

Child Sexual Exploitation in Wales: 3 years on Believe in children



Barnardo's
Cymru

No.3 Policy and
practice briefing

By Dr Sam Clutton and Jan Coles



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Introduction

This policy and practice briefing provides an overview of progress in identifying and responding to the risk of, and abuse through, child sexual exploitation since the publication of the first research on this issue in the Welsh context in 2005¹. Drawing on research undertaken across three local authorities, this briefing provides new evidence on the prevalence and nature of child sexual exploitation in Wales. The briefing seeks to highlight key vulnerabilities and risks and to set out evidence on best practice in safeguarding – including an introduction to new policy and procedures.

Child sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, 'protection' or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent.

Context and background

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a particularly hidden form of abuse. The majority of the evidence gathered in relation to this issue has taken place elsewhere in the UK and until recently very little was known about the prevalence and nature

of child sexual exploitation in Wales. In 2005 Barnardo's Cymru undertook a scoping study on behalf of the Wales Advisory Group on Child Sexual Exploitation². The scoping study identified 184 cases of children and young people across Wales who were identified as being sexually exploited or where there were concerns that they were being sexually exploited. The study also identified a lack of awareness of CSE among professionals and lack of identification of risk, suggesting that the figure of 184 represented an under-estimate of actual prevalence rates. The study also suggested that there were inconsistencies in local authority responses to CSE.

The Welsh Assembly Government responded to recommendations included in the scoping study report and commissioned a review of the content and implementation of local protocols for CSE across Wales. The review was carried out in 2006-07 and provided evidence to confirm the findings of the earlier scoping study³. The review identified a general lack of awareness about the content of local protocols and of associated procedures for responding to child sexual exploitation across agencies. Awareness of the risk indicators of, and issues associated with, child sexual exploitation was limited beyond small groups of strategic officers or practitioners who had a good working knowledge and were committed to addressing this issue. Examples of consistent multi-agency working were limited and a need for multi-agency training was identified by the majority

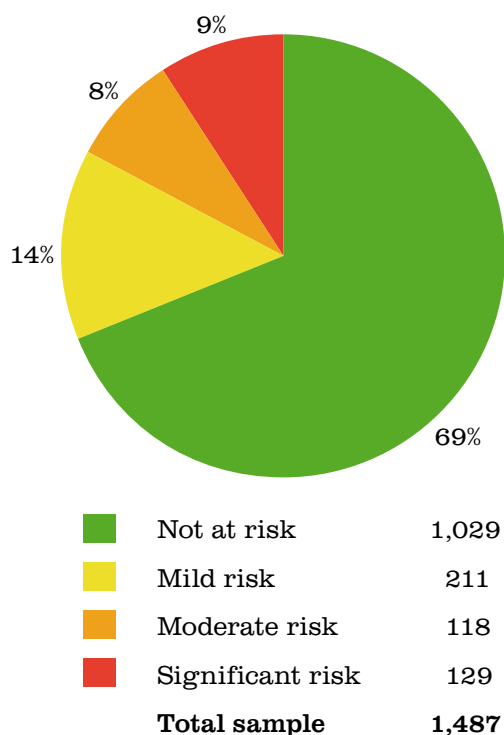
of respondents. There was wide variation in the content of local CSE safeguarding protocols, some included information that was incorrect, and there was no shared definition of CSE. Seven protocols included provision for the prosecution of children and young people, whilst only one of these described the prosecution of children as an absolute last resort.

The presence of multiple vulnerabilities and risks in the lives of children and young people at significant risk of sexual exploitation⁴, and the behaviours associated with abuse through sexual exploitation, equate to high resource demands on a number of agencies often in response to symptomatic and frequent crisis situations. Early identification by agencies that are in contact with vulnerable children and young people and prevention through safeguarding actions appropriate to the level of risk are key to reducing the number of children and young people who are abused through CSE. A large scale two-year evaluation of Barnardo's CSE Services across the UK provides evidence of the best approach for reducing risks for children and young people who are sexually exploited and how best to support them to escape this form of abuse⁵. This briefing provides an overview of the available evidence in relation to identifying and responding to the risk of and abuse through CSE.

