
Category 4 (Significant risk) (16+)	Indication that a child or young person is at significant risk of or is already being sexually exploited. Sexual exploitation is likely to be habitual, often self-denied and coercion/control is implicit.	<p><b>Refer to ART/ inform allocated social worker (if there is one). It is likely that a child with a significant risk score on a SERAF is likely to be at significant risk of harm in the form of sexual exploitation or some other form of harm or abuse. Therefore, a strategy discussion is required. If it is considered there are not reasonable grounds to suspect the child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm the rationale for this decision needs to be clearly recorded on the child's file. The PSW/ CSW team should be invited to all strategy discussions when there are concerns regarding CSE.</b></p> <p>If a child is known in relation to CSE concerns and this is a review SERAF consideration should be given to whether there is any new information that needs to be shared and if so a strategy discussion may be needed. If not it may be a good time to bring forward a multi-agency meeting to discuss the child's needs e.g. core group, TAC meeting etc.</p> <p>It is likely a multi agency meeting is required to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree protection plan, including regular review meetings.</p> <p>Protection plan should include long term intensive direct work with the child or young person.</p> <p><b>Alert PSW/CSW team and consider whether child/ young person should be included on South Gloucestershire CSE list.</b></p>
Moderate or Significant risk	Young person aged 18 years or above.	<p>Where a young person is aged 18 years or over the associated action in relation to Moderate and Significant risk: sexual exploitation should be addressed as an issue in relation to this young person through the Pathway or other work plan; liaison between children's services and police to address the young person's protection.</p> <p>Alert PSW/CSW team and consider whether child/ young person should be included on South Gloucestershire CSE list.</p>

# Interventions

Each of the four categories of risk have associated recommended actions.

## Category 1 - not at risk of sexual exploitation (SERAF score 0-5)

Children and young people in Category 1 do not have indicators of risk in relation to sexual exploitation. However as children and young people who have had concerns raised about them in relation to CSE they may have some vulnerabilities present.

Children and young people assessed as being in this category need access to basic information that will enable them to develop an awareness of the risks that can lead to a situation in which they may be exposed to sexual exploitation.

They need access to information that will equip them to avoid risk situations and to protect themselves.

You should:

Use the School Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE) curriculum as a platform through which to deliver basic safeguarding information, to explore ideas around 'healthy' sexual relationships. This also needs to include opportunities for children and young people to understand the very real risks involved in staying out late, going missing from school, home or care and safe use of the internet. If children are not at school consider whether this escalates the risks to this child.

If other agencies are working with the child/young person consider accessing support from that agency.

## Category 2 - mild risk (SERAF score 6-10)

Children and young people in Category 2 are likely to have multiple vulnerabilities such as problematic parenting and childhood experiences present.

One or two risk indicators may also be present. These vulnerabilities increase the risk of such children and young people being groomed for sexual exploitation. Early intervention and preventative work is needed to protect children and young people who have multiple vulnerabilities present.

Consideration should be given to convening a multi-agency meeting, using SAFeh process where consent is obtained, to ensure all information is shared and agree a plan to address risk and need. A planned programme to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and to provide tools for children and young people to self protect is required.

You should:

Consider a referral to preventative services to provide advice and support.

Such an intervention should raise risk awareness, provide information on keeping safe and address specific identified issues that pose a threat to safety. Such a programme should be delivered by a practitioner who has a good working relationship with the child or young person. It should include opportunities for children and young people to understand the very real risks involved in staying out late and going missing from school, home or care.

Risk needs to be regularly reassessed as part of the planned work undertaken with a child or young person. Any significant change in circumstances which might increase vulnerability or any incidence of behaviour associated with risk should result in an immediate re-assessment of risk.

### Category 3 - moderate risk (SERAF score 11-15)

Children and young people identified as being in Category 3 are likely to have multiple vulnerabilities present as well as one or more indicators of risk.

