



Youth Connect Team Overview

Introduction

A whole system response to Complex Safeguarding involves understanding and responding to extra-familial contexts, the contextual dynamics of harm and the transition of young people as they progress towards adulthood (Firmin, 2019; Holmes and Smale, 2018).

The Cumberland Youth Connect Team will focus on Child Exploitation (CE) and Missing.

The Family Help Workers within the Youth Connect Team will undertake Return Home Chats (RHC) with all children who have been reported missing and will work directly with children, families, carers and communities in relation to Child Exploitation and preventing Child Exploitation.

They will also be integral to supporting transition of children to adulthood and ensuring their child exploitation status is managed post 18.

The Youth Connect Team will work closely with other Local Authorities and Constabulary's to ensure that Cumbrian children placed out of the county have support, appropriate trigger planning for missing and CE markers are recorded.

Definitions of Child Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation:

The current DfE definition for CSE is:

"Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."

Child Criminal Exploitation:

The current Home Office Definition of CCE (2018) is:

"This occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:

- a. In exchange for something the victim needs or wants; and/or*
- b. For the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator; and/or*
- c. Through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."*

There is a body of evidence that vulnerable children and young adults are specifically targeted for criminal purposes.

Modern Slavery and Trafficking:

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that encompasses the offences of human trafficking and slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, as set out in anti-slavery legislation (Palermo Protocol 2000; Modern Slavery 2015.)

The following definition of Modern Slavery is used by the National Crime Agency:

“This is the term used within the UK and is defined within the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Act categorises offences of Slavery, Servitude and Forced or Compulsory Labour and Human Trafficking.

These crimes include holding a person in a position of slavery, servitude forced or compulsory labour, or facilitating their travel with the intention of exploiting them soon after. Although human trafficking often involves an international cross-border element, it is also possible to be a victim of modern slavery within your own country.

It is possible to be a victim even if consent has been given to be moved. Children cannot give consent to being exploited therefore the element of coercion or deception does not need to be present to prove an offence.”

Children Who Go Missing

Research indicates that a significant number of children and young people who are being exploited may go missing from home, care and education. Some go missing frequently; the more often they go missing the more vulnerable they are to being targeted for the purpose of exploitation or being the victims of exploitation. If a child does go missing, Cumbria’s Children who go Missing from Care or Home policy and procedure should be followed.

Independent Return Home Chats with the child or young person can help in establishing why they went missing and the subsequent support that may be required, as well as preventing repeat incidents.

Information gathered from return chats can be used to inform the identification, referral, and assessment of any child sexual/criminal exploitation concerns.

All Youth Connect Workers will be trained to undertake Return Home Chats. RHC’s should be completed by someone independent to the child. The Youth Connect Team will share relevant intelligence from missing episodes to identify person of concerns, hotspots, and disruption tactics alongside our Policing colleagues.

The Youth Connect Team

Cumberland Youth Connect Team were formerly known as The Complex Safeguarding Team until January 2025. The Team have recently rebranded and renamed themselves to highlight and emphasise the purpose and role of the team. We focus on building and encouraging positive connections for children and young people within their network, local community and services whilst breaking negative connections to keep our children safe.

The team is made up of a Family Help Manager, a Family Help Senior and five Family Help Workers. The Family Help Manager – Youth Connect is the CE Lead for Cumberland. Managing the Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker and coordinating all Level 1 meetings is the CERAR Co-Ordinator that sits within the Police. This is a county wide role.

The Youth Connect Team sits in The Family Help, Prevention and Youth Justice Service within the Children and Family Wellbeing directorate in Cumberland.

The Youth Connect Team’s Aims and Overarching Objectives:

- Children who are identified as at risk of or suspected/believed to be experiencing exploitation will receive



timely assessment of need and targeted plans to disrupt behaviours of the person(s) of concern/offenders and safeguard children. The Child Exploitation Risk and Review Framework will be followed. **Child Exploitation (including Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation) (proceduresonline.com)**

- Children who have been missing will be offered and receive prompt missing from home return chats where their voice can be heard. This will influence any subsequent planning, Stage 1, or Stage 2 intervention meetings.
- The Youth Connect Team will respond to contextual safeguarding within the wider partnership.
- The team will provide a multi-agency approach to safeguarding children at risk of or experiencing child exploitation, Youth Connect Workers will coordinate this response alongside the responsible case holder.
- The team will share intelligence and information with key professionals at the earliest opportunity.
- The Youth Connect Team Manager will lead mapping of hotspots, locations and connected persons of concern which will feed into the MACE meetings.
- The role of the team will be to work closely with our partners in the police to disrupt perpetrators of exploitation.
- The team will provide specialist support/consultation to partner agencies.
- The Youth Connect Team will raise awareness of all forms of exploitation within Cumberland and support knowledge exchange through campaigns, training, and consultation within partner agencies and the wider community.

Co-Work Model

Youth Connect Workers will offer direct support to children, families, including siblings (when affected), carers, and the wider professional network working with the child.

Youth Connect Workers will take the lead on any Child Exploitation support and interventions. The team will not case hold the child's plan but will work alongside case holders who will remain the key worker for the family. This model allows the Youth Connect Worker to build meaningful relationships with children and allows capacity for the allocated case holder to focus on their statutory/non statutory responsibilities. This allows the Youth Connect Worker to focus on the relationship building with the young person, to build trust and engagement.

