



North Yorkshire and City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership

# Criminal Exploitation and County Lines

Practice Guidance



# North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Practice Guidance

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<b>Author</b>	Emma Phillips, North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Danielle Johnson, North Yorkshire Children Social Care Detective Inspector Cheryl Quinn Rose Howley, City of York Children Social Care Sara Sherwood, City of York Children Social Care Sophia Lenton-Brooke, City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership Elaine Wylie, Humber and North Yorkshire ICB Andy Dukes, Youth Justice Service

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## Introduction

This guidance has been written in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) which provides statutory guidance regarding the legislative requirements on agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This practice guidance is for practitioners to work in a multi-agency context, and to enable practitioners to increase their awareness and understanding of the risks for children who may be at risk of or experiencing Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).

It has been designed to give agencies clear local guidance in relation to children who may be at risk of CCE, or who may currently be being exploited. It is important that there is a coordinated approach across all agencies when considering the risk to a child, and that the risk of CCE is assessed in all cases. And that if found to be existing at any level, it must be reported and worked with, alongside any other associated risk factors and actions within a child or young person's assessment and plan around that child. The guidance also promotes information sharing across all agencies and a joined up approach to risk reduction, as well as appropriate management oversight of those children vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

## Scope

The government guidance requires agencies to work together to:

- Develop local prevention strategies;
- Identify those at risk of exploitation;
- Take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of particular children and young people who may be criminally exploited;
- Take action against those who are intent on abusing and exploiting children and young people in this way.

## Legislation and Standards

- Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary
- Guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children (DCSF 2009)
- Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines Guidance Home Office: 2018)
- Modern Slavery Act (2015)
- HM Government Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)
- HM Government [Serious Violence Strategy](#) (2018)
- Department for Education: [Keeping Children Safe In Education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#) (2020) Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked (DFE 2009)
- Home Office - [National Referral Mechanism statistics](#) (2020)
- Home Office - [Modern Slavery guidance](#) (2020)
- Office of the Children Commissioner Report Gangs and Groups CDE
- Contextual Safeguarding Network: [Contextual Safeguarding and County Lines](#) (2019)
- Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance (Home Office 2018)
- National Crime Agency: [Intelligence Assessment – County Lines Drugs Supply, Vulnerability and Harm](#) (2018)
- HMICFRS: [‘Both sides of the coin’ County Lines review](#) (2020)
- Ofsted: [Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking and modern slavery: an addendum](#) (2018)
- Children and Young Person’s Missing from home, Education or Care (2014)
- Children and Families Act (2014)
- Children Act (2004)

## Policy Statement

The guidance will provide an overview of:

- Risk indicators to establish if a child is at risk of being criminally exploited;
- The referral process when it is identified a child is at risk of being criminally exploited;
- Contact points for practitioners to receive advice and support;
- Disruption strategies: The impact to children of being criminally exploited.

The practice guidance is aimed at all practitioners who may encounter children and young people who may be at risk of being or may currently be being criminally exploited. The guidance is written in line with the Home Office Guidance published in September 18 around Criminal Exploitation and County Lines (Home Office, 2018).

## Definitions

### Child Criminal Exploitation

Child criminal exploitation involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where children (under 18) receive or are promised 'something' tangible e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, gifts or money or 'something' intangible e.g. affection, respect, status or protection in return for committing a criminal act for the benefit of another individual or group of individuals or be threatened, coerced or intimidated into committing that criminal act.

In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. The child may be being exploited, even if the activity appears consensual and does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. A defining feature of CCE is the lack of choice available to the child either as a result of the child's social/economic/emotional vulnerability and or the violence, coercion, intimidation exerted upon them.

### County lines exploitation

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations.

The UK Government defines county lines as:

*County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.*

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people. It does not just affect large metropolitan areas, as young people are exploited in all communities up and down the country including rural communities. Exploitative adults will recruit and use children and young people in order to exploit them e.g. use them to move drugs and money for them. Children as young as 12 years old and up to 17 years old are recruited, often using social media. They can be exploited by being forced to carry drugs between locations, usually on trains, coaches or via taxis. They are also forced to sell drugs to local users.

A child may become involved in criminal exploitation as a result of desperation or coercion and it can be difficult to identify this form of exploitation. Often the signs of criminal exploitation can be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. Children can wrongly be labelled as actively choosing to take part in criminal behaviour, which can mask the coercion and exploitation. This may lead to professionals falsely perceiving the child as complicit in their abuse. Therefore identification of CCE requires knowledge, skills and professional curiosity in assessing the risk factors and personal circumstances of the individual child, to ensure that the indicators are correctly identified and appropriate support is put in place to protect the child.

The law states that consent is only valid where a child makes an informed choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels that they have no meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they don't comply, they cannot legally consent whatever their age. It is also important to identify that perpetrators of CCE may also themselves be children who are criminal exploited, and that victims of CCE may also be a risk of becoming perpetrators.

