

**The
Children's
Society**

**Criminal exploitation and County
Lines:
A toolkit for working with children and
young people**

December 2017



**Toolkit for working with children and
young people trafficked for the
purpose of criminal exploitation in
relation to 'County Lines'**

December 2017



**OFFICE OF THE POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER FOR NORFOLK**



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Please note that this toolkit is based on our current understanding and the evidence picture of criminal exploitation as we currently see it and therefore this document will remain a living document and subject to change.

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Introduction & Definition

The term 'county lines' is becoming more widely recognised and used to describe situations where young people may be internally trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation. What is often less understood is the experiences a young person faces and the potential for them to be harmed through various forms of abuse and exploitation as a result. This toolkit hopes to address some gaps in knowledge and offer suggestions for supporting young people who are at risk of, or being trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation.

There is currently no legal definition of county lines or criminal exploitation and also very little guidance. Currently, the criminal exploitation of children and young people is often not fully understood by services working with young people which can impact on the response that a young person receives. Trafficking and criminal exploitation are forms of abuse and therefore should be afforded a safeguarding response. Often the visible symptoms of this abuse are responded to, meaning that many young people receive a criminal justice response and their safeguarding needs can be overlooked as a result.

According to the recent National Crime Agency briefing on County Lines Violence, Exploitation and Drug Supply, two in three police forces reported that exploitation of children was identified in relation to 'county lines' activity, with one in four reporting that children involved in county lines were experiencing sexual abuse. However, the latest report also acknowledged that although the exploitation of children continues to be reported, the true scale of abuse remains an intelligence gap in many parts of the country.¹

Criminal exploitation interlinks with a number of multiple vulnerabilities and offences including the child being exposed to and/or victim of physical and emotional violence, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation, modern day slavery and human trafficking, domestic abuse and missing episodes.

The risk to a young person, and their family and friends, as a result of experiencing criminal exploitation can include but is not limited to:

- 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/revenge/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/university

Knowsley Safeguarding Children's Board uses a definition of criminal exploitation that has been adapted from the commonly used definition of child sexual exploitation

which helpfully demonstrates how young people can be trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation:

Criminal Exploitation involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them completing a task on behalf of another individual or group of individuals; this is often of a criminal nature. Child criminal exploitation often occurs without the child's immediate recognition, with the child believing that they are in control of the situation. 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. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.ⁱⁱ

The context within which this type of criminal exploitation often happens is in relation to county lines. The Home Office define 'County Lines' as:

The police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines". It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Lambeth Safeguarding Children's Board's definition expands on this to describe how:

Gangs typically recruit and exploit children and vulnerable young people to courier drugs and cash. Typically, users ask for drugs via a mobile phone line used by the gang. Couriers travel between the gang's urban base and the county or coastal locations on a regular basis to collect cash and deliver drugs. Gangs recruit children and young people through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage and/or grooming. Gangs also use local property as a base for their activities, and this often involves taking over the home of a vulnerable adult who is unable to challenge them.^{iv}

The Children's Society's Youth Experts describes 'county lines' as:

Invisible borders that separate a person's hometown from where they are sent to "work" (selling drugs, sex, firearms etc) for older members of a gang or crew. Young people are usually sent in twos or threes for intimidation purposes and "backup". A young person will typically spend less than 2 weeks away from home, keeping in regular contact with their 'olders' via burner phones.

Please see the Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Line Guidance produced by the Home Office, July 2017.^v

It is important to remember that young people being exploited in this way are likely to be being trafficked as they are having their travel *arranged or facilitated for the purpose them being exploited*.

It is helpful to draw on the definition of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to understand this:

- A person commits an offence if the person arranges or facilitates the travel of another person (“V”) with a view to V being exploited.
- It is irrelevant whether V consents to the travel (whether V is an adult or a child).
- A person may in particular arrange or facilitate V’s travel by recruiting V, transporting or transferring V, harbouring or receiving V, or transferring or exchanging control over V.
- A person arranges or facilitates V’s travel with a view to V being exploited only if— the person intends to exploit V (in any part of the world) during or after the travel, or the person knows or ought to know that another person is likely to exploit V (in any part of the world) during or after the travel.
- “Travel” means- arriving in, or entering, any country, departing from any country, travelling within any country.