A discussion will take place at the start of the Youth Connect Team's involvement with the allocated case holder to clarify the role of the Youth Connect Worker with the family/care provider and to ensure all key professionals and their respective managers agree about the scope of the work. The Youth Connect Team Manager will record this discussion.

The allocated Youth Connect Worker will attend any relevant meetings for the young person and family including strategy meetings, CIN, CP, Cared For, Early Help and review CE meetings and share information both verbally and in written format where required for any care planning processes.

Alongside offering direct support to children and families, the Youth Connect Worker will build working relationships with health providers, education providers, care homes and other contexts that children find themselves in such as youth zones, cadettes etc to raise awareness and focus on harm reduction for children.

Referral Route

All children assessed as Medium or High Child exploitation Status will be allocated a CEIW.

Direct work in relation to Child Exploitation will be allocated by the Youth Connect Team Manager via the completion of Level 1 assessments where there are identified areas of support and Intervention. It is acknowledged that those children who are High and Medium concerns may not be able to understand that they are being exploited. CEIW will work alongside their families and the professionals' network.

For those children assessed as Low CE status who are not being supported by other agencies a CEIW can be allocated by the Youth Connect Team Manager.



RHI allocation will also be managed by the CERAR lead via missing from home interview requests.

Via the MACE meetings and mapping activity (which are already established and will remain county wide) it may be that a cohort of children are identified and educative work is required, perhaps in a residential or school setting this again will be assessed and allocated for bespoke work by the Youth Connect Team Manager. All requests to be submitted to the relevant authorities CERAR inbox.

Assessment and Planning

The initial Child Exploitation Risk Assessment (CE Level 1) will be completed by the Youth Connect Team Manager, voice of the child parents and carer, allocated case holder and partner agencies as per Child Exploitation Risk and Review process (CERAR). The risk assessment review timescale will be dependent of level of risk.

If the child is assessed as Medium, High risk this will be reviewed on a 4-weekly basis by the Youth Connect Team Manager. Those children assessed a low risk will be reviewed on the 12 weekly basis this will be chaired by a CEIW.

Despite the agreed level of risk, a significant incident can and should trigger an early review. It is essential that there is an open working relationship between the case holder and the CEIW to ensure that significant information is shared and ensure that assessment and planning is timely and risk management plans are updated.

Interventions

The foundation for delivery of interventions will be building up a meaningful and trusting relationship with the child this is achieved through working alongside the child, through positive activities, understanding of interests and wishes and feelings and seeing the whole child. It is only by gaining trust which takes time, that the young person will be more responsive to engaging in structured work with the CEIW.

For every child assessed as High or Medium and accepted with a low CE status a bespoke package of direct prevention work will be identified. This will include the use of creative, practical, and innovative approaches, depending on the young person's age, level of understanding and their individual needs.

The direct work may include the following areas:

Exploitation and grooming, understanding, and managing trauma, healthy relationships, safety education, managing difficult situations, developing confidence, resilience and self-esteem, internet safety, sex, the law and consent, exploitation by gangs, missing and risks associated with this, recognising coercive behaviours and any other pull factors that may leave a young person vulnerable to exploitation. This is not exhaustive and may include collaboration with other agencies.

A strength based and trusting relationship, trauma informed model of work is at the core of the work undertaken by the Youth Connect Team. The Team will support the network around the child to see beyond presenting behaviours and explore what the child needs rather than adopting and behaviour management approach.

What the Youth Connect Team will do:

- Build a meaningful and trusted relationship with children that we work with and listen to them
- Ensure that approaches are underpinned by strength and relationship, trauma informed model of working
- Develop needs led bespoke packages of direct work – young person setting own goals empowering them and given



them choice

- Services will be delivered in a co-ordinated, trauma informed and consistent way by multi-agency working
- Work with children and their families/carers to reduce the risk of exploitation and episodes of missing (working with parents as partners)
- Offer practical support to children in relation to sexual health, housing and other identified needs
- Partnership working together to share information/intel at earliest opportunity – to enable mapping to identify hotspots, addresses/persons/associates of concern
- Disrupt the activities of people who seek to exploit children
- Reduce harm and offending
- Support professionals and communities across Cumbria to identify and mitigate the risk of exploitation to young people
- Strengthening communities
- Support children through related legal proceedings through prosecution and beyond

Partner Agencies

Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Co-ordinators (METCOs) for the Police work closely with the Youth Connect Team.

METCO currently attend all Low Concerns CE meetings and subsequent reviews. They attend all Missing Stage 1 and Stage 2 meetings and develop missing trigger plans for the Police.

METCO have good working relationships with schools in their area and residential settings. There will be 2 METCOs in each Local Authority. They are managed by a Detective Sargent who is linked into the CE MACE Level 2 meetings and Mapping meetings.

CEIW will work closely with METCOs to develop working relationship with schools and support and early help approach to disruption of CE. There may be scope for some joined up working in relation to preventative/group work sessions in school. The same offer will apply to LA residential settings. This will be dependent on capacity. As the teams develops there may be opportunity of co located teams.

Specialist Safeguarding Officers within Cumbria Constabularies Criminal Investigation Department will also support the CEIW's in relation to children who are at high or medium risk of exploitation.

In addition, any location or, perpetrator identified as posing a risk in relation to Child Exploitation will be adopted as a problem profile and the Police will lead on the disruption element of our contextual safeguarding approach.