The risk to a young person, and their family and friends, as a result of experiencing criminal exploitation can include:

- Physical injuries: risk of serious violence and death
- Emotional and psychological trauma
- Sexual violence: sexual assault, rape, indecent images being taken and shared as part of initiation/vengeance/punishment, internally inserting drugs
- Debt bondage – young person and families being 'in debt' to the exploiters which is used to control the young person
- Neglect and basic needs not being met
- Living in unclean, dangerous and/or unhygienic environments
- Tiredness and sleep deprivation: child is expected to carry out criminal activities over long periods and through the night
- Poor attendance and/or attainment at school/college

NYSCP and CYSCP promotes a multi-agency approach which emphasises the need to work together to:

- **Prevent** by raising awareness of CCE amongst young people, parents, carers and communities, and to work together to provide children and young people with strategies to recognise, avoid, report and exit criminal exploitation at any stage and to remove opportunities for potential perpetrators across the County;
- **Prepare** by providing strong leadership, effective systems, gathering of intelligence and partnership working to tackle CCE, by recognising the problem of the criminal exploitation of children and young people;
- **Protect** by safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, supporting professionals, parents, carers, families and communities who may be at risk of CCE, identifying potential victims, risks, patterns and perpetrators at the earliest opportunity;
- **Pursue** by investigating, disrupting, arresting and prosecuting those who seek to coerce, criminally exploit and abuse children and young people, whilst supporting victims and their families effectively through the criminal justice system.

### How common is child criminal exploitation and county lines?

County lines activity typically involves gangs or organised crime groups (OCGs) from a large urban area travelling to small locations (often rural towns/village/coastal areas) to sell class A drugs. The groups tend to communicate with drugs users via mobile phones which are referred to as the 'line'. The most common drugs involved are usually heroin and cocaine (crack and powder), but also MDMA, cannabis, amphetamines and spice.

It is difficult to establish the current number of 'lines' operating in the UK. However the most recent estimate from the National Crime Agency is that there are over [1000 different county lines](#) across England and Wales although the actual figure may well be higher. They believe that majority of those 'lines' involve the exploitation of multiple young or otherwise vulnerable people.

Traditionally this line is kept away from the area where the drugs are being sold, and a relay system is used to contact those acting as dealers in the rural location. Those who are exploiting young people will often travel between the urban and county locations on a regular basis to deliver drugs and collect money. They tend to use a local property, often belonging to a vulnerable person, as a base for their activities (referred to as 'cuckooing'). They often use violence, force or coercion. The National Crime Agency has also identified examples where perpetrators have also used apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks (NCA, 2017). Perpetrators may use violence to threaten children and young people when recruiting them, and may also violently assault children and young people working for them if they find their drugs or money are missing. Weapons such as firearms, knives, bats and acid are sometimes used to make violent threats. They may also include sexual violence and sexual exploitation.

Gangs will typically exploit children to deliver drugs from urban to country locations using intimidation, violence, debt bondage and/or grooming. County line networks may often bring their own operatives into the rural marketplace in pairs, they will then stay for a month or so before returning home and being replaced by others. This is done to avoid police detection and familiarity with these operatives.

Although the National Crime Agency believe that class A drugs continue to be the main driver for this form of criminality, sexual exploitation has also been highlighted as a significant risk factor associated with county lines. It can be used as a means of control/exploitation for the gratification of perpetrators, or even as a commodity to be sold. Grooming is also often found in local communal areas such as parks etc. where potential victims can be given alcohol and drugs to establish their 'relationship'. Groups can then exploit them sexually and coerce them to take and deal drugs.

The amount of money that can be obtained from a county line varies significantly depending on the size of the market and the level of competition. However the National Crime Agency reports that a typical line can make in the region of £3,000 per day with some more prominent lines possibly making in excess of £5,000 per day.

### **What is the local picture of Criminal Exploitation and County Lines in York and North Yorkshire?**

Nationally there has been a significant increase in the number of NRM referrals regarding potential child victims of Criminal Exploitation and County Lines. This increase accounted for approximately 40% of all NRM referrals submitted across the country in the past 12 months.

This increase has been mirrored across North Yorkshire and York as awareness and recognition of County Lines and CCE has been raised across partners and professional workers. In 2018, 48 out of 71 potential victims of Modern Slavery identified across North Yorkshire were children subject to County Lines and Criminal Exploitation. This exploitation covers the length and breadth of the County with reports in Skipton, Harrogate, Ripon, York, Northallerton, Selby and Scarborough.

The typical age of a child identified in North Yorkshire is 15-16 years old but potential victims as young as 13 years old have also been identified. The vast majority pertain to drug dealing/supply.

Like other rural counties, North Yorkshire is impacted upon by County Lines with Scarborough, York and Harrogate/Ripon in particular being identified as 'importing'

locations. In turn, cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham have been identified as “exporting” locations. At the present time, somewhere between 10 -15 Organised Crime Groups have been identified as operating within North Yorkshire.

### How children and young people become involved in Child Criminal Exploitation

Children and young people can be vulnerable to Criminal Exploitation due to their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources as outlined in the definition provided above, as well as in some cases simply just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. However there are certain vulnerabilities and indicators that may make children and young people more vulnerable to being targeted for exploitation. This is often linked to the environments within which they live. This is often referred to as contextual safeguarding and links not only to a child or young person’s home environment, but also to their peer network, their school/educational environment and/or the neighbourhood within which they live. Figure 1 below taken from Firmin (2013:47) outlines how each of these environments fit within the world the child or young person operates within.

