

# Guidance Notes on completing Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (CERAF)

## Identifying & Assessing Exploitation Risks

### 1. General Guidance

The Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (CERAF) is a child exploitation risk assessment tool. Your professional judgement is as equally important as the score. Be mindful that child exploitation does not exist as a standalone issue and that children who are being criminally exploited are also likely to have increased missing episodes, and may be victims of sexual abuse and/or trafficking.

A CERAF should be completed as soon as potential concerns regarding any form of child exploitation are identified. This may include child sexual exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE), county lines (CL), modern day slavery (MDS) or child trafficking concerns. The evidence may follow a missing episode, or increasing occasions of a child truanting from school, staying out late, associating with new peers/associates where there may be some concerns or known intelligence risk.

Best practice indicates that **information from multiple sources** (including family members, the child concerned, school, and other professionals) is needed to ensure that you have as much information as possible on the risk indicators and any explanations for these.

Give **timeframes** for when indicators have been identified – the frequency and extent of concerns/incidents should be informing your view of the level of risk.

You should **provide relevant details** for each vulnerability and risk indicator identified, as this will be informing your understanding of the nature and extent of risks – including how it may be linked to exploitation.

**Be mindful of your use of language.** Children are not responsible for their own abuse/exploitation and often they do not recognise the risks we may be concerned about. Children who are groomed are unable to give consent to their abuse. See [Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Using appropriate language for those subject to or at risk of exploitation.](#)

**Use the scoring guides** on the form to ensure that you are scoring the CERAF correctly.



A CERAF should be **carried out at regular intervals** to record any increase or reduction in risk and should **inform appropriate intervention**. As a minimum, it should be updated every three months or following a **change in circumstances** (e.g. change in placement) as this can have a significant impact on risk.

## **2. Vulnerability Factors**

This section of the CERAF includes factors that we know may render children and young people vulnerable to being targeted for child exploitation.

### **2.1 Emotional neglect by parent/carer/family member**

THINK ABOUT – Has the child suffered emotional neglect and has this impacted upon their vulnerability to exploitation? Do they feel wanted and loved within their family? Are they likely to be at increased risk of seeking out attention, affection or belonging, due to their caregiving experiences?

### **2.2 Physical abuse by parent/carer/family member**

THINK ABOUT – Has the child suffered physical abuse, which is likely to have increased their vulnerability to exploitation?

### **2.3 Sexual abuse**

THINK ABOUT - Has the child suffered sexual abuse in the past? This is not about current sexual exploitation – it is about considering whether the child has past experiences of sexual abuse in some form, which will have increased their vulnerability to being exploited.

### **2.4 Breakdown of family relationships**

THINK ABOUT – Has there been a breakdown in family relationships, which might cause the child to avoid going home or make them vulnerable to others who may seek to befriend them?

### **2.5 Family history of domestic abuse**

THINK ABOUT – Is there a known history of domestic abuse within the family which may have impacted upon the child's emotional wellbeing and understanding of healthy relationships?

Is ongoing domestic abuse a reason for the child to avoid being at home?

Is the impact of domestic abuse impairing the parent's capacity to act protectively?

### **2.6 Family history of substance misuse**

THINK ABOUT – Is there significant past or current substance misuse by family members, which may increase the child's vulnerability? Is parental substance misuse having an impact on parenting capacity and parental oversight of the child?

### **2.7 Family history of mental health difficulties**

THINK ABOUT – Is there significant past or current mental health issues of family members, which may increase the child's vulnerability? Are parental mental health issues impacting on parenting capacity?

## **2.8 Low self-esteem**

Self-esteem relates to our view of self, the value we give ourselves (our self -worth).  
When thinking about low self-esteem.

THINK ABOUT - Does the child consider themselves unlovable, inferior or unworthy? Do they believe that they deserve bad things to happen to them? Do they accept when bad things happen to them and is this a sign of their lack of self-worth?

## **2.9 Unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation (including placement breakdown and multiple moves)**

THINK ABOUT – Is unsuitable or inappropriate accommodation an issue and is this increasing the child’s vulnerability to being exploited? Is the child sofa-surfing or street homeless? Are they in accommodation, which is not suitable for their needs e.g. youngpeople in supported accommodation or a known ‘Hotspot’ when they are known to be vulnerable? Are they in the care of the local authority with multiple placements and/or multiple placement breakdowns?

## **2.10 Isolated from peers/social networks**

THINK ABOUT – Does the child lack a stable friendship group? Do they have appropriate friends their own age? Do they struggle to maintain appropriate friendships and tend to drift around? Do they feel lonely and that they have no real friends?

