

This issue focuses on the findings emerging from recent cases involving the sexual exploitation of children.

It also looks at the resources available to practitioners around Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), including the launch of a new CSE Analysis and Decision Making Tool which can be found [here](#).

## RECENT LEARNING FROM CASES INVOLVING THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

### 1. Background and context

The SSCB Learning and Improvement Subgroup were notified of children who were involved in sexual exploitation from a group of individuals identified through a police investigation into a case of child sexual exploitation.

### 2. Safeguarding Concerns

The case involved 2 children who had suffered significant harm which resulted in serious mental health problems, including suicide attempts. In addition, both children had several pregnancies, ending in miscarriage and termination, prior to both having a child by one of the perpetrators. One child suffered from sexually transmitted diseases.

There was also learning from several of the other children who were involved in this case.



### 3. The incident

The concerns date back to 2010 and 2011 when both children were aged 15 and agencies learned that they had an older 'boyfriend'. The actual age and identity of any boyfriend was not known initially. There were also allegations that the premises, where the perpetrators worked, was a location for men to have sex with under-age girls. The police investigation initially commenced in 2012 and then intensified in 2014 due to concerns and allegations reported to statutory agencies in relation to both children. In 2015, once the perpetrators were arrested and charged, the investigation was managed via a multi-agency approach.

### 4. Multi-agency learning

The case involved historical abuse of the children concerned from 2010 until 2014. In 2014 the police investigation intensified. This resulted in the prosecution and conviction of two perpetrators, in October 2016, for sexual offences against children.

Agencies involved have provided information about their involvement with each child and an agency report. Interviews were also held with other children involved in the case.

### 5. The findings so far

The purpose of reviewing this case is to learn how to promote change in the effectiveness of multi-agency practice and response to child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The type of CSE suffered by both children is an 'inappropriate relationship' model. This is defined as:

***'Usually involving one perpetrator who has inappropriate power or control over a young person (physical, emotional or financial). One indicator may be a significant age gap. The young person may believe they are in a loving relationship'.***

Both children believed they were 'in love' and that perpetrator A was their boyfriend, who gave them presents and told them both that he intended to have a permanent relationship with them. He was significantly older than them and subjected them to physical, sexual and emotional abuse as part of a controlling relationship. This model of abuse is distinct from the models described in other high profile serious case reviews. Such reviews focus on victims either being coerced into having sexual relationships with the boyfriends associates (known as the 'boyfriend' model) or where they may be forced / coerced into sexual activity with multiple men' (known as organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking). The 'inappropriate relationship' model of CSE was the focus of this case and should provide additional learning to previous high profile CSE case reviews.

Some emerging findings from the review process to date include:

- The confusing stance in **national policy to adolescent sexual activity** leaves professionals struggling to distinguish between 'inappropriate relationships' and permitted consensual sexual activity. This can leave children being at continued risk of unidentified child sexual exploitation, especially if they are judged to be 'competent' to make such decisions themselves
- Is there still a tendency within some services to focus on short term intervention on perceived parenting deficits, without taking sufficient **time to listen and hear the parents concerns**? This can lead to providing insufficient support to the family if the child is not judged to be at risk of harm from within the family and practitioners minimising real parental concerns of the risk of harm from external sources
- CSE **investigations need a multi-agency investigative model** able to develop consistent relationships with alleged victims over a long period; without this the likelihood to provide support to the children concerned and establish the evidence needed for a successful prosecution are severely reduced
- **Linking information within and between agencies** is an integral part of the safeguarding system to protect children from harm: improvements have been made in recent years, but there is scope for further development of this to protect children from child sexual exploitation
- Children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing CSE need **accessible, timely and sufficiently experienced support** for their emotional and mental health problems: this is developing in Somerset, but requires further improvement to provide for the range of need
- There is a need for **good multi-agency collaboration** in this complex area of work, regardless of the involvement of social work services: without this there is the potential of unrecognised risk and individual practitioners or agencies (often the schools) feeling isolated in their endeavours to safeguard children considered to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation
- The current **arrangements nationally in relation to piercing and tattoo salons** does not adequately address safeguarding risks for children
- There is scope for further **development of education provision around relationships and CSE** for both children and parents
- The practice in this case has indicated some scope for **increased sensitivity to cultural issues**



## TOOLS TO ASSIST PRACTITIONERS DEALING WITH CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The SSCB website has a page dedicated to providing practitioners with resources and tools around Child Sexual Exploitation: <http://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/working-with-children/cse-protocols/>.

There are a number of useful resources, providing background information, local protocols and guidance, as well as tools for screening, assessing the risk and decision making around Child Sexual exploitation.

In addition to these resources to aid practitioners in their own practice, there are also a number of links within the “sign-posting” section of this page, which practitioners can give to children and parents/carers where CSE is occurring or has been identified as a risk.

### Child Sexual Exploitation Analysis and Decision Making Tool

The Child Exploitation Strategic Subgroup of the SSCB have developed a new analysis and decision making tool, available [here](#). Scroll down to the **Tools** section to download.

This tool was developed by the Strategic Subgroup, in consultation with partners, to **replace the previous CSE risk assessment tool** as practitioners told us that they needed a more comprehensive tool to aid their decision making process around CSE.

It is designed to be used by practitioners/professionals working directly with children as part of their day to day role. It is an optional tool that can be used to **guide your judgment** where you suspect/are concerned about the risk of sexual exploitation for the child you are working with.

The **CSE initial screening tool remains the same** and is aimed at practitioners/volunteers who do not work directly with children, but may come into contact with children in the course of their day to day duties. This tool should be used if your suspicions are raised about the possibility of sexual exploitation and as a discussion tool with your safeguarding lead/manager.

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### Contact the SSCB!

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