Figure 1 – Contexts of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability

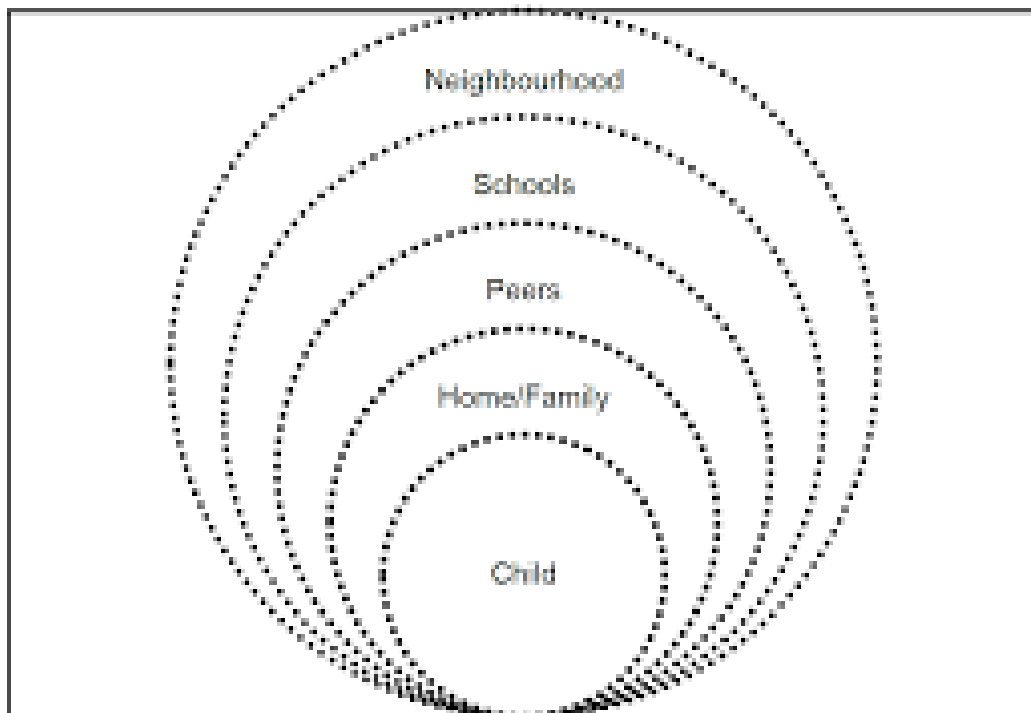


Figure 1: Contexts of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability( Firmin 2013:47)

There are a number of vulnerability factors that could make a child or young person vulnerable at any level - adapted from:

- [www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Exploitation%20Toolkit.pdf](http://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Exploitation%20Toolkit.pdf)

**Child** – All children can be vulnerable to exploitation however this vulnerability may increase if a child is looked after, has a learning disability, is exposed to substance misuse or has mental health problems.

**Home/Family Environment** – A child may be vulnerable to being targeted if they are subject to neglect/abuse within their family home and/or if they are exposed to domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, parents/guardians experiencing poor mental health,



poverty, homelessness/lack of stable accommodation and/or lack of a positive relationship with a protective and nurturing adult

**Peers** – A child or young person may be more vulnerable to being targeted for exploitation if they are exposed to other young people who are known to be exploited or others experiencing peer on peer abuse.

**Schools** – A child may be vulnerable if they have been excluded from school and/or are not in formal education, training or employment

**Neighbourhood** – A child or young person may be vulnerable to exploitation if the neighbourhood in which they live or socialise in exposes them to violence and/or deprivation.

The exploitation of children rarely occurs in isolation and there can be a number of issues occurring with a child or young person's life that may make them susceptible to criminal exploitation. As such this practice guidance should be read in conjunction with the practice guidance for Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Child Sexual Exploitation.

Children rarely self-report child criminal exploitation so it is important that practitioners are aware of potential indicators of risk, including:

- Acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones etc. without plausible explanation;
- Gang-association and/or isolation from peers/social networks;
- Exclusion or unexplained absences from school, college or work;
- Leaving home/care without explanation and persistently going missing or returning late, and/or being found in areas away from home.
- Suspicion of physical assault/unexplained injuries;
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls or having multiple handsets;
- Returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol, increasing drug use or being found to have large amounts of drugs on them;
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Evidence of/suspicions of physical or sexual assault;
- Relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups/arrested with older individuals
- Multiple callers (unknown adults or peers);
- Concerning use of internet or other social media;
- Increasing secretiveness around behaviours; and
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results/performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Criminal behaviour

Professionals should be particularly aware of two characteristic offending typologies which are often associated with criminal exploitation –

**Distributor or courier role** - Usually this arises where vulnerable young people from urban areas are exploited by gangs to deliver drugs in an outlying or rural area. These young people will most commonly be arrested in possession of significant amounts of drugs and/or cash, and often armed with large knives or other offensive weapons. Although less commonly seen, it is also possible that a child from North Yorkshire may be exploited in this way, either as a local operative or for transporting drugs to other areas. The possession of substantial drugs and/or cash, usually with weapons, is a key sign of involvement in organised criminal distribution. The presence of a suspected controlling adult near the place of arrest is also highly significant.

