



Suffolk  
Safeguarding  
Partnership

# **CSE Toolkit: Indicators of Possible Sexual Exploitation**

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## Risk Assessment Framework

This framework is designed to enable practitioners to reach a reasonable working conclusion about whether their concerns should be regarded as indicating a low, medium, or high risk of sexual exploitation. It can be used as a basic tool to evaluate a concern at a point of referral, or as a basis for a more complex assessment. It should be noted that this toolkit is an initial screening process and a starting point to aid decision making. It is NOT a fail-safe and you should always exercise professional judgement and seek a reflective conversation with your line manager or safeguarding lead.

Any child who appears to be at medium or high risk should be considered a possibility for 'Child in Need', and appropriate guidance must be followed. The presence of any one "high risk" indicator should lead to further and more detailed evaluation of risks and issues for the child and include action as required by Suffolk's Child in Need and/or Child Protection guidance (as appropriate). Suffolk's guidance regarding Children in Need is available at [www.suffolkscb.org.uk](http://www.suffolkscb.org.uk)

*The framework should be used flexibly to take account of each child's individuality, the uniqueness of their circumstances and the changes that may occur for them over time.*

*Risk assessment is a matter of professional judgement and careful evaluation of all the factors and issues- a considered 'weighting' of the strengths and the challenges-and cannot be done simply based on counting ticks in boxes.*

## Factors That May Indicate Risk of Sexual Exploitation:

All the factors in this list are associated with sexual exploitation but no single factor in this list is indicative. If any of these factors are present, consideration should be given to the possibility that the child is either:

***already at risk*** in terms of actual exploitation, coercion, and abuse through, for example, the exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc.

or

***is particularly vulnerable*** to being coerced or controlled by exploitative others.

## High Risk Indicators

Each indicator strongly suggests the possibility that that sexual exploitation of the child by a coercive 'other', (or 'others') has occurred over a period of time, (and may well be continuing at the time any assessment of risk is being considered).

***Such a premise should be held as likely, at least until a more detailed evaluation indicates that this is not the case.***

Children often don't realise that they are being coerced or exploited: in other cases, they do realise, but feel unable to tell anyone, for fear of recrimination by the perpetrator.

<b>LOW Indicators</b>	Current or during the past 6 months	Over 6 months ago
Break down or risk of breakdown in relationship with parent's carers/family		
Sudden change of friendship groups		
Whereabouts unclear or unknown (day and/or night)		
Absence/exclusion from school or not engaged in school/college/training/work		
Experimenting with drugs or alcohol		
Chronic levels of low self-esteem/low mood/self harming/suicide attempts/eating disorders		
Unaccounted for monies or goods		
Lack of awareness and/or understanding of being safe		
Doing social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of funding		
Association with other young people at risk of sexual exploitation or who are being sexually exploited		

<b>MEDIUM Indicators</b>	Current or during the past 6 months	Over 6 months ago
Repeat offending behaviour including association with gang members		
Demonstrating age inappropriate sexual knowledge		
Changes in behaviour (extreme secretiveness, challenging behaviour, aggression)		
Use of a mobile phone which causes concern including sexting to unknown people/multiple phones/sims		
Unsafe use of the internet including sharing indecent images		
Change of appearance, leaving home in clothing unusual for individual child/young person		
Physical injuries (external/internal) without clear explanation		
Sexual offending behaviour		
Has been sexually assaulted		

<b>HIGH Indicators</b>	Current or during the past 6 months	Over 6 months ago
Disclosure of physical/sexual assault including withdrawal of allegation		
Offering to have sex for money then running off before sex takes place		
Have multiple sexual transmitted infections/miscarriages/terminations		
Groomed/abuse via the internet or mobile technology including forming relationships with unknown others via social media		
Forms friendships/associations with older teens/adults (online and/or in the community)		
Access to premises not known to parent/carer and/or being taken to hotels, clubs, resorts, holiday accommodation		
Entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults		
Frequenting areas known for risky activities		
Unexplained amounts of money, clothes, mobile phones or other items		
Going missing and being found in areas where child has unknown links and child refuses to explain where or who they have been with.		
Street homelessness		