In cases of criminal exploitation we know that powerful, adult gang members recruit and arrange or facilitate the travel of children (and vulnerable adults) for the purpose of them selling drugs, firearms or sex on their behalf. This is exploitation and can fall under the Modern Slavery Act’s definitions of exploitation as:

- *Sexual exploitation*
- *Securing services etc by force, threats or deception*
- *Securing services etc from children and vulnerable persons*

Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a child to be a victim of trafficking:

- This should be reported to the police in order for them to investigate the offences committed (i.e Modern Slavery and trafficking offences)
- A referral should be made to Children’s Social Care as trafficking and exploitation means a child could be at risk of or experienced significant harm and Child Protection processes need to be followed.
- A referral should be made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) directly. The Police and Children’s Services First Responders, who are able to make this referral; however other agencies can and should support this referral to ensure it provides a full picture of the young person’s experience to help the assessment.
- Following this you should expect a strategy meeting to be convened in order assess the information known, identify gaps and to discuss a plan for the

child; this should not solely focus around intervention for the child and family. Contextual safeguarding is a key approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families.

<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>

- It is important to consider disruption of the exploitation and that practitioners and police work together to identify the perpetrators, locations and networks associated to the exploitation and develop plans to disrupt these.

This process of reporting and referring young people is often not followed and can be considered contentious to some professionals who may view the children and young people as willing participants in the exploitation and in need of criminal justice responses. This is a view that was previously held in relation to children and young people who experienced sexual exploitation and recent Serious Case Reviews have demonstrated the need to intervene and protect children and young people from exploitation. Until there is clear guidance to suggest otherwise we recommend that the steps suggested above should be followed in order to initiate appropriate investigations, safeguarding and support is provided for young people who are suspected to have been trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation.

It can also be considered contentious because The Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a statutory defense for victims of child trafficking and slavery accused of certain offences. This reflects the international principle of non-prosecution of trafficked children arising in a number of international instruments and the UK's obligations under the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings 2005 and the EU Directive on Trafficking.

Contrary to some understanding this does not mean children should be simply 'let off' of any crimes that they commit but that the impact of the trafficking and exploitation be taken into consideration when making criminal justice decisions. In some cases it may be appropriate not to pursue criminal proceedings, but this should be assessed on an individual basis.

For further guidance on the NRM please see: <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/the-national-referral-mechanism>

Context of criminal exploitation

County Lines are illegal business models managed and operated by serious organised crime gangs who use their power and position within the gangs to groom, recruit and exploit young people for the purpose of criminal gain. As outlined in earlier definitions this often involves high levels of violence, threat and force, and it is important to understand the grooming process as this is evident within the recruitment of young people for criminal exploitation.

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of exploitation or trafficking. Children and young people can be groomed online or face-to-face, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional. Groomers may be male or female.

They could be any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed or that what has happened is abuse.^{vi}

For further information on how 'county lines' are established; site selection, establishing an operating base and marketing please see the National Crime Agency report: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file>

- Both males and females can be exploited ^{vii}
- Children and young people are targeted and groomed for criminal exploitation either in major cities and trafficked into county areas, or children in the county authority
- Boys aged 14-17 are the most often targeted, however girls and children as young as often 10 are targeted too.^{viii}
- Children and young people can be shown how or made to internally insert and carry drugs in their rectum or vagina
- Children and young people can often store 'wrapped' drugs in their cheeks which then can be more easily swallowed if approached by police
- The children and young people will be sent to 'trap' houses, or 'bandos' where they will be made to sell drugs for anything from a few days to 6+ weeks. These established bases can often involve exploitation of vulnerable adults. For further information on this please see: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file>
- Children and young people can receive money, mobiles, credit, expensive clothing, jewellery, new haircuts or other items/gifts in exchange.
- Children and young people can be vulnerable to targeting at pupil referral units, alternative education provisions, special education needs provisions and care homes/placements.
- Children and young people are often given targets to sell drugs, given modes of transport such as bikes or train tickets, weapons to protect themselves and a phone with drug user's contacts on it.