**Purchaser or debtor role** - These will usually be local young people, who are offending to meet obligations to a County Lines gang, and facing severe reprisal if they fail to pay. Typical offending might include systematic high-value shop thefts, burglary offences or theft of high value bicycles. Young people carrying out these types of offences may be alone, or in small groups of two or three. The immediate proximity of a controlling adult is less common, but professional curiosity should explore how the stolen goods are being 'fenced' into cash. One local 'fence' may facilitate a network of acquisitive crime involving many children.

We also know that Organised Crime Groups will change and adapt their business model in how they exploit children either to avoid detection by law enforcement agencies and/or to respond to environmental changes. For example, there was evidence during the COVID-19 pandemic of county lines gangs recruiting children close to home so that they were not reported missing, or would not cause suspicion regarding their whereabouts. We also are aware that OCGs may well use girls to run drugs as professionals will often associate county lines with boys, again to avoid detection. Furthermore, as law enforcement improve disruption on transport links such as train lines etc. OCGs will often change their tactics to enable them to continue to exploit children without being identified ([Crest, 2020](#)).

## Barriers to Engagement

There may be many factors that could influence how a child or young person engages with interventions and professionals who may become aware of the risk of criminal exploitation. A few barriers to consider include:

- Child criminal exploitation is not being recognised and responded to as a safeguarding concern.
- Professionals may view criminal exploitation as a lifestyle choice, which can make a child or young person feel blamed for their exploitation, or reinforce a feeling of an untrue identity, e.g. of autonomous drug dealer
- Services are not being consistent or persistent in their approach
- Children or young people are fearful of repercussions towards themselves, friends or family if they are seen to be engaging with professionals
- The child or young person may still be being controlled by exploiters and have no ability or power to exit
- Even if the police are involved, the child or young person still may not feel safe or protected from repercussions
- The child or young person may have distrust in services such as police and social care
- The child or young person may be fearful of getting into trouble with the police, or be in breach of a court order
- Children or young people who have experienced previous abuse, fractured attachments and trauma can often hold a deep mistrust of adults and services
- The child or young person may be made to feel that they are 'in debt' to perpetrators and/or reliant on the 'exchange' i.e. money/substances/ this is often referred to as 'debt bondage'.
- The child or young person can become withdrawn from their support network due to the grooming process and unable to access services

- The child or young person may have experienced multiple professionals talking about concerns with them, which again could lead a young person feeling frustrated or unable to engage
- The child or young person may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their experiences.

It is also important to remember that a child or young person might not relate to their experience as being abusive or exploitative:

- They may feel a sense of loyalty and brotherhood to the exploiters and they may feel emotionally fulfilled in a way they haven't before experienced from parents, carers or professionals
- The child or young person may feel that they have gained 'friends' or 'family' and that these people care for him or her.
- The child or young person may be receiving money or rewards that they have not had access to previously, or the money may be supporting their family to cover basic needs
- The child or young person may feel a sense of status and power that they haven't had before. They may see themselves as an autonomous drug dealer, rather than a victim of exploitation at the bottom of a large organised crime structure.

## Child Criminal Exploitation Examples

There are many different ways in which children who may be at risk may come the notice of professionals. The examples below are some scenarios that may raise professionals concerns that a child could be a risk of CCE:

### Example 1

Child A has started to disengage with their education. They have started to get into trouble at school and they are refusing to follow simple instructions. If they are given detentions after school they then escalate quickly into emotional crisis and their aggressive behavioural response appears to be an over-reaction to a simple consequence. They have started missing the odd day from school with no real reason given for their absence. Staff have noticed that they are often late into school. When they are at school staff have noticed that they appear hyper vigilant and nervous throughout the day. They often comment about friends they may have, who "look out for them" or who "have their back" when they are out of school. They have recently begun to get into trouble more often for looking at/using their phone during lessons. They become distressed and react very strongly if asked to hand in their phone or if the phone is confiscated.

### Example 2

Child B has recently become very quiet. They don't have a strong friendship group but has recently been seen at break times and lunchtimes with other pupils who are known to present challenging behaviours in school and in the community. A couple of staff have passed brief comments stating they weren't aware that Child B was friends with a different group and concern at who Child B has been hanging about with at break times. In 1-1 discussions with a trusted adult, Child B talks about not being liked and not having real friends. It is after this that staff notice Child B with new items e.g. new phone, new pencil case, new jacket etc. When asked, Child B has stated a friend has loaned it to them. It is known that the friend Child B is referring to is an adult and known in the community for criminal behaviour etc.

**Example 3**

Through the night / early hours of the morning on Sunday / Monday, Child C accessed a bottle of rum from their foster carers home and drank half a bottle of it whilst the carers were asleep and was subsequently sick all over her room. She informed the carers of this the next day and they helped her to clean the room and reassured her she wasn't going to get into trouble for this. The social worker visited the home the following day and during the visit Child C was speaking of being very low in mood and thinking of harming herself, so the CAMHS crisis team were called. They visited last night and also visited again today.