The range of need within this category of risk is wide in terms of the difference between a child or young person with a SERAF score of 11 and a child or young person with a SERAF score of 15.

Children and young people at moderate risk may be groomed or targeted for opportunistic abuse and/or exploitative relationships by abusing adults.

It is in this category that any omitted information can have the greatest effect on accuracy of assessment and information sharing.

You should:

If the child is not an open case to a social worker a referral should be made to ART, who will consider if threshold is met for social care assessment. Such a referral, might result in checks being undertaken within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, or a Strategy Meeting being convened.

If there is an allocated social worker you should inform the allocated social worker, in relation to children and young people assessed as at moderate risk. **There should be a record on the child's file (usually a record of a discussion between a social worker and team manager) to consider whether there are reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm in the form of CSE or any other form of abuse or neglect. If so, a strategy discussion must follow. If not a clear plan is needed regarding reducing the risks to the child.**

If a strategy discussion is required the SWCPP procedures should be followed and the requirements of a strategy discussion (set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children) must be adhered to.

### Category 4 - significant risk (SERAF score 16+)

Where children or young people are assessed as being in Category 4 there is a clear indication that



they are at significant risk of sexual exploitation or that they are already being abused through sexual exploitation. This is likely to include cases where abuse is habitual, denied, and where coercion and control is implicit.

You should:

In these situations it is likely that there are reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm in the form of CSE or some other form of abuse or neglect. In these cases the threshold is met to convene a strategy discussion. If the decision is made that there is not reasonable grounds to suspect a child is suffering/ likely to suffer significant harm a team manager must record the rationale for this decision on the child's file.

As with Category 3, multi-agency strategy meetings should ensure the effective exchange of information between representatives of key agencies. If a strategy discussion is required the SWCPP procedures should be followed and the requirements of a strategy discussion (set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children) must be adhered to.

### Principles of strategy meeting

Working Together to Safeguard Children explicitly sets out requirements that should be followed in a strategy discussion. Multi-agency strategy meetings enable the effective exchange of information between representatives of key agencies. The meetings should include the individual who has identified risk or raised concerns in relation to the child or young person and representatives of children's services, police, health, education, placements and the commissioned specialist CSE service. The multi-agency strategy meeting should agree a protection plan and action to include direct or therapeutic work with the individual child or young person. The focus of any protection plan and of direct interventions should be the reduction of specific risks which are causing concern. In particular where it is identified a child is staying out late and/or going missing from school, home or care is identified, the plan must address this as a priority. The safeguarding implications of staying out late and going missing should not be underestimated by any agencies.

The length of intervention required will be different in each case and is reliant on the specific circumstances of the child or young person and the nature of the risks which are being addressed. Individual children and young people may respond to intervention in different ways and this will also impact on the length of that intervention.

A change of circumstances such as a placement change for example, may serve to support the reduction of risks in a relatively short space of time; conversely a placement change could serve to quickly escalate risk. Risks should be carefully monitored and reviewed over time in relation to children and young people for whom there have been concerns as part of assessment and planning processes already in place within teams.

All agencies involved in working with the child or young person should address issues of sexual exploitation whether in relation to, for example, placements, offending behaviour, work with the child or young person's family, education or sexual health as part of their work with that child or