- Children and young people receive a small cut of money/clothes/status or are 'looked after' by 'older' i.e. taken to visit barbers and/or items of clothing/footwear given
- The phone lines can be worth thousands of pounds. There is monetary value in the selling of drugs and weapons, and also sexual exploitation related to this type of trafficking. This creates a place where perpetrators can have financial gain through the victimhood of children and vulnerable adults. Organised Crimes Groups have been known to 'set up' children and young people in robberies, meaning that the child believes they are in debt to the perpetrators. This is known as 'debt bondage'. The child believes they have to work for free to pay off the 'debt'. This can also apply if the child is actually robbed, or if they are arrested and have drugs, money or the phone confiscated by police.
- Children may be at risk of harm from the vulnerable adults who may also be being exploited by the gangs; such as using their homes as a trap house. Those adults often have their own needs; such as learning disabilities, substance misuse or mental health issues and there have been instances of harm to young people perpetrated by those individuals.

Vulnerabilities & Indicators:

There are some factors that can increase the vulnerability that a young person will be exploited by others. In order to understand these, it is helpful to draw on the contextual safeguarding circles shown below; helping us to think about the child or individual factors, home, peers, school and neighbourhood.^{ix}

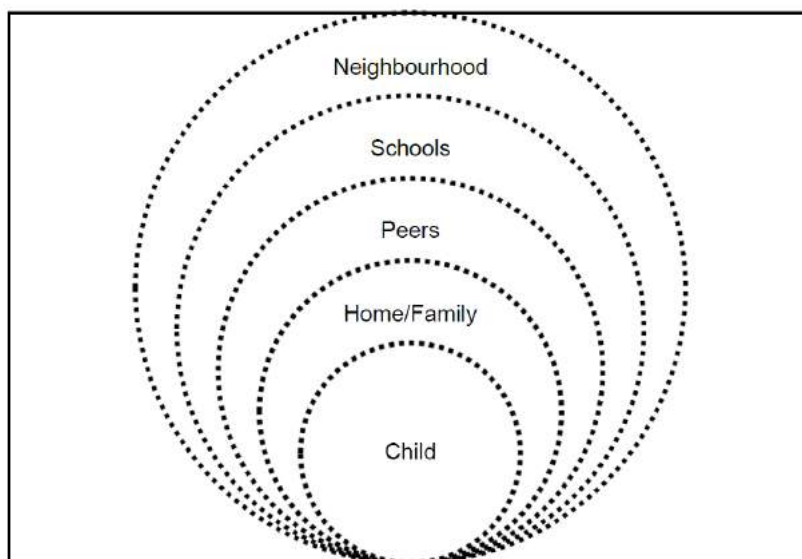


Figure 1: Contexts of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability(Firmin 2013:47)

Child/ Individual: Looked after, learning disabilities, substance misuse, mental health problem.

Home/family: Neglect/abuse, exposed/experience violence, parental substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse, poverty, lack of positive relationship with a protective, nurturing adult, homelessness or insecure accommodation status^x

Peers: Exposed to other young people known to be exploited, exposed to or experienced peer on peer abuse,

Schools: Exclusion from school and not in education/training or employment, exposed of experience violent crime

Neighbourhoods: Exposed or experience violent crime, deprived neighbourhood

These vulnerabilities do not mean that a young person will be exploited but are factors that could increase the vulnerability that they could be exploited by someone.

Warning indicators

There are a number of indicators listed in the following table that could alert us to a young person being criminally exploited.

Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent missing episodes and been found out of area • Found with large quantities of drugs or weapons • Found with drugs inside rectum or vagina • Unexplained amounts of money, mobiles, credit, clothing, jewellery, new hair cut or other items/gifts • Returned from missing episodes with injuries, or dishevelled • Change in behaviour; more secretive / withdrawn/isolated from peers or not mixing with usual friends • Unexplained absences from, or not engaged in school/ college/ training/ work • Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive at home or school Including use of sexualised language and language in relation to drug dealing and/or violence • Expressions around invincibility or not caring about what happens to them • Increased interest in making money • Reports being taken to parties, people’s houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adults • Increasing use of drugs or alcohol • Fear of reprisal from ‘gang’ members or violence from young people or adults • Having multiple mobile phones, sim cards or use of a phone that causes concern - multiple callers or more texts /pings than usual • Possession of hotel keys/cards or keys to unknown premises