<b>Additional Factors</b>	Comment
Witnessing/experiencing domestic violence	
Children and young people "Looked After"	
Substance misuse by parents/carers	
Physical/learning disabilities/difficulties, special needs, or mental health issues	
Homophobia	
Failure/fracturing of parental relationships. Parental conflict	
A death, loss, or illness of a significant person in the child's life	
Financially unsupported	
History of neglect including sexual/emotional/physical abuse	
Some form of family conflict	
Parent/carer currently/historically involved in sex work	
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	
Other (please specify)	

<b>Total LOW</b>	
<b>Total MEDIUM</b>	
<b>Total HIGH</b>	

## Thresholds and Appropriate Intervention

Sexual exploitation is abuse, and sexually exploited children should be treated as victims of abuse. Children do not make informed choices to enter or remain in sexual exploitation, but do so because of manipulation, coercion fear or violence.

A child under the age of 13 is not legally able to consent to sexual activity (sexual Offences Act 2003) Sexual intercourse (penetration by the penis of the vagina, mouth or anus) with a child under the age of 13 is treated as statutory rape.

For young people between the ages of 13 and 16 years, the Act reinforces that whilst mutually agreed, non-exploitative sexual activity between teenagers does take place and that often no harm comes from it, the age of consent remains at 16 (or 18 when the other person holds a position of trust).

### Low Risk

A vulnerable child or young person, who is at risk of being targeted and groomed for sexual exploitation.

#### Child or Young Person presenting with 1 to 4 indicators

This child or young person requires intervention by any professional, parent or carer who has a good relationship with them to carry out healthy relationships and rights work. **Depending on the indicators they present with**, they will also require at least some basic awareness raising work on CSE, sexual health, risk challenging behaviours and consequences. If there is a person/s posing a risk to the child, ensure they are disrupted and that information about them is recorded and passed to the appropriate agency.

Procedure:

- Ensure that this child or young person is listed on file as 'At risk of CSE'.
- Carry out basic intervention work (as above) at the earliest opportunity and at the child's comprehension level. Review/revisit those steps through the work with the child.
- Use the MASH Professionals Consultation Line for advice and support.  
(Telephone:0345 606 1499)
- Use this tool at least every four to six weeks to assess changes to risk levels for the young person until they are safe or the risk is sufficiently reduced.
- If risk levels are escalating, follow procedures below for Medium or High Risk cases.

## Medium Risk

A child or young person who appears to be targeted for opportunistic abuse through the exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc. Coercion and control are highly likely to be significant factors.

### Child or young person presenting with more than 5 indicators

This child or young person requires more intensive assessment and 1-1 support. If they present immediately with primarily medium risk indicators, the interventions outlined above for Low Risk should be completed, along with more intensive work on CSE, grooming, increasing the child's ability to make confident positive choices about safety and contingency planning. Work is also likely to be required on any additional vulnerability factors identified, alongside work with the child's family, carers, siblings, and peers, to both enable and enhance awareness and resilience.

Practitioners are encouraged to seek the views and observations of professional colleagues alongside the child and her/his family in framing a coherent and supportive plan, and to revisit and review this plan regularly.

Should levels of risk increase, or if new concerns become known, you are encouraged to consult the MASH Professionals Consultation Line (0345 606 1499) for support and advice re next steps towards referral via Customer First.

If the child or young person is already open to Social Care, assessments will be updated and, if required, a strategy threshold discussion and S47 enquiry undertaken.

## High Risk

A child or young person who is either **already** experiencing sexual exploitation and coercive control or whose heightened vulnerability places them **at escalated risk** of such approaches.

Child or young person presenting with several indicators from all categories and 1 or more high risk indicator/s.

Refer to the MASH via Customer First for a strategy threshold discussion and/or allocation for a Social Work Assessment and coordinated intensive support of the child/ young person and their family.

If the child or young person is already open to Social Care, assessments are to be updated and if required, a strategy threshold discussion and S47 enquiry undertaken.

For further information, please go to [www.suffolkscb.org.uk](http://www.suffolkscb.org.uk) where a portal on our homepage takes you through to strategy and policy documents and research material.

June 2017