During this visit Child C has disclosed to the Social Worker and foster carer that a man was sending her money via paypal / amazon vouchers in exchange for her sending pictures of her face for fraud purposes. She has said this man is 17 and from Norway, but has been sending her money in dollars and she showed a picture of the lower part of this man's face. He has told her that he knows how to access people's bank accounts / computers etc. and seems to be giving this information to her to make her feel scared of him.

**Example 4**

Child D is 15 years old and frequently runs away from home however due to neglect within the household, many of these missing episodes go unreported to police and social care. His school attendance has recently deteriorated and is no longer in main stream education. He has been in trouble with the police for a number of minor offences (criminal damage, shop theft, anti-social behaviour), but does not have any drug related arrests/convictions. Recently Child D has been found 'out of area' at the home of a known drug user and no adequate explanation was offered. Recent intelligence suggests that Child D is dealing cannabis. Child D has also been stopped and searched by the Police last week and was found to be in possession of a lock knife. When challenged, child D stated that he needed it for 'protection' but refused to elaborate any further.

**Example 5**

Child E is a 14 year old girl who presented to the Minor Injuries Unit at 18.00 on a Wednesday evening with a knife wound to her thigh. She stated that this was an accidental injury caused by her dropping a knife whilst cooking. The wound required suturing. Child E is otherwise well. She did disclose she is a regular cannabis user, but did not appear under the influence at the time. She was accompanied to the Unit by an older man, who looked to be about 20/21 years old. The adult male stated that Child E was his friend and she was staying with him for a few days as she lived out of this area. During the consultation, it was observed that Child E had two mobile phones, one of which continually received messages. Child E was very quiet and the older adult male does most of the talking.

## Framework for Decision Making

All agencies working within NYSCP and CYSCP have a responsibility to address the needs of children and young people in their area. Effective joint working provides the framework in which children's needs can be met across the spectrum.

Framework for decision making or Threshold Document can help to identify the level of need for the children or young person who may be at risk of or experiencing CCE. It is

also intended to help identify how children’s needs might be met across universal, early help, targeted prevention and intensive/acute services.

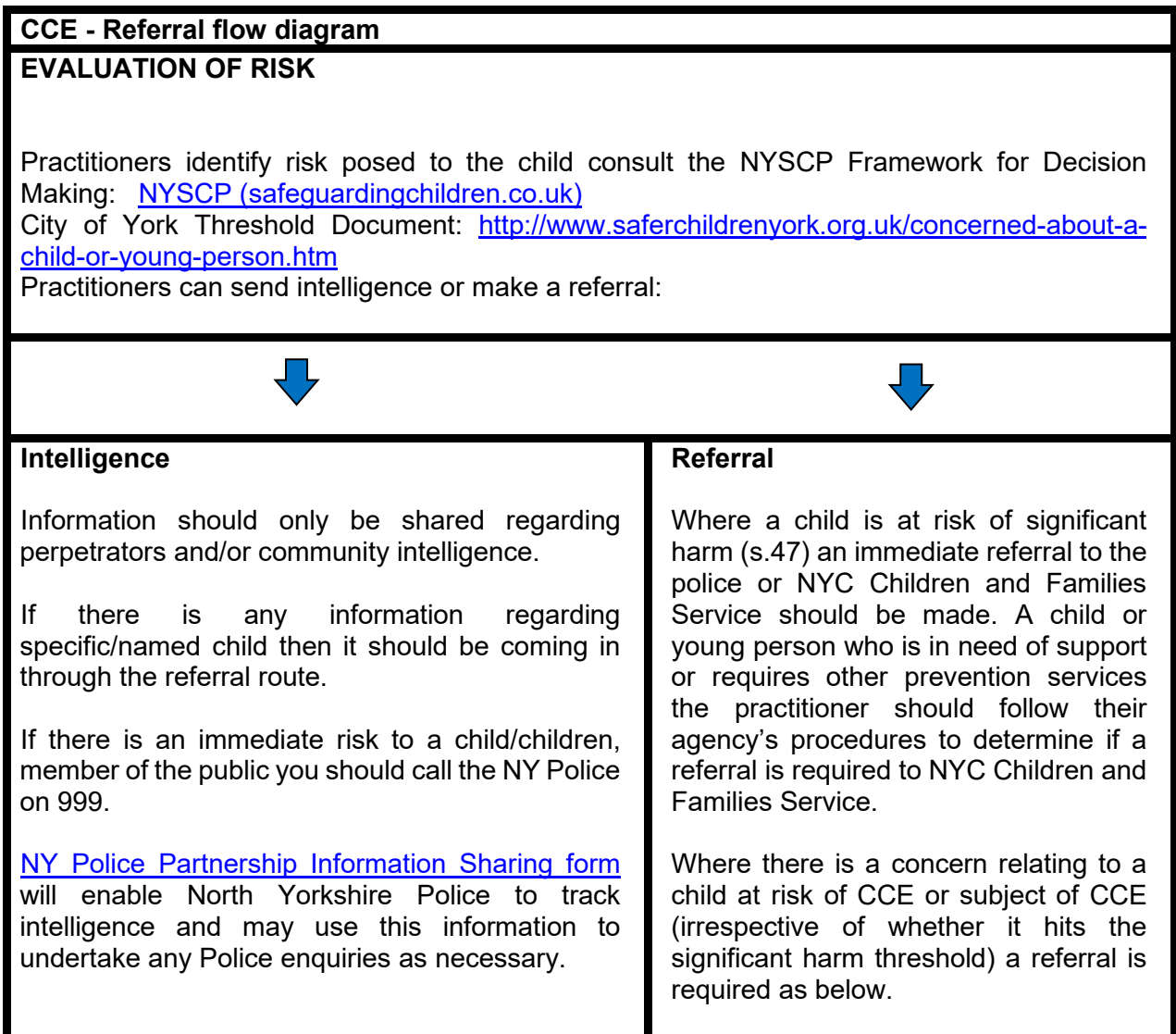
North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Framework for Decision Making can be accessed by visiting: [NYSCP \(safeguardingchildren.co.uk\)](http://www.nyscp.org.uk)

