**Early Help for Exploitation**

There are three inter-connected conditions that enable abuse through exploitation to occur:

**Vulnerability (influenced by internal and external factors)**

Perpetrator Risk

Inadequate protective structures

Abuse does not occur because of a child or person’s vulnerability. It occurs because there is someone who is willing to take advantage of or create this vulnerability and because there are inadequate protective structures around the child/ person and their family to mediate against this. These ‘inter-connected conditions for abuse’ do not exist in a vacuum and, as such, must also be considered in light of the impact of wider contextual factors such as societal messages around abuse or sexual norms, or the expanding contact opportunities offered by an increasingly networked world.

An effective early help approach therefore needs to consider reducing the opportunity of these three elements connecting.

**Universal Education**

***Raising awareness of grooming & exploitation across Solihull and who to contact for help***

The first step of Early Help must therefore be to raise awareness of exploitation; to make everyone aware that it is harmful and abusive to children, young people and adults. Solihull Exploitation Reduction Board have made a range of resources available for different business settings; [accommodation providers](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/accomodation/), [community premises](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/community-groups/), [hospitality trades](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/hospitality/), [public services](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/public-services/), [transport providers](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/transport/), and [visitor attractions](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/visitor-attractions/); the aim of these resources is to promote opportunity for people to recognise the early signs and indicators that there may be people/ persons trying to groom or exploit people in or around their place of work. This requires everyone’s help to use the resources and ensure that clear messages are communicated to the community to make the actions of grooming and exploitation more visible and easier to detect, harder to perpetrate without being noticed.

The next stage is to raise awareness with [children, young people, adults](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/children-young-people-adults/), and [parents & carers, friends & relatives](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/exploitation-communications/parents-carers-relatives-friends/) about exploitation and particularly about the manipulative cognitive behaviours used by perpetrators to groom and exploit others. Again these resources require all practitioners working directly with children, young people, adults and their parents/ carers to share the information and ensure it is being not only understood, but that everyone has been encouraged to consider how this may relate to their own life and situations they may find themselves in.

These resources will also be helped if education settings in Solihull adopt a [*Respect me, you, us*](https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/respecting-me-you-us/?utm_source=Thinkuknow&utm_campaign=3a88eaa6ae-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_6_22_2022_AMBASSADORS_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0b54505554-3a88eaa6ae-63982073)approach to help young people develop a better understanding of healthy relationships, and how to challenge unhealthy behaviours and social norms.

It is important that those working with children, young people and adults with specific learning needs or disabilities, take the time to find out what is needed to help each individual to process and understand the information they are receiving and consider what this means for their own life context.

For example, a girl with autism was dropped at a place near a cinema to meet her friend, after several minutes her friend had not arrived and it started to rain, she became anxious, and a passer-by noticing this suggested she step into a nearby sheltered doorway of their flats out of the rain, she did and was then raped by the person who had suggested this. This case ended up in court and during that case the prosecution stated that the girl was of an age where she would have taken part in a range of relationships and education sessions and knew what she was agreeing to when being asked into the doorway. A specialist doctor was able to successfully argue to the court that while the girl could indeed recall the information from the relationship sessions she had participated in, she had not been given the chance to process the information in a way that connected it to her life experiences. Her autism meant that she did not pick up on nuances and the mannerisms of anyone implying something. Many girls mask the usual attributes visible in boys of autism; they tend to have a good superficial conversation skill- but this is often learned from You Tube, as they have been watching clips of how to be, what to do, how to do make-up etc. this can lead people to overlook the possibility of Autism. Even if it a diagnosis is known, understanding what this means in processing information for the individual is key and providing helping to transition information into the exploration of different contexts the person may encounter is essential.