## **2.11 Lack of positive relationship with a protective/nurturing adult**

THINK ABOUT – Does the child have a positive relationship with an adult who is protective and nurturing of them e.g. parent, extended family, family friend, professional.

## **2.12 Physical or Learning Disability**

THINK ABOUT – Does the child have a physical or learning disability, which is increasing their vulnerability/susceptibility to being targeted for grooming/exploitation?

# **3. Medium Risk Indicators**

This section of the CERAf includes indicators that are associated with risk of, or that may indicate, abuse through sexual/criminal exploitation.

**TIMEFRAME:** These should be ticked if they are currently present or have been present during the past three months.

## **3.1 Regularly staying out late (this may include periods of staying out all day and whereabouts unknown)**

THINK ABOUT – Is the child demonstrating a pattern of staying out late or has there been a recent change? Are they just pushing boundaries or does it appear to be indicating something more concerning? Provide details of dates this has happened, how late they have stayed out, who they were with, where they went, how did they act when they left/returned? Note anything else relevant about the incidents.

### **3.2 Multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people)**

THINK ABOUT – Are there *multiple* unknown people coming to the child's address to look for them or contacting them? Are there suspicions these people present an exploitation risk to the child?

### **3.3 Use of a mobile phone that causes concern (e.g. multiple phones, contact from unknown / concerning people)**

THINK ABOUT – Does the child's mobile phone use give cause for concern regarding exploitation? Are they communicating with someone of concern? Are they sending/receiving explicit images? Are they receiving lots of calls/messages from unknown sources or at odd times of the day? Does their demeanor change following contact on their phone or do they leave the house straight after? Do they have more than one phone, or is their phone use or messages indicative of involvement in drug supply?

Remember: It is quite usual for teenagers to have sole control of their mobile phone so this in itself should not give you cause for concern. You need to think about the connection with the child's mobile phone use and possible exploitation.

### **3.4 Expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression, carrying weapons, other sudden change in wellbeing)**

THINK ABOUT – Has there been a change in their emotional wellbeing and/or behaviour which could be reactions to undisclosed trauma e.g. self-harming, acting very aggressively or withdrawn, taking overdoses? Is the child carrying weapons because they feel threatened / at risk of harm from others?

Consider the context around the behaviour and any potential triggers – consider any other likely explanations, which may be non-exploitation, related.

### **3.5 Exclusion or unexplained absences from school or not engaged in school/college/training/work**

THINK ABOUT – Is the child out of education/training/employment and their whereabouts is unknown a lot of the time? Is the child truanting from school and their whereabouts is unknown or are there concerns about where they are going/who they are meeting?

### **3.6 Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), pregnancy/termination of pregnancy**

THINK ABOUT – Has the child contracted STI's, got pregnant and/or had a termination and there is concern this could link to CSE? If the child is accessing sexual health services in relation to the above issues, does the sexual health nurse/health professionals have concerns? Was the child accompanied to any appointment by anyone? Recurring STI's and/or pregnancies/terminations should be a cause for significant concern.

### **3.7 Drug/Alcohol misuse**

THINK ABOUT – Are there concerns regarding the child's drug/alcohol use which potentially increases their risk of exploitation? Is their substance use beyond more common teenage experimentation (as this in itself is not an indicator of exploitation but

could increase vulnerability)? Are drugs/alcohol being supplied to the child as part of a grooming process? Does the substance given reduce the child's capacity to keep safe? Are there indications of a dependency/increasing dependency? Could the child be accruing a debt?

Relevant details: How is the child accessing/funding the substance? Who is supplying them? Who is the child using them with? What is the extent of their usage? What type of substance is the child using and what effect does it have on the child (this should assist you in considering why a perpetrator may provide the child with either drugs or alcohol or both)? Remember: This is about the child's substance use, not their parents or anyone else's.

### **3.8 Use of the internet that causes concern (e.g. coerced to take/share indecent images; dealing drugs; selling stolen goods; use of the 'Dark Web')**

THINK ABOUT - Does the child's internet use give cause for concern regarding exploitation? Has their use of the internet changed and is this giving cause for concern? Are they using the internet to communicate with someone of concern? Are they sharing explicit images of themselves or receiving them from others? Are they arranging to meet up with strangers? Are there indications that they are being groomed?