City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership Threshold Document can be accessed by visiting:  
<http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/concerned-about-a-child-or-young-person.htm>

**Process**

If you are worried about a child or a young person under the age of 18, you should contact the NYC Children and Families Service or York Children Social Care. If your concern is outside of normal office hours, you should contact the Emergency Duty Team 0300 131 2 131

In an emergency, always ring 999  
 You should call 101 to report crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response.



Information being shared internally within North Yorkshire Police, follow internal procedures and pass to the Vulnerability Assessment team:

[intelligenceunit@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk](mailto:intelligenceunit@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk)

Discuss the concerns with the designated safeguarding lead and determine if a referral is required to:

NYC Children and Families Service  
T: 0300 131 2 131

E: [social.care@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:social.care@northyorks.gov.uk)  
[Referral Form to Children and Families Service](#)

[www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/about-us/worried-about-a-child/](http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/about-us/worried-about-a-child/)

York Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

T: 01904 551900

E: [mash@york.gov.uk](mailto:mash@york.gov.uk)

NYC MAST/York MASH will screen the referral and will determine the level of support and next steps required for the referral.

Following the referral, a thorough risk assessment will be undertaken by Children and Families Service in conjunction with partners.

## National Referral Mechanism

The NRM is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring that they receive appropriate support. It is also the mechanism through which the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) collect data about victims. The information contributes to building a clearer picture about the scope of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK.

The NRM was introduced in 2009 to meet the UK's obligations under the Council of European Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. At the core of every country's NRM is the process of locating and identifying "potential victims of trafficking". The duty to refer children into the NRM is made by '[first responders](#)' who include organisations such as Local Authority, Police and NSPCC where they suspect a child may have been subject to Modern Slavery or Human Trafficking. Modern Slavery is a complex crime and can involve multiple forms of exploitation. It encompasses:

- **Human Trafficking** which is defined as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons (including children) by means of threat, force or coercion for the purpose of sexual or commercial sexual exploitation or domestic servitude' (United Nations). Of note, children may be trafficked into the UK from abroad, but children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another.  
Or
- **Slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour** which is the condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the rights of ownership are exercised. People are treated as commodities and exploited for criminal gain. It is a global crime which transcends age, gender, ethnicity, and borders. Victims of modern slavery may have been brought legally or illegally from overseas, or they may be British citizens living in the United Kingdom. Unaccompanied and/or intentionally displaced children are at particular risk.

Some child victims may not recognise that they are being trafficked or exploited. They may feel they have chosen or consented to elements of their exploitation, or accepted it as part of their situation. However a child cannot give consent to be harmfully exploited by others, so this has no effect upon our action to safeguard those children.

North Yorkshire and City of York NRM Panel

North Yorkshire and City of York are currently taking part in a pilot of devolved decision making, which means that making the decision about whether a child has been subjected to modern slavery or human trafficking sits with the local decision making multi-agency NRM panel. The NRM Panel is a weekly virtual panel made up of senior managers from a number of key agencies including North Yorkshire Police, Children Social Care, Youth Justice Services, Health and the [Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service](#).

The aim of the twice-weekly virtual panel is to ensure there is consistent multi-agency decision-making and robust planning in respect of children who may be subjected to Modern Slavery.

The panel may hear the information surrounding what has happened to a child at three points:

1. **Pre – Screen** – A referral can be made into the panel a first responder concerned that a child may be subject to modern slavery. The panel will consider the details and make a decision as to whether a referral should be submitted to the Single Competent Authority (SCA) which is part of the Home Office. The referrer will then be supported by the NRM Panel Coordinator submit the referral to the SCA online.
2. **Reasonable Grounds** Once the SCA have received the referral, they will send it back to the NRM panel. Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2018) requires two decisions to be made. The first is a Reasonable Grounds (RG) decision where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the individual may be a victim.
3. **Conclusive Grounds** the second decision the panel is required to make is a Conclusive Grounds (CG) decision as to whether, on the balance of probabilities, a child is a victim of modern slavery. If sufficient information is known at the Reasonable Grounds Decision meeting, both decisions can be made at the same time. If there is not and further information is needed, a further meeting will be scheduled to make the final CG decision. Both decisions have to be made no later than 45 days from the date the panel received the referral from the SCA\*.