NICE provide guidelines that covers recognising and diagnosing a range of disorders in children and young people and adults. These also include information that aims to improve the experience of children, young people, adults and those who care for them. [Thrive](https://www.childnet.com/what-we-do/our-projects/thrive-online/) provide a range of resources that may be helpful to parents and educators of people with learning difficulties and disabilities

**Early Help**

***Relational practice with parents and carers as early as possible***

Parents and carers are most likely to spot the first signs of someone being exploited. They will often experience a rapid change in the behaviour of their loved one, who may start to use abusive language and become hostile or aggressive to those they love. Parents and carers are likely to intuitively know that something is wrong, and that this is not usual developmental behaviour. They are likely to experience some shock at the rapid change in their loved one’s behaviour and attitude and will search for a reason for this happening. It is at this stage that they need to know where to seek help and that services already linked to the family should look to make a swift response to support parents/ carers. Unfortunately, too many parents report being turned away from services when seeking help at this stage, and this means the opportunity for early help is often missed.

Parents/carers need to be supported to develop a more in-depth understanding of exploitation and how it can happen; if parents/ carers have heard of exploitation, many think that a child/ young person/ adult is only exploited if they are associated with older people, they are often not aware that peers of the same age can also exploit others. They need help and support to understand the impact of grooming and consent, so they can realise that demands and constraints being placed on their loved ones are causing the responses in the behaviour they see; often purposefully to drive a wedge between the parent/ carer and the ones they love to isolate that child/ young person or adult and make them reliant on the exploiter.

Unrealistic expectations should not be put on parents/ carers to control their loved ones, it must be recognised that the harm being experienced is external to the family/ carer relationship, and that professionals and parents and carers have to work together to counter-act the influence of the groomer.

The groomers aim is to deceive the person they are grooming into trusting them, they will pretend to pursue a friendship or a romantic relationship, or provide an existing opportunity, while hiding their true intention. They aim to physically and emotionally isolate the person they are grooming by moving them away from important people in their lives and emphasising the importance of the grooming relationship. They will use vague and implicit language to further their goal so that those they target cannot tell they are being groomed as they aim to desensitise them to illegal and abusive activity. They aim to create a bond that is developed through trauma; this can be created instantaneously and is done do through domination, fear and threat and the following factors occur:

* A person threatens to kill another and is perceived as having the capability to do so;
* The other cannot escape, so her or his life depends on the threatening person;
* The threatened person is isolated from outsiders so that the only other perspective available to her or him is that of the threatening person; and
* The threatening person is perceived as showing some degree of kindness to the one being threatened.

(*Isolation from others perspectives and the inability to escape do not have to be in person/ in a physical space, this can happen very efficiently through the use of technology)*

Survival strategies for people who have been groomed this way are:

* dissociation;
* loss of reality;
* denial;
* attentiveness to groomer;
* fondness for groomer;
* increase in tolerance of groomer bad behaviours;
* fondness and fear together;
* focus on their kindnesses;
* emotional indebtedness;
* lack of initiative;
* inability to act or think;
* trying to understand their point of view;
* taking on their point of view;
* seeing the groomer as a victim;
* sympathising with the groomer;
* seeing the groomer as having problems they can help solve;
* fear of outside people presenting a threat or danger.

It is particularly important to pay attention to the final point in the list.  This helps explain why it is the parents and carers who are more likely to instinctively know that something is wrong with their loved one- they will become the first perceived outsiders to the grooming relationship and what was a perfectly health parent/ carer to child/ young person/ adult relationship will experience extreme tensions and behaviour changes that may make it appear dysfunctional. Professionals need to be extremely mindful of the language they use to avoid analysing this relationship without recognising the impact of the extra-familial harm through exploitation.

Practitioners should note that this perceived threat from outside people may also make it difficult for practitioners to build the relationship needed to enable young people to accept they are being exploited and to trust the “dangerous” practitioner enough to risk leaving the “caring” perpetrator(s).