Research findings

Professionals and practitioners responding to the scoping study and the review viewed the identification of children and young people at risk of CSE as problematic. In response to this Barnardo's Cymru successfully piloted a Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF) in Newport in 2006⁶. Further research was carried out in two more local authorities in 2007 using SERAF. Across the three authorities the sample includes 1,487 cases involving children and young people aged 10 to 22 years old and held by Social Services and the Youth Offending Service in Wales.

Figure 1: Children and young people by category of risk. Sample from 3 local authorities in Wales 2006-2007



NB: Please refer to SERAF framework at the end of this briefing for an explanation of each category of risk.

The sample is biased towards children and young people at risk because it is drawn from Social Services and Youth Offending Service case loads. These children and young people are therefore more likely than their peers to be subject to the

vulnerabilities and risks associated with CSE. The prevalence rates here are therefore in relation to children and young people already in contact with services that provide for children in need and/or at risk and not in relation to the local child populations as a whole.

It is of great concern that as many as nine per cent of vulnerable children and young people who are known to statutory services across three Welsh local authorities are at significant risk of sexual exploitation.

Figure 2: Total sample by category of risk and gender

	Female	Male
Not at risk	38%	62%
Mild risk	44%	56%
Moderate risk	44%	55%
Significant risk	64%	36%
Total sample	42%	58%

- There were more boys and young men in the total sample than females (58%>42%). However children and young people identified as at 'significant risk' of CSE were more likely to be female (64%>36%).
- The majority of cases identified as at 'moderate' or 'significant' risk of CSE relate to children and young people aged between 14 and 17 years. For girls and young women a 'peak' age for risk is 15 years old. For boys and young men the 'peak' age for risk was older but this may be a result of the fact that the sexual exploitation of boys is particularly well hidden.
- Of the total sample, 95 per cent of children and young people were described as White Welsh or White British. A total of 68 children and young people were identified as belonging to a BME group. Eighteen of these were cases identified as

at risk and 11 of those were at 'significant risk' of CSE.

- In total, disability was recorded in relation to 412 cases in the sample and 90 per cent of those cases were identified as 'not at risk' of CSE. Forty cases where a disability was recorded were identified as at risk of CSE and in all but one of these cases a learning disability was identified. Of the cases where disability was recorded, 11 were identified as at 'significant risk' of CSE.

Vulnerabilities and risk indicators of CSE

The children and young people in the sample were all known to statutory services and as such we would expect to find high incidence of problematic family backgrounds and childhood experience. Issues such as childhood abuse, family history of domestic abuse, family history of substance misuse and family breakdown were identified across the category of risk sub-samples. However, as the level of risk increased, the incidence of these factors also increased in relation to most indicators.

The correlation between experience of abuse during childhood and risk of sexual exploitation is well established⁷. Childhood abuse may be viewed as a vulnerability factor in that children who are abused during childhood are likely to suffer from low self worth which makes them vulnerable to exploitation by abusive adults. Furthermore, children who have experienced sexual abuse have already been through a grooming process which establishes as 'normal' a breaching of appropriate sexual boundaries. Others have argued that childhood abuse serves to propel children into high risk situations such as running away⁸. We know that experience of abusive family relationships

leaves children and young people with low self-esteem, poor trust in adults and relationship difficulties, which in turn renders them vulnerable to sexual exploitation⁹. A history of abuse has been identified as a risk indicator by Barnardo's services working across the UK¹⁰.

Children and young people in the 'significant' category of risk were over twice as likely to have experienced emotional abuse in childhood compared to the sample as a whole.

They were three times as likely to have experienced physical abuse and sexual abuse when compared to the sample as a whole.

Experience of problematic parenting was identified as a common characteristic of young people included in a study of service users of Barnardo's sexual exploitation services¹¹. The negative impact of substance misuse on parenting capacity and the lives of children living in families where substance misuse takes place is documented¹². Children and young people living in families where there is domestic abuse are at increased risk of abuse themselves and the detrimental effects of witnessing domestic abuse on children are clear¹³. There is a high incidence of family breakdown across the sample as a whole and this, as with other factors is related to the sample origin (ie drawn from Social Services caseloads). Family breakdown has been described elsewhere as an 'underlying vulnerability factor'¹⁴.

Approximately one quarter of the cases in the total sample had a family history of domestic abuse and this rose to two-thirds of cases in the 'significant' risk sample.