### **3.9 Living independently and failing to respond to attempts by worker to keep in touch**

THINK ABOUT - This relates to young people who are living independently (not at home) e.g. they may be in some form of supported accommodation. Consideration should be given as to whether the child's failure to respond to the workers attempts to keep in touch are a change in their usual behaviour or have a cause other than exploitation. Are they engaging with anyone else? Are there cuckooing risks? This indicator relates to the concern that the cause for the young person's non-engagement is because they are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, exploitation.

## **4. 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/criminal 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 the past three months) or recent (between three and six months ago)**. Remember to provide in your explanation details of why you have ticked "current 3 months" or "previous 3-6 months" in order that this is clear.

### **4.1 Disclosure of sexual/physical assault (which may be followed by withdrawal of allegation)**

THINK ABOUT – This indicator is suggestive of there being an individual/group who is grooming/exploiting the child and the child's withdrawal of the allegation is an indication of the presence of the abuser's control over them. There may be possible use of violence in advance of exploitation in order to control the child. Also consider issues relating to being forced to internally insert drugs inside the body to transport or hide them ('plugging').

**Remember:** You need to be thinking in the context of exploitation – this is not about the child having a parent who has been/is being physically/emotionally abusive (unless you think they are a perpetrator of grooming and exploitation).

#### **4.2 Peers suspected/known to be being sexually or criminally exploited**

**THINK ABOUT** – Is the child associating with other children/peers who are suspected of being exploited sexually or criminally? Is there an indication the child may also be at risk because of this association?

#### **4.3 Periods of going missing overnight or longer**

**THINK ABOUT** – Has the child gone missing overnight or longer? Provide details of when, what is known about where they have stayed or who with etc. Has the child be travelling out of Swindon whilst missing or found in another area with no obvious link (consider trafficking and county lines risks). It is important to provide details of how often this has occurred within a period and the duration of the missing periods, as well as any other known details regarding the episodes.

**Remember:** There will be occasions when a child goes missing overnight and it is completely unrelated to exploitation, however it should always be considered.

#### **4.4 Relationship/s with older or controlling individual / group (e.g. older boy/girlfriend\*, gang/organised crime group) \*This should not be scored if the child of concern is of a similar age.**

The control element is important when considering this significant risk indicator – an exploitative relationship between a perpetrator and their victim is going to involve some degree of power imbalance and potentially control, intimidation, threats, and violence.

**THINK ABOUT** – Does the child have an older boyfriend or girlfriend, which gives cause for concern? Are there concerns regarding relationships with an individual or group who have some control over them (this could be peers or adults)? Has the child become indebted to others and is now expected to pay this off?

**Details:** Provide any details of the relationship, how long it been going on for, where did they meet/continue to meet, what they do together, what explanations have been given for their friendship/association/relationship, and details of any indications of control. Consider the young person feeling indebted; being coerced to do things they would not normally do; online or offline.

#### **4.5 Physical abuse by controlling person / physical injury without plausible explanation**

**THINK ABOUT** - This indicator is about recognising if a child is being physically abused by a controlling person or presenting with injuries that they cannot give a plausible explanation for. This may indicate that they are being sexually/criminally exploited and that physical violence is being used as a way of controlling or punishing them.

#### **4.6 Emotional abuse by controlling person (who may be exploiting them)**

**THINK ABOUT** – This indicator is about recognising if a child is being emotionally abused by a controlling person who is likely to be seeking to, or is, sexually/criminally exploiting them. Consider whether someone is emotionally abusing the young person in order to control/coerce, or as part of a grooming process.

Clearly outline any evidence/indications of emotional abuse e.g. humiliating, embarrassing, constantly putting down, overly criticising, ignoring/excluding, unreasonable jealousy, emotional blackmail, domination and control, withdrawal of affection, isolating from family and friends, threatening to hurt people they care about to get the child to conform etc.

#### **4.7 Entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown people (not taking and driving away i.e. car theft)**

THINK ABOUT – Has the child been seen or known to have been entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown people/people of concern? If so – when did this occur (date/time), how many occasions, is there a description or details of the car/individuals in the car etc?

#### **4.8 Unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothing, or other items**

THINK ABOUT – Has the child been observed with money, clothing, mobile phones or any other significant items that they cannot account for or give a plausible explanation on how they were obtained? If so, this could be an indication of goods being provided as part of an exploitation or grooming process?

#### **4.9 Frequenting areas known for sexual/criminal exploitation/associated with county lines (e.g. “trap houses”)**

THINK ABOUT – Is the child frequenting somewhere where there are known concerns about children being targeted and groomed for sexual/criminal exploitation, or where sexual or criminal exploitation is taking place? Consider locations/addresses/properties (sometimes abandoned) linked to exploitation concerns.