\*Decisions made by the panel will be subject to Quality Assurance checks by the SCA

Further information about the NRM Panel can be found through our One Minute Guides on:

- [Modern Slavery and the National Referral Mechanism](#)
- [Submitting a Referral to the National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\) for a child](#)
- [Trafficking & the NRM](#)

If you are a first responder<sup>1</sup> and you suspect you have a child who may have been victim of modern slavery you should speak to your manager and then contact the NRM Coordinator via email at [NRM@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:NRM@northyorks.gov.uk). Once a referral has been submitted to

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<sup>1</sup> The list of First Responders can be found [here](#)

the NRM, a child may not be found subject to modern slavery and human trafficking, thus no further action will be taken. However, where this is not the case further outcomes are:

### Stage 1 – The Reasonable Grounds decision:

If the NRM Panel reaches a '**Reasonable Grounds**' decision this means that the panel believe that:

"I suspect but cannot prove that the person is a victim of Human Trafficking, Slavery, Servitude and Forced or Compulsory Labour"

If a '**Positive Reasonable Grounds**' decision is reached, there is enough information to investigate.

Once a decision has been made, the police force in the area where the crime has been committed will be contacted by the SCA and a crime will be recorded and investigated by the police to establish, whether or not the child is the victim of modern slavery.

(Remember: the NRM runs alongside established safeguarding processes, it does not replace them).

The investigating officer will be provided with the contact details of the person who submitted the notification and is expected to liaise with them around how to best engage the young person and obtain any updates that might be helpful for the investigation.

### Stage 2 – Conclusive Grounds Decision

If the panel make a Conclusive Grounds decision, it is decided that '*on the balance of probabilities*', there is sufficient information to decide that the individual is a victim of modern slavery.

A Conclusive Grounds decision provides official recognition (based on the civil burden of proof), that a child is/was a victim of exploitation at that '**moment of time**'. It does not confer any other automatic rights or benefits.

## Information Sharing

The NYSCP, CYSCP and their partners have adopted the [Joint Information Sharing Protocol](#) which sets out the guidance of when information can be passed on from relevant agencies relating to a child or young person.

The information within the North Yorkshire Police Information Form (stage 3) can be shared within the following Acts: the 'Crime and Disorder Act 1989' (prevention and detection of crime); and, the 'Data Protection Act 1988' (prevention and detection of crime and/or apprehension of offenders; and, protection of personal data). Under the provisions in the above acts, it is not necessary to obtain consent to share relevant information.

## Key Principles

The key principles should be:

- A child-centred approach which is focused on the child's needs, including consideration of children with particular needs or sensitivities, and the fact that children do not always acknowledge what may be an exploitative or abusive situation;
- A proactive approach which is focused on prevention, early identification and intervention as well as disrupting activity and prosecuting perpetrators;



- Parenting, family life, and services that take account of family circumstances in deciding how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people;
- The rights of children and young people to be safeguarded from sexual exploitation just as agencies have duties in respect of safeguarding and promoting welfare;
- An integrated approach as detailed within Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) Within this, sexual exploitation requires a three-pronged approach tackling prevention, protection and prosecution;
- A shared responsibility of effective joint working between different agencies and professionals underpinned by a strong commitment from managers who understand the sexual exploitation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

I need further advice and guidance, who do I contact?

As a practitioner, if you are unsure and would like further advice or guidance, the first step is to approach your line manager or your designated safeguarding lead. Alternatively, you can contact either:

North Yorkshire Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST)

T: 0300 131 2 131

E: [social.care@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:social.care@northyorks.gov.uk)

Referral Form: [Referral Form to Children and Families Service](#)

North Yorkshire Police

Telephone 101

York Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

T: 01904 551900

E: [mash@york.gov.uk](mailto:mash@york.gov.uk)

Referral form <http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/concerned-about-a-child-or-young-person.htm>

Q: I have just heard something in passing and am not sure if it is relevant?

**A:** Any information should be passed on to the Police via the [NY Police Partnership Information Sharing form](#)

It may be that it does not relate to any particular individual but just a comment relating to a place, people in a car or shop that is providing alcohol or where individuals of concern appear to be congregating. It could prove valuable in identifying a location, a perpetrator or other potential victims and help the police take disruptive and pre-emptive action to remove any specific threat.

Q: I am concerned that if I identify someone at risk they will not be happy with my actions and it may jeopardise my relationship and trust with them?

**A:** It is also your duty of care to share this information with the key agencies in order to protect the child or young person.