- Disclosure of sexual/ physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation
- Abduction or forced imprisonment
- Entering or leaving vehicles cars with unknown adults
- Receiving rewards of money or goods for introducing peers
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being
- Agencies unable to engage
- New peer groups and/or relationships
- Relationships with controlling /older individuals or groups ^{xi}
- Parental concerns ^{xii}
- Repeated STI's and/or pregnancy
- Increase referrals to agencies for other known peers
- Multiple referrals for incidents in the same location

Barriers to Engagement

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

- Child criminal exploitation not being recognised and responded to as a safeguarding concern
- Professionals viewing criminal exploitation as a 'lifestyle choice' which can make a young person feel blamed for their exploitation or reinforce a young person's feeling of ownership of an untrue identity of autonomous drug dealer.
- Services not being consistent or persistent in their approach and closing due to 'non engagement'
- Young person fearful of repercussions towards themselves, friends or family if seen to be engaging with professionals
- Young person may still be being controlled by exploiters and have no ability or power to exit
- Even if the police are involved, young person still may not feel safe or protected from repercussions
- Young person may have distrust in services such as police and social care
- Young person may be fearful of getting in trouble with the police or be in breach of court order
- Children who have experienced previous abuse, fractured attachments and trauma, hold a deep mistrust of adults and services.^{xiii}

- Young person may be made to feel they are in 'debt' to perpetrators and/or reliant on the 'exchange' i.e. money/substances- this is often referred to as 'debt bondage'
- Young person withdrawn from support network due to grooming process and unable to access services
- Structural inequalities related to race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture, education
- Young person may have experienced multiple professionals talking about concerns with them which again could lead a young person feeling frustrated/unable to engage
- Young person feeling embarrassed/ashamed of their experiences

It is important to remember that a young person might not relate to their experience as being abusive or exploitative. The young person may feel a sense of 'loyalty' and 'brotherhood' to the exploiters, they may feel emotionally fulfilled in a way they haven't experienced from parents, carers or professionals before. The young person may feel they have gained 'friends' or 'family' and that these people care for him or her. The 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 young person may feel a sense of 'status' and 'power' that they haven't had before. The young person may see themselves as an autonomous drug dealer rather than a victim of exploitation at the bottom of a large organised crime structure.

This links in with the process of how an exploiter may target and groom a young person. This however also links in with barriers to engagement and why a young person may not relate to the term 'criminal exploitation'.

Practical Tips

- Be interested, professionally curious, listen to what the young person is saying and hear it from a safeguarding perspective.
- Don't make judgements; especially in relation to their involvement in criminal activities. Remember they may appear to be willing participants but it is likely that their actions and choices are being controlled by perpetrators with more power than them.
- Advocate for the young person and for child protection processes to be followed; using the three steps outlined previously: report to police, refer to CSC and refer to NRM.

- Challenge professional views which are oppressive, judgmental, or rejecting the need for a child protection response.
- Explain what is happening and why you might need to share information. Keep the young person updated on any outcomes.
- Ensure the young person is given choices; throughout their experience of being criminally exploited they will have been working with parameters of little or no choice and therefore it is important that young person is given choice back
- As a starting point to explaining exploitation it can be helpful to talk about the long hours a young person is expected to carry out criminal activities as being exploitative in itself and can open up further discussion about what is going on for them.
- Exploring a young person's identity and creating a safe space to explore this
- Discussing relevant music and music videos can open up conversations around county lines, physical/sexual violence, status, power and control
- Building a young person's resilience; looking at strengths and future plans
- Be creative in your approach and ask what the young person wants or needs.

Language

Similarly to sexual exploitation there is often inappropriate or unhelpful language used to describe young people's experiences of being criminally exploited and it is important that we use the right language in order to influence proper recognition and responses for the young people.

Inappropriate terms	Suggested alternatives
<i>Drug running</i>	Child criminal exploitation (CCE)
<i>He/she is drug running</i>	The child is being trafficked for purpose of criminal exploitation
<i>Recruit/run/work</i>	This implies there is a level of choice or control by the child regarding their exploitation and does not take into consideration the grooming, coercion, threats or intimidation. A more appropriate description would be that the child is being criminally exploited.
<i>He/she is choosing this lifestyle</i>	Again, this implies there is a level of choice or control by the child regarding their exploitation and does not take into consideration the grooming, coercion, threats or intimidation. A more appropriate description would be that the child is being criminally exploited.