Helping to quickly protect/ rebuild the parent/carers relationship can assist so much. Parent/ carers need to consistently respond with behaviours that are opposed to those used by the groomer. Where a groomer uses terror parents and carers need to demonstrate love, care and affection. A groomer will expect an instantaneous response, where as parents/ carers needs to allow the child, young person or adult to take time and their response always has to come from a caring perspective, not one of domination or fear. Parent/ carers need to strive to create welcoming and safe places and dialogue that promotes independent thinking, rather than controls the individual. Interactions should be aimed at enabling them to explore and reflect on their whole life experience and things they feel are important, so that they have space to learn and self- determine the actions they need and wish to take, as the groomer will be demanding obedience and wishing to master their every move.

These requirements may be very difficult for parents, as they will feel a range of emotions themselves to what is happening, it is therefore important that professionals are understanding and can help them express their feelings in a safe place, understanding that they may feel powerless, frustrated, angry and overwhelmed with what is happening to their loved one, but it is important that with that person they remain calm and caring.

All practitioners should be aware of the [All Age Exploitation](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/local-content/4cjN/localised-content-exploitation-tools-and-pathways/?b=Solihull) multi-agency safeguarding procedures, and should use the [screening tool](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/6/UPDATED%20Solihull%20all%20age%20exploitation%20screening%20tool%20May%202021.docx) and [guidance](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/6/UPDATEDAll%20Age%20Exploitation%20Guidance%20Doc%20for%20All%20Age%20Screening%20Tool.doc) to inform their response. For parents and carers of those under 18, even when it may not be clear enough to definitely recognise exploitation, the minimum support offered should be a co-ordinated Early Help approach bringing all those in contact with the family together in line with the LSCP Early Help [Guidance](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/lscp/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/09/Early-help-Guidance.docx) & [Procedures](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cdlewis%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5C15B9F327%5Cprocedures). There is a guide to help parents understand what is meant by [Early Help](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/lscp/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/12/A-guide-to-early-help-information-for-parents-and-carers-2.pdf). At each review (at least every 12 weeks) those involved should consider if the Early Help plan has helped rule out concerns about Exploitation, if not the screening tool should be revisited and if required a referral for statutory services should be considered.

All parents and carers of those under 18 should be encouraged to make links and seek support from [Parents Against Child Exploitation](https://paceuk.info/) the information and training resources available on the PACE website will also be useful for parents and carers of those over 18.

Many children, young people, adults who are being exploited may be groomed to go missing from their home or places they would usually be. Parents/ Carers and the child, young person or adult should be advised about the services provided by [Missing People](https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/get-help) as they are likely to be able to offer someone to talk to when someone is missing and other agencies aren’t available. For those under 18 professionals should be aware of the [missing from home, care and other settings](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/local-content/zUzN/localised-content-missing-pathway-and-tools/?b=Solihull) multi-agency safeguarding procedures and there is a guide for parents and carers about [missing](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/lscp/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/06/A-guide-to-children-going-missing-running-away-June-2022.pdf)

LSCP training is available for [working with parents as partners](https://training.solihulllscp.co.uk/Course/CourseDescriptive.aspx?id=166)

**Early Help**

**Practitioners recognising and responding to early signs of exploitation**

People rarely came forward independently to disclose exploitation, this continues to emphasise the importance of professionals’ ability to identify risk and signs of exploitation and sexual abuse (sexual exploitation is sexual abuse) in the absence of child-disclosure. If there is a sudden change in behaviour then professionals should always consider if this could be because of exploitation, and if the possibility is it can’t be ruled out, then it should be considered that it is possible, The [screening tool](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/6/UPDATED%20Solihull%20all%20age%20exploitation%20screening%20tool%20May%202021.docx) and [guidance](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/assets/clients/6/UPDATEDAll%20Age%20Exploitation%20Guidance%20Doc%20for%20All%20Age%20Screening%20Tool.doc) should be used by the professional noticing the difference, with the child/ young person/ adult, it should not be expected that this is anyone else’s responsibility and the minimum approach from screening should be co-ordinated Early Help ensuring equality, diversity & inclusion:

Research has stated that agencies were more aware of vulnerability and early indicators of sexual abuse in girls than in boys. Consequently, this means that child sexual abuse concerns for boys tended to be reported at a much later stage if at all**.** The reality is that many of those perpetrating exploitation will often not distinguish in what way they exploit someone.