A family history of substance misuse was identified in relation to a quarter of the total sample but applied to over half of the cases in the 'significant' risk category.

Figure 3

Breakdown of family relationships	
'Not at risk' sample (1,029)	277 (27%)
'Mild risk' sample (211)	172 (82%)
'Moderate risk' sample (118)	97 (82%)
'Significant risk' sample (129)	121 (94%)
Total sample (1,487)	667 (45%)

Family breakdown was recorded in relation to just under half (45 per cent) of the total sample of cases but to the majority of cases identified as at 'significant' risk (94 per cent).

The family histories and behaviours that bring children into contact with Social Services often impact negatively on emotional well-being¹⁵. Low self esteem and poor emotional and mental well-being render children and young people vulnerable to exploitation and also result from exploitation.

Low self image was identified in relation to a third of the total sample of cases and was recorded for most (83 per cent) of the cases in the 'significant' risk category.

Expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, violence, aggression) were recorded in relation to just under a third of the total sample of cases. This rose to 81 per cent of cases in the 'significant' risk category.

Disengagement from education, isolation from peers and exposure to risk situations increase the vulnerability of children and young people to sexual exploitation. Children and young people who are not engaged in school, who are isolated from positive social networks and who stay out late, spend a large proportion of their time away from appropriate adults and protective networks. They are exposed to situations in which they are accessible to those who wish to harm or exploit them. The relationship between sexual exploitation and substance misuse is a complex one which may include the use of substances as a coping mechanism or as a focus of exchange and control by the exploitative adult¹⁶. All of the factors discussed here increase the exposure of children and young people to risk situations where they may be involved with other vulnerable young people and may come into contact with exploitative adults perhaps while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Only two per cent of the total sample was identified as isolated from peers/family but this was indicated in a quarter of 'moderate' risk cases and just under half (47 per cent) of 'significant' risk cases.

Staying out late was recorded as an issue across the categories of risk and in relation to a quarter of cases in the total sample. In relation to the at risk categories this was recorded in over three-quarter of cases (81 per cent moderate risk; 88 per cent significant risk).

Drug and alcohol misuse increased in relation to category of risk, affecting a third of the total sample and nearly all (97 per cent) of the 'significant' risk cases.

Figure 4

Exclusions/unexplained absences from school	
'Not at risk' sample (1,029)	12% (127)
'Mild risk' sample (211)	53% (112)
'Moderate risk' sample (118)	75% (89)
'Significant risk' sample (129)	89% (115)
Total sample (1,487)	30% (443)

Incidents of exclusions/unexplained absences from school increased with each level of risk, rising to 89 per cent of the 'significant' risk cases.

Direct risk indicators of sexual exploitation

Some behaviours are suggestive of direct risk of or involvement in sexual exploitation. There may be alternative explanations

for some direct risk indicators, however where a number of these direct risk indicators are present they suggest a pattern of behaviour associated with sexual exploitation.

Children and young people who go missing are particularly vulnerable to exploitation during the periods that they are away from protective networks. Periods of going missing may be a direct risk indicator of sexual exploitation¹⁷. Research undertaken with specialist CSE service users in 2006 found that young people who had been sexually exploited were often being moved by coercers and exploiters to locations other than their place of residence

(internally trafficked); the most common experience was of being taken to a nearby city, town or authority where sexual exploitation occurred, followed by the young person being returned to their original location one or two days later¹⁸. Case study material from Wales also suggests that during periods of going missing, children and young people are often internally trafficked. This could be to a local city, to another local authority in Wales or to a city or location in England where they are sold for sex before being returned to their place of residence.

The majority of sexual exploitation of children and young people takes place 'off street'¹⁹. Mobile phones and the internet allow for exploitative adults to organise and orchestrate the abuse of children in private accommodation, hotel rooms and massage parlours. These indicators suggest a pattern of behaviour strongly associated with sexual exploitation.

A common pattern in the sexual exploitation of girls and young women is the presence of an older 'boyfriend'. This abusing adult exploits the vulnerability of the girl through a process of control which begins with an apparently loving relationship and develops into a controlling, abusive and exploitative relationship over a period of time²⁰. Recent evidence from Barnardo's service users demonstrates a clearly defined route into sexual exploitation through an older adult, most often through but not always an older 'boyfriend'²¹.