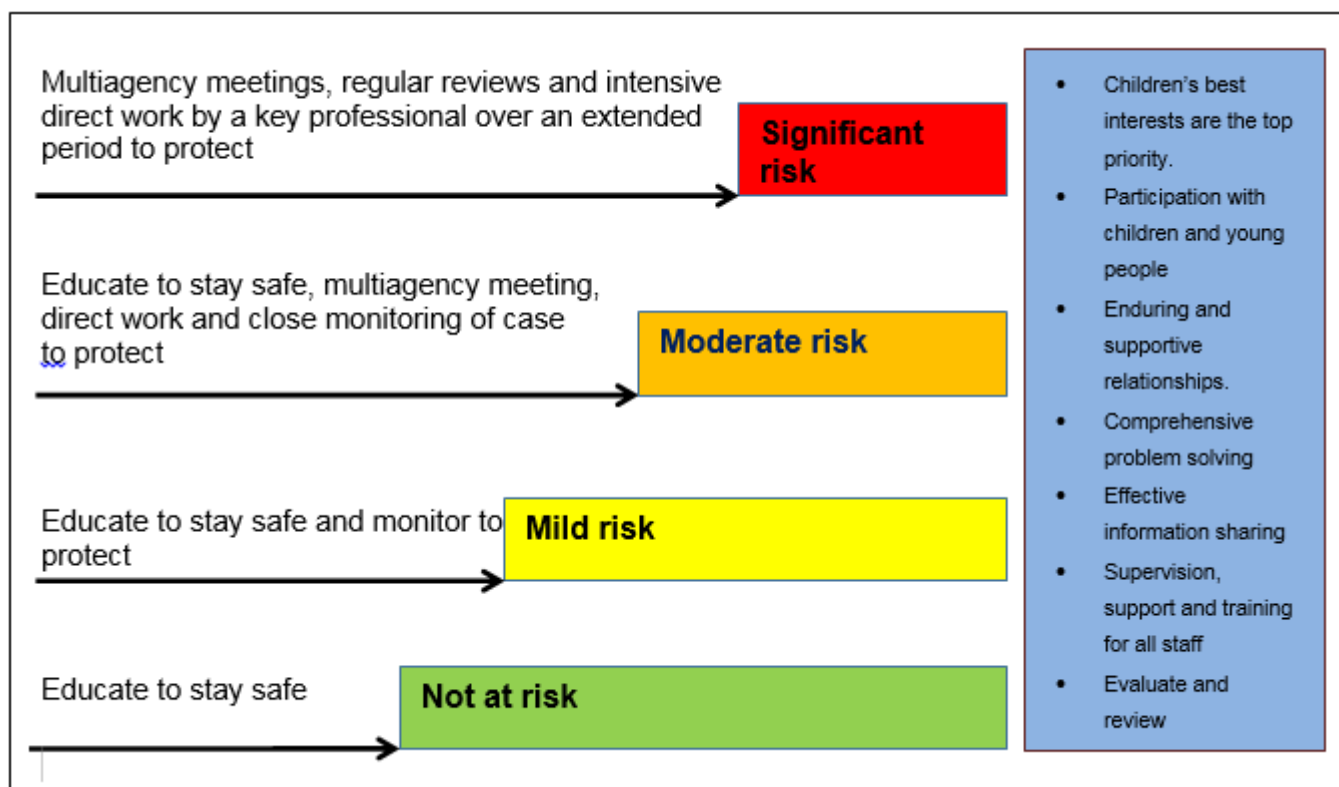
young person. A coordinated and synchronised approach by all agencies maximises the effectiveness of interventions and the impact of planned actions. All agencies should agree and adopt a consistent approach that does not shy away from or collude with risky situations. All agencies and professionals need to be aware of the intensive and long-term nature of the approach required. The presence of multiple vulnerabilities and risks in the lives of children and young people at significant risk often means that they are difficult to engage and that positive outcomes take time.

## Young people aged 18 years and over, entitled to Aftercare services

Where there are concerns regarding risk of sexual exploitation in relation to a young person entitled to receive services under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the associated actions set out above should be generally followed.

In relation to Category 1 and Category 2 cases, information and awareness raising actions should be addressed as part of the pathway planning process. Risk should be assessed and addressed as part of existing processes. Similarly where young people are assessed as Category 3 or Category 4 cases sexual exploitation should be addressed through the pathway or other work plan. Liaison between children’s services and the Safeguarding Coordination Unit (SCU) is also required in addressing the protection of the young person. It is essential that there is coordinated work between partner agencies to understand the individual’s additional vulnerabilities as care leavers.

