Language Guide for Practitioners - Supporting children and young people at Risk of Exploitation

Preventing the exploitation of children and young people

MACE

Contextual safeguarding

Introduction

This guide has been created to support those working with children, families and the community to think about the language they use when working with children subject to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). It outlines terms that should *not* be used when discussing or recording Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation and includes a list of alternative, appropriately worded phrases and narratives.

As Local Authorities continue to find new ways to use Contextual Approaches to safeguarding, we need practitioners, representatives and partners to confidently and safely identify, assess and respond to children and young people who experience harm outside of their home environment.

A key feature of the support we offer to children, adults and their families, is to think about the way we talk about and describe the difficulties they may be facing. This includes how we can contribute to and get the best partnership response to help and assist them.

When we describe children and young people's experiences, any language that implies that a child, young person or group of young people are complicit or responsible for the exploitation they may suffer or crimes that they may be victim/s of, should always be challenged!

Our language should always recognise and be responsive to trauma resulting from the harm children/young people have experienced. If support services don't make these considerations, this may contribute to the continuing victimisation of children and young people and prevent young people and those that care for them from accessing the right help at the right time for them.

Responses to Individual Child Harm	
Terms not to be used	**Improved response**
Putting themselves at risk. This implies that the child is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator and that they are able to make free and informed choices.	• The child may be groomed • The child is at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited • A perpetrator may exploit the child's increased vulnerability • The child is not in a protective environment • The situation reduces the child's safety • The location is dangerous to children • The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse them • It is unclear whether the child is under duress to go missing • There are concerns that the child may be being sexually abused/exploited • It is unclear why the child is getting into cars • There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child to act in this way • There are concerns regarding other influences on the child
Would not cooperate with…	• The child did not feel safe enough to disclose • The child appears to fear negative repercussions for disclosure • The child is being criminally/sexually exploited and or groomed and therefore is not able to disclose. • Child considers the relationship to be consensual however the relationship has been formed in the context of exploitation
Missing	• The child's safety is context driven • The child does not feel able to stay at their current location • The child is being groomed/ coerced to leave • The child may consider leaving to be the safest option in their circumstances • Someone else has control over this child's behaviour • The child has returned to a safe place

Sexual activity with… This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. If it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context this term is not appropriate	• The child has been sexually abused • The child has been raped • There are reports of sexual abuse • The child has described sexual activity, however concerns exist that they child may have been groomed and/or coerced
Sexually active since [age under 13] A child under 13 cannot consent to sex and is therefore being abused. This should be reflected in the language used	• The child has been raped • The child has been/may have been sexually abused • Concerns exist that the child may have been coerced, exploited, or sexually abused
Has been contacting adult males/ females via phone or internet This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the communication and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context	• Adult males/females may have been contacting the child • The child may have been groomed • There are concerns that the adult is facilitating communication with a child • The child is vulnerable to online perpetrators • There are concerns that others may be using online technology to access or abuse the child • Adults appear to be using a range of methods to communicate with the child
Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The child is being sexually exploited • There are concerns that the child has been raped • Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child • The child is being sexually abused • The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them • The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency
In a relationship with… This implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context	• The young person says that they are in a relationship with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation and/or offending • The young person has been/is being groomed, exploited and controlled
Involved in CSE This implies there is a level of choice regarding the child being abused. A five year old would never be referred to as being involved in sexual abuse for the same reasons.	• The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited. • The child is being sexually exploited.
Promiscuous This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. Promiscuous is a judgemental term which stereotypes and labels people. It isn't appropriate in any context when discussing children and young people, but particularly if it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context	• The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited • The child is being sexually exploited • This child has/is /being coerced into sharing images of themselves online

Prostituting themselves This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context. Changes in legislation have meant that child prostitution is no longer an acceptable term and should never be used.	• The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited • The child is being sexually exploited
Boyfriend/girlfriend implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context. Children have been challenged in court with practitioners recordings where a practitioner has referred to the perpetrator as the child's boyfriend or girlfriend	• The young person says that they are in a relationship with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation and/or offending • The young person has been/is being groomed, exploited and controlled
Drug running – He/she is drug running This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or	• Child criminal exploitation (CCE). The child is being criminally exploited • The child is being trafficked for purpose of criminal exploitation.
Recruit/run/work This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context of the	• The child is being criminally exploited
He/she is choosing this lifestyle This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context	• The child is being criminally exploited • The child is being sexually exploited