The majority of direct indicators of CSE including: use of a mobile phone that causes concern; multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people); unexplained amounts of money/things; peers involved in clipping /sexual exploitation; entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults and frequenting areas

known for sex work; increased with each category of risk and with a notable increase in these indicators for 'significant' risk cases.

There were some distinct gender patterns in relation to direct risk indicators. An older 'boyfriend'/controlling adult was identified in relation to 83 per cent of girls and young women in the 'significant' risk category. While for boys and young men in the 'significant' risk category this figure was 18 per cent.

Two thirds (64 per cent) of boys and young men in the 'significant' risk category were recorded as 'entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults' compared to just under half (46 per cent) of girls and young women in the same risk category.

Figure 5

Periods of going missing overnight or longer	
'Not at risk' sample (1029)	2 (>1%)
'Mild risk' sample (211)	42 (20%)
'Moderate risk' sample (118)	81 (69%)
'Significant risk' sample (129)	116 (90%)
Total sample (1,487)	241 (16%)

'Periods of going missing' was the most significant direct indicator of risk for both genders.

Overview of relevant legislation, policy and practice guidance

Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (2000) (Department of Health, National Assembly for Wales) and the *National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation* (2001) (Department of Health) promote an inter agency approach in order to:

- acknowledge and recognise the problem of the sexual exploitation of children;
- recognise that the child is a victim of abuse;
- safeguard children involved, promote their welfare and provide them with the strategies to 'exit';
- investigate and prosecute those who coerce, exploit and abuse children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2004) (Welsh Assembly Government) emphasises that 'children involved in "prostitution" and other forms of sexual exploitation should be treated primarily as victims of abuse, and their needs require careful assessment. They are likely to be in need of welfare services and – in many cases – protection under the Children Act 1989.'

All Wales Child Protection Procedures (2008) (All Wales Child Protection Group and Welsh Assembly Government) (Section 4.8) sets out the procedures for responding to the sexual exploitation of children. The procedures are clear that – 'any person who works with children and families and has concerns that a child is at risk of abuse through sexual exploitation must make a referral in accordance with the child protection procedures as set out in Part 3 of the All Wales Child Protection Procedures. This includes any unsubstantiated

concerns as they contribute to other information that has been provided from elsewhere and help to build up a picture that the child may be suffering harm'.

All Wales Safeguarding children and young people at Risk of Sexual Exploitation Protocol (2008) (All Wales Child Protection Group and Welsh Assembly Government) This protocol has been developed in response to the findings of the Welsh Assembly Government funded review of existing CSE protocols (2006). The protocol is intended to support the identification of children and young people at risk of CSE and to ensure that there is consistent evidence based practice across Wales in responding to risk and abuse through CSE so that children and young people are safeguarded. The Protocol advocates the use of the SERAF Risk Assessment Framework (see below).

Coles, J and Clutton, S (2008) *SERAF Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework Resource Pack*, Cardiff: Barnardo's Cymru – each Local Safeguarding Children Board in Wales has been provided with a pack and further packs are available for purchase. Please contact michelle.gough@barnardos.org.uk

The Seraf Service

In October 2006 Barnardo's Cymru established the first specialist CSE service in Wales.

The Service works across Wales to:

- provide specialist training and practice development support;
- support best practice in the identification of and responses to children and young people at risk of CSE;
- provide preventative work with vulnerable children and young people and;
- provide specialist direct work with children and young people at risk of or abused through sexual exploitation.

Barnardo's has been involved in child sexual exploitation work since 1995. The core features of our model of practice can be summarised in the Four A's of Access, Attention, Assertive outreach and Advocacy²². Evidence of good practice suggests that intervention, support and action should be based upon the child or young person's needs and be delivered by a trusted worker in conjunction with a protective network of appropriate agencies. The Welsh Assembly Government has provided funding of £60,000 to support a consortium arrangement between local authorities wishing to buy into the Service. The Service already works with many local authorities on a spot-purchase basis and growing awareness of CSE has led to a sharp increase in referrals over the past six months. Practitioners can contact the Service to request a risk assessment or make a referral for direct work with a child or young person. The Service also provides training and case consultation.