### Step diagram



Interventions with individual children and young people should be aimed at addressing the specific areas causing concern, beginning with the most risky or dangerous as well as those areas

identified by the child or young person as areas where they are willing to work on making changes. This supports reduction of risks and progresses cases to positive outcomes.

### Reducing risks for positive outcomes

Each of the areas which present risks for children and young people in relation to sexual exploitation can be dealt with to promote safeguarding and to achieve positive outcomes.

Reducing these risks involves a multi-agency approach which delivers a protective network and holistic package of care.

# Perpetrators

## Identifying and prosecuting perpetrators

Identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators must be a key part of work to safeguard children and young people from CSE. While the police and criminal justice agencies lead on this aspect of work, the support of other partners, for example in recording information and gathering and preserving evidence is also vital. Identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators should be a key consideration of all agencies working to address the issue of CSE locally. But any work to identify and prosecute perpetrators should not put children and young people at any further risk of harm.

## Linking prosecutions to the provision of support

Local areas need to adopt a three-pronged approach to dealing with CSE, including prevention, providing support and protection for young people and prosecuting offenders. These areas of work should not be undertaken in isolation. Work to identify and address the risk factors that make young people vulnerable to CSE and the provision of support and protection will enable agencies to gain the trust and confidence of the young person, in many cases so that they can be part of the work to tackle the exploitation itself. Specialist agencies, particularly those that are non-statutory, that work with victims of CSE will most frequently be in this position and it is vital that where a young person wants, and is able to be a part of a prosecution, the agency is able to support them through the process and post conviction.

## Disrupting perpetrator behaviour

Disrupting perpetrator behaviours should be viewed as an important part of local work to tackle CSE. Whilst there should always be a proactive investigation aiming for successful prosecutions, a disruption plan targeting suspected perpetrators can be extremely beneficial.

## CSE network meetings

The CSE (Intelligence and Response) Network is a multi-agency operational process for the Avon and Somerset police force area with the objectives of identifying and effectively responding to:

- Groups and gangs targeting children for sexual exploitation that may be operating across LSCB area boundaries
- Networks of vulnerable children being targeted for sexual exploitation across LSCB area boundaries
- Organisations and premises/locations providing opportunities to those who would target children for sexual exploitation

Perpetrators will be considered when there is a need for additional multi-agency focus because there is evidence to suggest that:

- More than one suspect is targeting a child/children for CSE
- More than one child is being targeted for CSE

- An organisation is facilitating or enabling the perpetration of CSE
- There is evidence that a location is being used to facilitate or enable the perpetration of CSE with potential or actual victims and/or perpetrators attending the location
- Any other case in which there is agreement between a member of staff at position equivalent to children's social care service manager and police inspector agree that there is a need to refer

CSE network meetings are held to ensure that in complex cases, the necessary links are identified and that responses are appropriately coordinated both across the organisations involved and relevant geographic areas. Meetings take place every eight weeks and will be arranged and chaired by Avon and Somerset constabulary. Children's social care and the commissioned specialist service attend these meetings. Representatives from any agency can refer in for a network meeting (although in reality referrals are likely to be from the specialist commissioned service, social care, YOT or the police). The minimum criteria will be that there is a need for additional multi-agency focus because there is evidence to suggest that:

- More than one suspect is targeting a child/children for CSE
- More than one child is being targeted for CSE
- An organisation is facilitating or enabling the perpetration of CSE
- There is evidence that a location is being used to facilitate or enable the perpetration of CSE with potential or actual victims and/or perpetrators attending the location
- Any other case in which there is agreement between a member of staff at position equivalent to Children's Social Care Service Manager and police Inspector agree that there is a need to refer

## Responding to young people that are perpetrators of CSE

### Peer-on-peer abuse

When a young person is exploited by their peer(s), the abuser is the same age, or close in age to them. At the very least, everyone directly involved in the abuse is under 18 years of age. In peer-on-peer exploitation, schools and youth clubs are also locations where children and young people can be exploited. When the perpetrator of CSE is under the age of 18, a strategy discussion must be convened which considers their safeguarding needs. An assessment needs to be undertaken to consider their needs so that the cycle of abuse can be stopped.