Responses to Group Based Child Harm	
Terms not to be used	**Improved Response**
Associating or spending time with 'elders' This implies that the child or young people are responsible for their exploitation and have the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.	• The young people say that they are friends with a person or group of people and there are concerns about the ages of those people, the imbalance of power, exploitation and or offending • The young people have been groomed, exploited, coerced and/or controlled. Note: If the 'elder' is also under the age of 18 years old, this will need to be considered using language of vulnerability/ exploitation and also requires a child protection processes/ response
Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex or to run drugs. This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context relating to substance use	• The child is being sexually/criminally exploited • The child is being criminally exploited through drug debt. • There are concerns that the child has been raped as they do not have the freedom or capacity to consent • Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child • The child is being sexually abused. • The child's vulnerability regarding drug • The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency
Gang Involved or Affiliated This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context or powerful	• It is unclear why the child is getting into cars. There are concerns that there is a power imbalance and powerful grooming forcing or compelling the child to act in this way • There are concerns regarding other influences on the child. Note: If other members of the peer network are also under the age of 18 years old, this will need to be considered using language of vulnerability/exploitation and also requires a child protection processes/response

Responses to Location Based Child Harm	
Terms not to be used	**Improved Response**
Running County Lines This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context	• The child(ren) in this location may be being trafficked and sexually/criminally exploited • There may be harmful behaviours and or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this area • This environment may not be safe for these children • The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse child(ren) • The child(ren) feel under threat/ coerced to remain in this location and/ or the grooming process is so powerful that the child believes this to be their choice • The child(ren) do not feel safe enough to leave this location. Note: County Lines? Is s/he exploited through County Lines? This should always be framed as question where there is not an established link between County border locations or phone/ social media 'lines' for the purpose of dealing/supply. There is a danger that broad use of the term 'County Lines' may distract practitioners from identifying and responding to children groomed, trafficked and exploited for the purpose of local drug dealing or supply

Gang(s) in the Area/ location	• Area impacted by episodes of serious youth violence
This implies that the child or young people are responsible for the exploitation and have the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise an abusive or exploitative context or their right to be in the location without experiencing harm.	• Groups of young people congregate to create safety for themselves • There may be harmful behaviours and or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this space/ community/ neighbourhood • The space/ community or neighbourhood may not be safe for this child or group of children • There appears to be limited safe opportunities to interrupt/ harmful behaviours and or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this community/ neighbourhood • This community requires support to address concerns or attitudes that exist towards violence and criminality within this space/ community/neighbourhood • Owing to conflict and tensions between these groups, other areas or locations in the borough may not be safe for this child or group of children • The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse vulnerable children
Despite the risk s/he continues to return to the location… This implies that the child or young people are responsible for any exploitation they experience in a location. It does not recognise abusive or exploitative context or their right to be in the location without experiencing harm.	• The child(ren) have an existing peer network in this location • The child(ren) have an ownership or investment in the area • The child(ren) considers themselves to be safe in this space/community/ neighbourhood • The child(ren) did not consider themselves safe where they were • The child(ren) have been groomed or coerced into being in this neighbourhood/ location • The child(ren) does not feel they have another safe place to go • The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse child(ren) • The child(ren) feel under threat/ coerced to remain in this location • The child(ren) do not feel safe enough to leave this location

1. Some of the content of this guide has been derived from Hackney Contextual Safeguarding Project (2019) ***Assessment and intervention planning for young people at risk of extra-familial harm: A practice guide**

2. Content regarding **Responses to Individual Child Harm** has been extended and adapted from *The Children's Society's guidance: Appropriate Language Child Sexual and/or Criminal Exploitation Guidance for Professionals 2018)** https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20Toolkit.pdf

3. Additionally there are key new features around vulnerability language to describe contexts including: Responses to Group Based Child Harm and Responses to Location Based Child Harm which is the work of **Simone Nyarko.***Simone Nyarko (2018) **'Languaging Child and Adolescent Vulnerability': A Guide For Professionals and Practitioners supporting children and families in community settings**