<p><i>Spending time/associating with 'elders'</i></p>	<p>The young person says that they are friends with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation, offending.</p> <p>The young person has been groomed, exploited, controlled.</p> <p>If the 'elder' is under the age of 18 years old- this will also need to be considered using child protection processes</p>
<p><i>Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex or to run drugs</i></p>	<p>Child is being sexually/criminally exploited</p> <p>Child is being criminally exploited through drug debt</p> <p>Concerns that the child has been raped</p> <p>Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child</p> <p>The child is being sexually abused</p> <p>The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them.</p> <p>The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency.</p>

Services Available (Nationally)

Criminal exploitation is not a new issue, and like sexual exploitation, is a child protection issue that has existed for a long time, however what is new is the emerging recognition of the impact and risk of harm to the child as a result of how they are being trafficked and exploited. Unfortunately, there are still very few services directly available to young people or professionals however those noted below are national services commissioned to support children and young people affected by criminal exploitation.

Name	Area	Age Range	Website	Contacts
The Children's Society Research/	National Charity London Specific service called Stride . The	11-18	https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/	Rhiannon Sawyer

campaigns and policy work. London Criminal Exploitation Service	project accepts referrals from Newham, Camden and Tower Hamlets.			
St Giles & Missing People- County lines/ Criminal Exploitation Service	London & Kent- Kent OT-1-1 support (Funded to 31/3/18) CLiC - South Wales- 1-1 support Nationwide telephone support for young people and parents- Safecall (Funded to 31/3/18)		http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/ http://site.stgilestrust.org.uk	partner@missingpeople.org.uk info@stgilestrust.org.uk

Resources Available

As noted above with regards to a limited number of services there are also still very few resources available; however the links below may be useful.

Organisation	Title	Link	Area Specific
Home Office	Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines	This guidance outlines what county lines (and associated criminal exploitation) is, signs to look for in potential

	county lines		victims, and what to do about it
Trapped	Project Phoenix; It's not Okay: http://www.itstotokay.co.uk/professionals/trapped1/	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLhGpS1f-F0	This is a short film clip showing a young person being criminally exploited.

Research

National Crime Agency

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file>

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file> -2016

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-County-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file> - 2015

The Children's Society

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/appg-missing-gangs-and-exploitation-roundtable-report.pdf>

Criminal Law & Justice Weekly

<https://www.criminallawandjustice.co.uk/features/Running-County-Lines>

Youth Justice Legal Centre

<http://www.yjlc.uk/exploitation-children-county-lines-gangs-children-safeguarded-not-prosecuted>

Ending Gang and Exploitation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-violence-and-exploitation>

Preventing the Violent and Sexual Victimization of Vulnerable Gang-involved and Gang-affected Children and Young People in Ipswich. Andell & Pitts-University of Suffolk. August 2017.

<https://www.uos.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Final%20Amended%20Report%20-FINAL%20VERSION%20PDF.pdf>

Catch 22- Running the risks; The link between gang involvement and young people going missing.

<https://www.catch-22.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Catch22-Dawes-Unit-Running-The-Risks-full-report.pdf>

References

ⁱ <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file>

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http://knowsleyscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_prev_tack_crim_exploit.html#def_ch_crim

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines>

^{iv} <https://www.lambethscb.org.uk/professionals/gangs>

^v

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62677/0/6_3505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2_.pdf

^{vi} <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/grooming/>

^{viii} <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-County-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file>

^{ix} <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/assets/documents/Contextual-Safeguarding-Briefing.pdf>

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62677/0/6_3505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2_.pdf

^{xi}

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62677/0/6_3505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2_.pdf

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62677/0/6_3505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2.pdf

xiii https://www.barnardos.org.uk/cse_barnardo_s_model_of_practice.pdf

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs crucial local services and campaigns to change the law to help this country's most vulnerable children and young people.

Further information

To download a summary of this report, or to find out more please visit

childrenssociety.org.uk/cse

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