For further information contact Barnardo's Seraf Service
46 Marlborough Road
Roath Cardiff CF23 5BX
Telephone: 029 2049 1743
Email: jan.coles@barnardos.org.uk

Next steps: tackling child sexual exploitation in Wales

There has been considerable progress in Wales over the past three years in terms of increasing professional awareness of CSE. This has included: the production of a consistent All Wales Protocol based on evidenced best practice and investment in direct work with children and young people at risk of or abused through CSE. A number of local authorities are working with Barnardo's Cymru to strengthen policy and practice in responding to CSE in their area and have clearly demonstrated their commitment to tackling this issue.

There has also been a very good take up of multi-agency training over the past three years. Since it was established in October 2006 the Seraf Service worked with 57 children and young people in April 2007- March 2008 and currently has 21 open cases. However there are still far too many children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation across Wales and currently practice to safeguard all children and young people from this form of abuse is not in place. There are still real difficulties in identifying resources to safeguard and support the most at risk children and young people. Perpetrators continue to exploit the vulnerability of our most disadvantaged children and young people and in most cases this abuse still goes unchallenged.

The way forward

1. The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- Identify resources to support the effective implementation of the All Wales Protocol Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation by local authorities so that children and young people are safeguarded and take measures to ensure that Local Safeguarding Children Boards review progress in local implementation of the new Protocol.
- Offer guidance and support to local authorities in developing preventative work through education and community settings with vulnerable children and young people as part of delivering Core Aim 3 of the Children and Young People's Plans.
- Take action in response to the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (Forty-ninth session, 2008) that State Parties 'intensify its efforts to collect data on the extent of sexual exploitation and

abuse of children, essential to prepare adequate responses and combat this phenomena'. It is essential that local authorities monitor the number of children and young people at risk of or abused through sexual exploitation in line with the 'Safeguarding Children involved in Prostitution' Guidance issued in 2000. This data should be collated at a national level.

- Issue guidance to Local Safeguarding Children Boards and engage with the police authorities to stress the importance of local implementation of the 'Missing Children Protocol' currently being developed by the All Wales Child Protection Group. There is a clear and established link between periods of going missing (and in particular repeat episodes of going missing) and the risk of child sexual exploitation and abuse through sexual exploitation. There is also evidence to suggest that during periods of going missing children and young people are being internally trafficked so that abuse through sexual exploitation can take place.
- Advise local authorities that the use of secure accommodation is an inappropriate and ineffective response to child sexual exploitation.
- Engage with police authorities in Wales to encourage the strengthening of procedures to investigate, disrupt and convict perpetrators using powers already available to them through various pieces of legislation including the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- Petition the Westminster Government to remove the provisions to arrest and prosecute young people who are considered to 'persistently and voluntarily return to prostitution' under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. This

provision is very unhelpful. To retain the potential for prosecution of children experiencing this abuse undermines the principle that children should be protected from abuse and serves to perpetuate the myth that young people are making free and informed choices. The retention of this offence ignores the impact that complex life experiences and grooming processes have on a child enabling abuse to take place. The criminalisation of children in these circumstances is wholly unacceptable. Any Police resources should be concentrated on the protection of children and young people and the investigation and prosecution of offenders.

2. Local authorities should:

- Ensure that staff who work with vulnerable children and young people through education, community, health and Children's Services settings have knowledge of and access to training to support the implementation of the All Wales Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation Protocol. Practitioner awareness is key to the identification of risk of CSE and the protection of children and young people.
- Ensure that staff who work with vulnerable children and young people through education, community, health and Children's Services settings have access to information and tools so that they are well placed to identify risk of CSE.
- Monitor the number of children and young people in the authority who are at risk of or abused through CSE in line with the 'Safeguarding Children involved in Prostitution' Guidance issued in 2000.

- Protect all children and young people through the inclusion of basic safeguarding information, an understanding of 'healthy' relationships and a sense of agency and control about their bodies and selves in the school Personal and Social Education curriculum. Teaching resources to support this are available.
- Protect and engage vulnerable children and young people through group work or one-to-one work to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and provide tools for children and young people to recognise risky situations and to self protect as required.
- Ensure that a multi-agency strategy meeting under the All Wales Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation Protocol is held in relation to any child or young person where there are concerns about risk of CSE. The meeting should lead to a protection plan and include intensive direct work with the child or young person where appropriate.
- Ensure that intelligence about perpetrators, unsafe adults, vehicles and places is collected, shared and passed on to the police. Intelligence may be limited in relation to one child or young person but when information about a number of cases is put together the potential to disrupt or convict perpetrators will be increased.