The terms ‘trap house’ and ‘bando’ are sometimes used to refer to addresses used as a base for drug supply. These can also refer to other locations including B&B’s, hotels, parks etc. which may be linked to exploitation concerns.

#### **4.10 Travelling/located out of area without plausible explanation/known link; arrested out of area (especially for drug related offences)**

This may be an indicator of a child’s involvement in county lines (model of drug supply where drugs are exported into other areas and a dedicated phone/deal line is used to manage supply). Children/vulnerable adults may be used to move/store drugs or money or may be sent to other areas to sell the drugs, often being forced to stay in poor conditions.

#### **4.11 Child found with large quantities of Class A/B drugs or suspected of/involved in movement and selling of drugs (in any quantity)**

This may be an indicator/evidence that the child is involved in significant drug supply activity with the potential for them to be controlled/exploited by others. Due consideration needs to be given to what and who has led the child to become involved in this high-risk situation, and who is gaining from their involvement (often the child gains very little and/or may not have a sound understanding of the risks).

Whenever significant quantities of drugs are seized from a child there is the potential for them to become indebted to exploiters and be more susceptible to an increased risk of

further harm, exploitation and trafficking. Safety planning around this must always be considered.

#### **4.12 Child involved in robberies/thefts/movement of drugs with no or limited signs of personal gain**

This may be an indicator or evidence that the child is being drawn into criminal behaviours to be 'tested', to pay debts or for the benefit/gain of someone else.

#### **4.13 Child has a drug debt (and they are likely to be at risk if unpaid)**

If a child has a drug debt or repeated debts that they are unable to pay, they may be required to run drugs further or in larger quantities. This may also mean having to commit robberies or steal from others including their family to fund payments. Confiscating drugs/cash from a child may put them at further risk and planning needs to be considered around their personal safety. Specify how much the debt is, if known.

### **5. Other Relevant Information**

#### **Child/parent's view of risks/safety**

Understanding the child and parents' perspectives are vitally important to help assess what impact this has on their level of safety and whether risks were present but have now reduced.

- Does the child/parent recognise the exploitation risks/concerns?
- Is the parent taking all appropriate protective steps and is this having any impact, or is a lack of action increasing the exploiters access to the child?

#### **Protective/safety measures**

Presence of protective/safety measures may reduce the level of concern about current risks or a lack of these may heighten concern further. Examples:

- Positive relationships with protective adult/s or supporting professionals
- Sustained/access to positive peer relationships
- Involvement in/access to diversionary/positive activities
- Positive engagement with education or employment
- Parental oversight/management of internet
- Social media plan
- Missing action plan
- Direct work
- Community disruption



## Scoring and Professional Judgement

Scoring guidance is detailed within the CERAF.

The score is only a guideline and **your professional judgement is more important**. The information you have gathered in relation to risk indicators, child/parent views and protective/safety factors will assist in forming a narrative around what may be happening to the child and the level of exploitation risk they may be exposed to.

## National Referral Mechanism (NRM) & Trafficking

Human trafficking is an integral process to child exploitation and can include the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person, by means of the threat of or use of force, or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power, for the purpose of exploitation.

The UNHCR (Guidelines 2006, Human trafficking) defines the process as a combination of three basic components:

- 1) **Movement** (including within the UK) - **WHAT**
- 2) Control, through harm/threat of harm or fraud - **HOW**
- 3) For the **purpose of exploitation** – **WHY**

For Child Trafficking we only need to show two elements 1 and 3 above and do not need to prove the means.

It is key for practitioners to ensure that they always consider trafficking as an issue related to child exploitation and act accordingly. Children may be taken from one place to another for exploitation including sexual activity and drug running. Practitioners also need to be aware that CCE and drug running for county lines falls under the forced labour category. This is all covered in the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

If a child meets the test for being trafficked as above, then appropriate safeguarding action must be the first step, followed by completion of a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral.

NRM forms can only be completed by first responders and an updated system is now in place for reporting.

### Digital Referral System now live

The new [digital NRM referral form](#) is available to **all** First Responders- please use this form for all NRM **and** Duty to Notify (DTN) referrals. The old referral system is being phased out and First Responders are requested to start using the new system as soon as possible.

The online form will identify whether someone is a First Responder by verifying their work email address. You will need to complete this verification process to progress with the form. After submitting the form (which will be sent to the Single Competent Authority SCA), you will be sent a link to download a copy.