Several reports have indicated that people from Black, Asian and other minoritized groups in the UK are disproportionately represented within the criminal justice system. It is evidenced that prejudice, stereotypes and language intersect in how a person from a disadvantaged background is understood. An example of this being the [adultification](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/06/Academic-Insights-Adultification-bias-within-child-protection-and-safeguarding.pdf) of young black boys through language which fails to acknowledge the true status of the young person as a child. This has resulted in young people being scrutinised as an adult despite having many contraindicating factors to this perspective.

Practitioners working directly with children, young people and/ or adults should complete LSCP training [Module 5a](https://training.solihulllscp.co.uk/Course/CourseDescriptive.aspx?id=137)- All age Exploitation Awareness

**Early Help**

**Trauma informed approach to working with children, young people or adults.**

A trauma-informed approach can be implemented in any type of [organisation](https://www.lancsvrn.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Lancs-VRN-Trauma-Informed-toolkit.pdf) or service setting and can be distinct from trauma-focused interventions or treatments that are designed specifically to address the consequences of trauma and to facilitate healing. Recognising the whole-life impact of past and present trauma on an individual and understanding their whole lived experience is essential to working effectively with them.

Trauma is much more than a story that explains why people are frightened, angry or out of control. Trauma is re-experienced in the present, not as a story, but as profoundly disturbing physical sensations and emotions that may not be consciously associated with memories of past trauma. Terror, rage and helplessness are manifested as bodily reactions, like a pounding heart, nausea, gut-wrenching sensations and characteristic body movements that signify collapse, rigidity or rage. Even though the environment may be safe, trauma survivors may still perceive the environment as threatening or dangerous, leading to ongoing anxiety and fear. In this situation, even innocuous situations or stimuli are often misinterpreted as threatening and the ‘fight, flight or freeze’ response is activated often leading to inappropriate responses by the individual which in themselves can put them at further risk of harm.

It is important that any service identifying concerning behaviour in an individual considers if this is a response caused by trauma and therefore all professionals and volunteers should access [trauma informed training](https://westmidlands-vru.org/about/trauma-informed/). It may be appropriate for some services to consider screening for concerns about exploitation at trigger points that may indicate concerning behaviour changes (e.g. school behaviour management processes)

**Early Help**

**Holistic support**

The criteria encompassed in the description of holistic support includes developing ‘a trusting relationship’ ‘building on the person’s strengths’ and using ‘a pedagogic approach’:

Trusting relationship:

Taking into consideration the information mentioned above about trauma bonding, a trusting, inter-personal approach with a single, constant practitioner, is the essential element needed to promote an individual’s involvement with services. A person aiming to build this relationship must be aware of the language they use and;

Be **Accessible**; this does not mean they need to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but they need to be friendly and welcoming, able to explain their role and remit, and the person who may be being exploited needs to be able to contact them directly, understanding this may mean leaving them a message that is only responded to when the practitioner is in work.

Give **Attention**; The person is provided with regular contact and as well as arranged meetings, where possible the practitioner can respond to the needs of the individual in a timely manner.

Practice **Assertive outreach**; If the person doesn’t attend or doesn’t communicate the practitioner will continue to be assertive and consistent in making contact and reaching out to the person, demonstrating understanding and care even if a response is not received.

Provide **Advocacy**; There may be a wide range of services that could help and support the person; however this can be overwhelming for the individual, and not all services will have a good understanding of the needs of the individual; advocating for them will help form relationships with services that are needed and challenge views that are unhelpful.

(This is known as the Barnardo’s **4 A’s model**)

Strengths based:

This means that the practitioner and the person work together to determine an outcome that draws on the individual’s strengths and assets. Working collaboratively promotes the opportunity for the individual to be a co-producer of the service and support they receive. Practitioners should consider the following standards for a strengths-based approach:

• The individual sets their own goals.

• Assessment is of the strengths/resources the individual has.

• The practitioner enables supportive links to resources in the environment (people, communities, and services).