Q: I am concerned that if I flag someone as being at risk of CCE that this will remain on their file:

**A:** A child or young person's risk assessment should be reviewed at appropriate intervals to determine if they have the accurate risk category assigned to their case. The appropriate CEE risk will be flagged on the Children and Families Service case management system. As part of the step up / step down procedures and case closure process, the child or young person will be assessed and if they are no longer at risk of CCE, the CCE risk flag will be removed from the system/s

**Q:** Do you have a video I can use for training/awareness raising around becoming a victim of CCE?

**A:** Yes, North Yorkshire have a video based on a real life experience filmed in North Yorkshire. They can be accessed via:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4\\_fYs3lwl&t=16s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4_fYs3lwl&t=16s)

<https://vimeo.com/291459306>

Useful Numbers	
NYC Multi Agency Screening Team	0300 131 2 131 <a href="mailto:Social.care@northyorks.gov.uk">Social.care@northyorks.gov.uk</a>
Emergency Duty Team (out of office hours)	0300 131 2 131
York Children Social Care	01904 551900 <a href="mailto:childrensfrontdoor@york.gov.uk">childrensfrontdoor@york.gov.uk</a>
North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership	01609 535187 <a href="http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk">www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk</a>
York Safeguarding Children Partnership	<a href="http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/">http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk/</a>
Police Vulnerability Assessment Team	<a href="mailto:intelligenceunit@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk">intelligenceunit@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk</a> 01609 643162
North Yorkshire Police	Emergency 999, Non-Emergency 101
Sexual Assault Referral Centre	01904 669339
NSPCC Child Protection Helpline	0808 800 5000
ChildLine	0800 1111
Missing People Helpline	0808 800 7070
Rape and Abuse Line	0808 800 0123 (answered by women every evening)
NHS Direct Health Advice	111
Supporting Victims	01904 669 276 <a href="mailto:help@supportingvictims.org">help@supportingvictims.org</a>
Domestic Abuse Support	03000 90 90
Drug and Alcohol Advisory Services (FRANK)	0800 776600
Crimestoppers	0800 555111 <a href="http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org">www.crimestoppers-uk.org</a>

Abianda  Abianda is a social enterprise that works with young women affected by gangs.	020 76860520 Email: <a href="mailto:hello@abianda.com">hello@abianda.com</a> <a href="http://www.abianda.com">www.abianda.com</a>
Catch-22	<a href="http://www.catch-22.org.uk/child-criminal-exploitation">www.catch-22.org.uk/child-criminal-exploitation</a>
North Yorkshire CCE Video	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4_fYs3lwl&amp;t=16s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4_fYs3lwl&amp;t=16s</a> <a href="https://vimeo.com/291459306">https://vimeo.com/291459306</a>
St Giles Trust	<a href="http://Home - St Giles (stgilestrust.org.uk)">Home - St Giles (stgilestrust.org.uk)</a>

### Useful Websites

Child Exploitation Online Protection (CEOP)	<a href="http://www.ceop.police.uk">www.ceop.police.uk</a>
CSE Police and Prevention	Child and Young People Trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation in relation to county lines: A Toolkit for Professionals  <a href="https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Exploitation%20Toolkit.pdf">https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Exploitation%20Toolkit.pdf</a>
National Crime Agency (NCA)	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/county-lines-criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults">https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/county-lines-criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults</a>  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-violence-and-exploitation">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-violence-and-exploitation</a>
National Working Group (NWG)	<a href="http://www.nwgnetwork.org">http://www.nwgnetwork.org</a>
National Referral Mechanism	<a href="http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism">http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism</a>  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms</a>

### Glossary of Terms

Term	Meaning
CIN	Child in Need
S47	Section 47 of the 'Children Act 1989' (indicative of concerns about significant harm)
MAST	Multi Agency Screening Team
CP	Child Protection
Disruption	Tactics used to divert or stop perpetrators exploiting young people where there is little or no evidence to prosecute
Gang	Organised groups with an element of status, membership and criminality or 2 or more young people involved in delinquent peer groups.
Hot spot	Specific areas, streets or houses used to target young people

Information Sharing Form	Template for sharing information about risks to Children and Young People which will inform multi-agency responses and intelligence gathering / Police Problem Profiling
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
NYSCP	North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
CYSCP	City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership
Perpetrator	Any person who poses a risk or commits crimes against a young person
Risk Indicator	Common or known signs of child sexual exploitation and/or child criminal exploitation
Cuckooing	The term used to describe a tactic used by drug dealers where they use threats and violence to take over the homes of vulnerable people to store and sell drugs. Commonly, drug users are targeted and offered 'free' drugs in exchange.
Going Country	This is the most popular term that describes county lines activity. It can also mean the act of travelling to another city/town to deliver drugs or money.
Trapping	The act of selling drugs .Trapping can refer to the act of moving drugs from one town to another or the act of selling drugs in one.
Trap House	A building used as a base from where drugs are sold (or sometimes manufactured). These houses are usually occupied by someone (usually an adult, but sometimes young people are forced to stay in a trap house).
Trapline	This refers to when someone owns a mobile phone specifically for the purpose of running and selling drugs
Taxing	Is a newly reported term which describes the infliction of violence in order to obtain control i.e. the marking or injuring of a gang member who has done wrong, as a show of strength to others.
Debt bondage	Refers to the creation of a drugs debt which the victim has to pay off.
TAF	Team around the Family
Trafficking	The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs