

Child sexual exploitation warning signs and vulnerabilities checklist

Following the Children's Commissioner Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, the research and analysis that was conducted identified the following typical vulnerabilities in children prior to abuse:

- **Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance use, domestic violence, parental mental health issues, and parental criminality).**
- **History of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of honour based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect).**
- **Recent bereavement or loss.**
- **Gang association either through relatives, peers of intimate relationships (in case of gang associated CSE only)**
- **Attending school with young people who are sexually exploited.**
- **Learning disabilities.**
- **Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their families.**
- **Friends with young people who are sexually exploited.**
- **Homelessness.**
- **Lacking friends from the same AGE GROUP.**
- **Living In a gang neighbourhood.**
- **Living in residential care.**
- **Living in hostel, bed and breakfast accommodation or a foyer.**
- **Low self-esteem or self-confidence.**
- **Young carers.**

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

- **Missing from home.**
- **Physical injuries.**
- **Drug or alcohol misuse.**
- **Offending.**
- **Repeated sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations/**
- **Absence from school.**
- **Change in physical appearance.**
- **Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking sites.**
- **Estranged from their family.**
- **Receipt of gifts from unknown sources.**
- **Recruiting others into sexual exploitation situations.**
- **Poor mental health.**
- **Self-harm**
- **Thoughts of or attempts at suicide.**

Evidence shows that any child displaying several vulnerabilities from the above lists should be considered to be at high risk of sexual exploitation. Practitioners should immediately take preventative and protective action as required and an immediate referral should also be made to the relevant Public Protection Unit. However, it is important to note that children without pre-existing vulnerabilities can still be sexually exploited.

Therefore, any child showing risk indicators in the second list, but none of the vulnerabilities in the first, should also be considered as a potential victim, with appropriate assessment and action put in place as required.