• Explicit methods are used for identifying individual and environmental strengths for goal attainment.

• The relationship is hope-inducing, including through people, communities, and culture.

• The individual is the expert in their own life and the practitioner collaborates to enable meaningful choice.

A pedagogic approach

Offering the opportunity to engage in a pedagogic relationship to someone who may be experiencing trauma provides them with an opportunity to practice building/re-building a positive relationship. Critically, too, ‘placing trust in the person, in their competence and responsibility, can be an empowering experience for them’. A practitioner will aim for the following criteria if their approach is pedagogic:

• The person trusts the practitioner

• The practitioner will provide support that is person-centred

• The practitioners support addresses the whole-person’s needs

• The practitioner gives of themselves; this involves discussion, negotiation and learning together; ‘inhabiting the same life-space as the person, not existing in separate hierarchical domains’.

The Holistic Support Model

The holistic support model embodies all of the above and has 5 key dimensions:

* Emotional
* Intellectual/ Phycological
* Physical
* Spiritual
* Social

All of these dimensions must be evaluated when considering if trauma has been experienced and how to move forward.

**Early Help**

**Contextual Safeguarding**

Traditionally safeguarding interventions have focused on the individual being safe in their home. This means that the response to any safeguarding concern at the moment is focused on the individual, requiring an assessment of their individual needs and a plan put into place around them.

This approach does not take into account that it may be the contexts outside of the home that may increase the prevalence of harm; in places like parks, shopping centres, peer groups, and even schools. Practitioners may have considered peer group influences on the individual, but not necessarily the peer group dynamics, the levels of influence between individuals and the relationships between these people and the environments where harm is occurring. Exploitation, physical violence and sexual assault may escalate when certain young people interact as a peer group and may be further increased when peer groups met in a certain environments or contexts. If for example there were large numbers of young people meeting in a shopping centre and concerns were being raised about exploitation, physical or sexual violence and criminal activity, the response at the moment would require people to identify the individual people, make contact with them and screen to ascertain any concerns for that individual. This would be very time consuming and could mean that some people who just happen to be in that environment are unnecessarily targeted. While an intervention may then be made to support an individual, it would not address the possibility of harm occurring in the context.

A contextual safeguarding approach would mean that the assessment, plan and intervention would be of the peer group, environment or context. There may still be some individuals who need to be targeted for further support, but this is likely to be a much smaller and manageable number. The aim would be to ensure that there is a positive change in the context reducing the possibility of harm occurring there for others.

[The Contextual Safeguarding Network](https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/about-us/) has a range of tools, guides and information.

LSCP training is available on an [Introduction to Contextual Safeguarding](https://training.solihulllscp.co.uk/Course/CourseDescriptive.aspx?id=167)

**Early Help**

**Perpetrator disruption**

This paper started with the need to educate society about exploitation; this education asks people to take responsibility for reporting any concerns they see or have. This information may be small pieces of intelligence that help form a bigger picture. Professionals may also gain small pieces of information within their work or own lives, it is important that these are always reported using the [FIB form](https://www.safeguardingsolihull.org.uk/lscp/multi-agency-procedures-and-practice-guidance/exploitation/west-midlands-police-intel-form/), and not just verbally to other workers, as when this intelligence is collated correctly it can help inform wider enforcement action.

The Home office has published a [disruption tool kit](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091229/14.100_HO_Child_Exploitation_Disruption_Toolkit_v7_WEB_1_.pdf) and the [NWG](https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NWG-Disruption-Toolkit-v3-1.pdf) have one too that looks disruption beyond the age of 18. It should not require a victim of exploitation to disclose the identity of their exploiter or provide evidence that could be used in court for any disruption activity to take place, the reality is this is very unlikely that a disclosure will happen, and many of those who have appeared as witnesses in court have found the experience retraumatising. It is not always possible to identify those individuals who are perpetrating exploitation however consideration should be given to criminal, civil and partnership disruption at the earliest opportunity to exploitative activity.