



Learning Together: Learning from Case Reviews and Audits

How do we use recommendations from case reviews and multi-agency audits to improve our safeguarding of children in Swindon?

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

This short briefing summarises what recent case reviews and multi-agency audits have told us about risk factors and learning for improved practice around CSE. This briefing is aimed anyone who works with children and families in Swindon and provides key findings, recommendations and links to guidance.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of **sexual abuse** where **children** are **sexually exploited** for money, power or status. **Children** may be groomed into believing they are in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs or alcohol. Case reviews highlight that **child sexual exploitation** can be particularly hard for professionals to recognise and respond to – it is important to **exercise professional curiosity** and **ask questions**. Confusion around **children's rights** and their **capacity to consent** to sexual activity means both children and professionals often wrongly view exploitative relationships as consensual. This means that sexual exploitation often goes **unidentified**, and children can be **reluctant** to trust and engage with services.

Keep focus on the need to improve outcomes for the child's daily lived experience and record their voice: For trust to develop & ensure children feel supported to disclose their experiences, they need to be listened to & their experiences accepted & recorded. Victims of CSE may need on-going support to ensure they are protected in the future. **Child Sexual Exploitation is abuse; it is not a 'lifestyle choice'**. The use of inappropriate language to describe children at risk of CSE may judge the child and imply they are to blame. Challenge inappropriate language, labelling and terminology by encouraging alternatives [outlined here](#).

Underage sexual activity, CSE & grooming - the differences: Case reviews found that there is confusion about sexual activity that can mean professionals struggle to distinguish between child abuse, grooming, CSE and/or underage sexual activity. This prevented concerns being identified and reported.

- ❖ **Underage sexual activity;** guidance on underage sexual activity can be found on the [LSCB website](#) and includes a [briefing paper](#) and [practitioner guidance](#)
- ❖ **CSE;** is a type of sexual abuse - [visit the NSPCC website for more information on CSE](#)
- ❖ **Grooming;** is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purpose of sexual abuse, exploitation or trafficking - [visit the NSPCC website for more information on grooming](#)

Children find it difficult to talk about sexual issues: Children say that they are unlikely to disclose CSE due to embarrassment about talking about sexual experiences or fear of or loyalty to perpetrators. Children may lack knowledge or acceptance that they are being exploited and have a lack of trust or fear authorities. Messages from children are that they want professionals, including sexual health nurses and GPs, to ask better questions and be more inquisitive particularly when prescribing contraception or treating STIs. It is vital for professionals to exercise their professional curiosity and not get embarrassed when talking about sexual issues or experiences with children.

It is difficult for a child to see themselves as a victim: Even if a child is unaware, or doesn't accept that they are at risk, professionals still need to be curious and intervene to prevent child abuse. 16-17 year olds are often wrongly viewed as being more in control of their choices and less vulnerable to exploitation, however it is important to remember that 16-17 year olds are still children in need of protection from exploitation.

Professionals in Health Services: Professionals providing any sexual health services (including contraception) should consider the child protection implications of possible abuse or exploitation whenever they become aware of underage sexual activity. The fact that children are engaged in what they view as consensual sexual activity does not mean that they are not being exploited. Case reviews show that professionals need to exercise professional curiosity and ask questions.

Be aware of the warning signs of CSE and grooming: Victims of sexual exploitation may display challenging or offending behaviour, it is important to remember that this is a key indicator of abuse. When dealing with children, practitioners need to see vulnerable children in need of protection rather than focussing on the child's challenging or offending behaviour. Victims of exploitation should not be criminalised, but instead be supported and protected; services need to embed a child-centred approach where children at risk of exploitation are viewed as vulnerable children in need of protection first.

Share any concerns with MASH/Police; it may be part of the bigger picture

- ✓ Under age sexual activity
 - ✓ Sexual health concerns
 - ✓ Mental health problems
 - ✓ Isolation from family and friends
 - ✓ Hanging out with older people/adults
 - ✓ Teenage pregnancy
 - ✓ Criminal activity
 - ✓ Aggressive behaviour
 - ✓ Involvement in abusive relationships
 - ✓ Being overly secretive
 - ✓ Staying out late
 - ✓ Alcohol and drug misuse
 - ✓ Suicide attempts
 - ✓ Older boyfriend or girlfriend
 - ✓ Change in appearance
 - ✓ Going missing
 - ✓ Truancy, exclusion from school
 - ✓ Self-harm
 - ✓ Unexplained gifts, money, mobile phone, drugs or alcohol
- ✓ **Share any safeguarding concerns relating to a child with The Police/MASH: FCP-GCSX@swindon.gcsx.gov.uk / 01793 466903**
- ✓ **Intelligence or any other concerns relating to Child Sexual Exploitation (i.e. a suspicious car or activity) can be shared with The Police by completing The Wiltshire Police Intel Submission Form (visit the [LSCB Website](#) for forms and guidance)**

Managers should seek to understand if the voice of the child has been sought during supervisor oversight: Serious Case Reviews have found that where CSE was identified, professionals did not always receive adequate supervision to provide them with the tools and advice needed to respond or escalate their concerns effectively. The consequences of this was that professional boundaries became blurred as workers felt responsible for trying to keep the children safe without adequate single or multi-agency support. It is essential that frontline professionals receive support, tools, expert advice and supervision to be able to effectively identify and respond to concerns; formally escalating when necessary using the [LSCB Escalation Policy](#). The impact and trauma that staff are subject to when working with such harrowing cases should not be underestimated and managers need to provide adequate support and reflective supervision.

Sharing learning from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) in order to improve safeguarding practice is vital. Swindon LSCB wants to recognise and learn from good practice as well as any take on board any areas for improvement that is regularly commented upon in reviews:

[Brooke SCR](#) – SCR based on a wide ranging police investigation into Child Sexual Exploitation in Bristol.

['Jack' SCR](#) – SCR from Bradford about the online grooming of a teenage boy who was the victim of child sexual exploitation

[Local Support, Training & Resources](#)

The [Swindon LSCB Website](#) provides information and guidance on [Child Sexual Exploitation](#) and links to local multi-agency CSE and Child Protection [training](#).