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# Appendix A: Range of orders, disruption tactics used by the police to prevent, tackle and prosecute perpetrators of cse

## **Sexual Offences Act 2003**

Prosecutions for child sexual exploitation can be brought under provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. These include:

- [S.1 Rape](#)
- [S.2 and 3 Sexual assault](#)
- [S.5-8 Rape and other sexual offences against children under 13](#)
- [S.14 Arranging or facilitating commission of a child sex offence](#)
- [S.15 Meeting a child following sexual grooming](#)
- [S.47 Paying for sexual services of a child](#)
- [S.48 Causing or inciting sexual exploitation of a child](#)
- [S.49 Controlling a child in relation to sexual exploitation](#)
- [S.57-59 Trafficking within and outside the UK for sexual exploitation](#)

It is now a criminal offence for an adult to send a sexual message to a child. The Serious Crime Act which received royal assent on 3rd March 2015 amends section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

## Disruption tactics

If the criteria for a criminal prosecution are not met a variety of disruption tactics are used by the police:

### *A Child Sexual exploitation Letter*

**Letter to Person of Concern:** This letter should be used where there are concerns that an adult is having inappropriate contact with a person under 18 and that the person under 18 is at risk of or vulnerable to CSE. This could be where there is information that the adult has been in company with the child or young person or that there are children/young people at their address. It should be used where there is insufficient information, intelligence or evidence to take other action. If any offences are suspected or disclosed, this is not an appropriate course of action.

If the criteria are met to serve a Child Abduction Warning Notice (CAWN), then a CAWN should be served instead of using this letter.

### *A Child Abduction Warning Notices*

#### *Section 2, Child Abduction Act 1984 - children under 16*

## *Section 49, Children Act 1989 – children under 18 and subject of a Care Order*

These notices, which have no legal authority in themselves, are authorised by a child's parent/person with parental responsibility and issued by the Police, warn a suspected perpetrator to stop associating with a named child. As such, the adult is made aware that a concern has been raised about the relationship and that authorities are watching. Although the notices have no legal effect themselves, they effectively deprive suspects of the defences that either they did not know the age of the child or they thought that they would have had the permission of the person responsible for the child to have that child with them.

### **Civil Remedies**

There are a wide number of civil remedies applicable in many different situations:

#### *Sexual Risk Order (replaced Risk of Sexual Harm Orders)*

Can be issued against an individual who has 'done an act of a sexual nature which suggests that they pose a risk of harm to the public in the UK or children and vulnerable adults abroad'. An 'act of a sexual nature' has not been defined in the legislation and the guidance states this 'will depend to a significant degree on the individual circumstances of the behaviour and its context', which means this Order may be used by Police and the National Crime Agency to disrupt grooming activity. A Sexual Risk Order lasts a minimum of 2 years and has no maximum duration. Breach of a Sexual Risk Order is a criminal offence which can attract a term of imprisonment of up to 5 years. Breach of an Abduction Notice can become grounds for issuing of the Sexual Risk Order.

#### *A Sexual Harm Prevention Order (Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime and Policing Act 2014)*

Can be made against a person who has been convicted or cautioned in relation to a sexual offence to protect any members of the public in the UK, or vulnerable adults and children abroad, from sexual harm including protecting children from grooming activity. The Sexual Harm Prevention Order must be made for a minimum of 5 years and can be made for an indefinite period if necessary. The Order can contain any prohibitions aimed at protecting children and others. Breach of an Order is a criminal offence, which can attract a term of imprisonment of up to 5 years.