Further resources and short briefings available electronically on request from michelle.gough@barnardos.org.uk

Telephone: 029 2049 1743

Clutton, S and Payne, R (2008) *Sample profile: children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation across 3 Welsh Authorities* Barnardo's Cymru – Free

Coles, J and Clutton, S (2008) *SERAF Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework Resource Pack*, Cardiff: Barnardo's Cymru – (Hard copy – there is a charge for this item)

Clutton, S (2008) *Children and Young People who go Missing and Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation* – Barnardo's Cymru – Free

Clutton, S. and Coles, J. (2008) *Core Aim 3: The best possible health, free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation* – *Child Sexual Exploitation* – Barnardo's Cymru – Free

Clutton, S. and Coles, J. (2007) *Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework: A pilot study*, Cardiff: Barnardo's Cymru – Free

References

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² This group was established in 2004, is chaired by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and has representation from across the statutory and voluntary sectors including Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the police.

³ Clutton, S and Coles, J (2007) -unpublished report presented to Welsh Assembly Government and at Local Safeguarding Children Boards Conference, March 2007

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¹⁶ Drinkwater, S Greenwood, H with Margaret Melrose, (2004) 'Young People Exploited through Prostitution: A Literature review', in Melrose, M. and Barret, D. (2004), *Anchors in Floating Lives: Interventions with young people sexually abused through prostitution*, pp 23-35 Dorset: Russell House Publishing

¹⁷ Biehal, N. and Wade, J. (1999), *Children who go missing: research, policy and practice*, London: DOH

¹⁸ Scott, S and Skidmore, P, (2006) *Reducing the Risk: Barnardo's support for sexually exploited young people; A two year evaluation*, Barkingside: Barnardo's www.barnardos.org.uk/reducingtherisk

¹⁹ Harper, Z. and Scott, S. (2005), *Meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people in London*, Barkingside: Barnardo's

²⁰ See 7 above, Barnardo's, 1998

²¹ See 5 above, Scott, S. and Skidmore, P. 2006

²² Scott, S. and Skidmore, P. (2006) *Reducing the risk: Barnardo's support for sexually exploited young people: A two-year evaluation*, pp48-49, Barkingside: Barnardo's

SERAF Framework

SERAF Category of risk	Indicators of risk	Description	Associated actions
Category 1 Not at risk	No risk indicators but may have one or more vulnerabilities present.	A child or young person who may be 'in need' but who is not currently at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Educate to stay safe. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 2 Mild risk	Multiple vulnerabilities. One or two risk indicators may also be present.	A vulnerable child or young person who may be at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation.	Consider multi-agency meeting to share information and agree a plan to address risk and/or need. Work on risk awareness and staying safe should be undertaken with this child/young person. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances.
Category 3 Moderate risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators present.	A child or young person who may be targeted for opportunistic abuse through exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc.	Convene multi-agency meeting under protocol for sexually exploited children and young people to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree safety plan. At least one review meeting to be convened. Work should be undertaken with this child/young person around risk reduction and keeping safe.
Category 4 Significant risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators. One or more significant risk indicators also likely.	Indication that a child or young person is at significant risk of or is already being sexually exploited. Sexual exploitation is likely to be habitual, often self-denied and coercion/control is implicit.	Convene multi-agency meeting under protocol for sexually exploited children and young people to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree safety plan, including regular review meetings. Protection plan should include long-term intensive direct work with the child or young person.
Moderate or Significant risk	As above.	Young person aged 18 years or above.	Where a young person is aged 18 years or over the associated action in relation to Moderate and Significant risk: sexual exploitation should be addressed as an issue in relation to this young person through the Pathway or other work plan; liaison between social services and Police Public Protection Unit to address the young person's protection.

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Barnardo's Cymru

Trident Court, East Moors
Road, Cardiff CF24 5TD.
Tel: 029 2049 3387

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