#### *A Serious Crime Prevention Order (Serious Crime Prevention Act 2007)*

The following offences against the Sexual Offences Act 2003 are qualifying offences for these orders:

<b>Section</b>	<b>Offence</b>
<b>14</b>	arranging or facilitating commission of a child sex offence
<b>48</b>	causing or inciting the sexual exploitation of a child
<b>49</b>	controlling a child through sexual exploitation
<b>50</b>	arranging or facilitating the sexual exploitation of a child



<b>52</b>	causing or inciting prostitution for gain
<b>53</b>	controlling prostitution for gain
<b>57,58,59</b>	trafficking for sexual exploitation

# Appendix B: Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF)

You can download the following blank SERAF framework form in [Microsoft Word format](#) or in [pdf format](#).

## Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF)

### Child / young person

Name	
Date of birth	
Address	
Is the child receiving support services from any other agency	
Please list other agencies	
Has sexual exploitation been identified as a specific issue for this child?	
Involvement with the youth justice system?	
School / College	

**Vulnerabilities** - factors that have been or are present in the child's lifetime. Include any knowledge about current impact (last 6 months) on the child.

<b>Vulnerabilities</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Please provide details where this risk is identified</b>
Emotional neglect by parent/carer/family member		
Sexual Abuse		
Breakdown of family relationships		

Family history of domestic abuse		
Family history of substance abuse		
Family history of mental health difficulties		
Low self esteem		
Unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation		
Isolated from peer/social networks		
Lack of positive relationship with a productive/nurturing adult		
SECTION TOTAL 1: Vulnerabilities (score 1 for each ticked, if none ticked enter 0):		

Moderate risk indicators - Please tick if present on date of referral or during the past 6 months

Staying out late		
Multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people)		
Use of a mobile phone that causes concern		
Expressions of despair (self harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression)		
Exclusions from school or unexplained absences from or not engaged in school/college/training/work		
Disclosures of sexual/physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation		
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)		
Peers involved in clipping/sexual exploitation		
Drugs misuse		
Alcohol misuse		
Use of the internet that causes concern		
Living independently and failing to respond to attempts by worker to keep in touch		

Associating with other sexually exploited children		
SECTION TOTAL 2: Moderate risk indicators (score 1 for each ticked, if none ticked enter 0):		

Significant Risk Indicators - should only be selected in relation to adults outside the family (unless family member was facilitating exploitation)

**Score - 5 for each CURRENT (last 6 months)**

**1 for each RECENT (6-12 months)**

**6 for each BOTH , (if none selected, enter 0)**

<b>Significant Risk Indicators</b>	
Periods of going missing overnight or longer	
Boyfriend / girlfriend relationship with controlling adult	
Physical abuse by controlling adult/physical injury without plausible explanation.	
Emotional abuse by controlling adult (NOT parent / carer)	
Entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults (not taking and driving away: car theft)	
Unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothing or other items	
Frequenting areas known for on / off street sexual exploitation	
SECTION TOTAL 3	
Child under 13? If so, add 5 to section total:	Yes / No

### Perpetrator

Do you have any information that might identify an individual who might pose a risk to a child as a result of CSE?	
Name or nickname	Date of birth

Age	Gender
-----	--------

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Ethnic appearance	Any distinguishing features (tattoos, marks, scars)

Phone numbers	Address

Any social media you know they are using	

Vehicle					
	Make	Model	Colour	Registration	

Any other details	
Why do you think this person is a perpetrator and what is the relationship to the victim, is any?	Are there any risks that cannot be disclosed due to confidentiality/data protection?

### SERAF Scale

SERAF Scale - add all three SECTION TOTALS together:	
Risk Category (see How to complete the SERAF for guidance):	

### Professional Assessment

What do you think is working well?

What are you worried about?

**Professional judgement**

*Please use your professional judgement to reflect upon the indicators you have selected above and consider the health, welfare and safety of the child in question*

What do you think needs to happen next?

Person completing form:

Name	
Designation and agency	