

Fife Child Protection Committee Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy



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Introduction

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a key challenge facing society today. It is a form of extra-familial harm¹ and exploitation that occurs when 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. CSE can have long-term effects on young people's wellbeing, impacting their life into adulthood.

This strategy sets out Fife's Children in Fife Partnership and the Child Protection Committee's continued commitment to prioritising the care and protection of children and young people ***'Making Fife a place where every child and young person matters'*** and where children and young people feel safe beyond their home because their communities and child protection systems can and will protect them from harm.

It is set within existing and established national and inter-agency policy and guidance and clarifies our partnership definition of CSE, identifies vulnerability indicators and articulates our commitment to tackling CSE. It sets out our shared understanding of the core values and approaches which underpin an effective response to keeping children and young people safe while being trauma informed.

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is mostly an unseen form of criminal sexual abuse. Victims may not recognise they are being sexually exploited because of the nuanced dynamic of control exerted by perpetrators over their victims. Victims might be unaware that they are being taken advantage of due to the subtle and manipulative ways that perpetrators control their victims.

There is very little information or consistently applied data on the incidence of CSE in Scotland, despite efforts in recent years by Scotland's National CSE Group to determine the scale, nature and prevalence.

¹ Extra-familial harm refers to abuse, exploitation, or violence that occurs outside of the family environment. It encompasses risks that children and young people may face from individuals or groups that may not be connected to them by blood or family ties. This type of harm can happen in various contexts, including online environments, within peer groups, at clubs and organisations they attend, or in the wider community.

Child sexual exploitation is not defined in law in Scotland. However National Guidance for Child Protection 2021 defines it as:

‘Child sexual exploitation (CSE) 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 person under 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or 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. Children who are trafficked across borders or within the UK may be at particular risk of sexual abuse.’

A child is anyone up to and including 17 years of age.

CSE can take many forms. It can happen to all genders and follow very different profiles of exploitation and abuse.

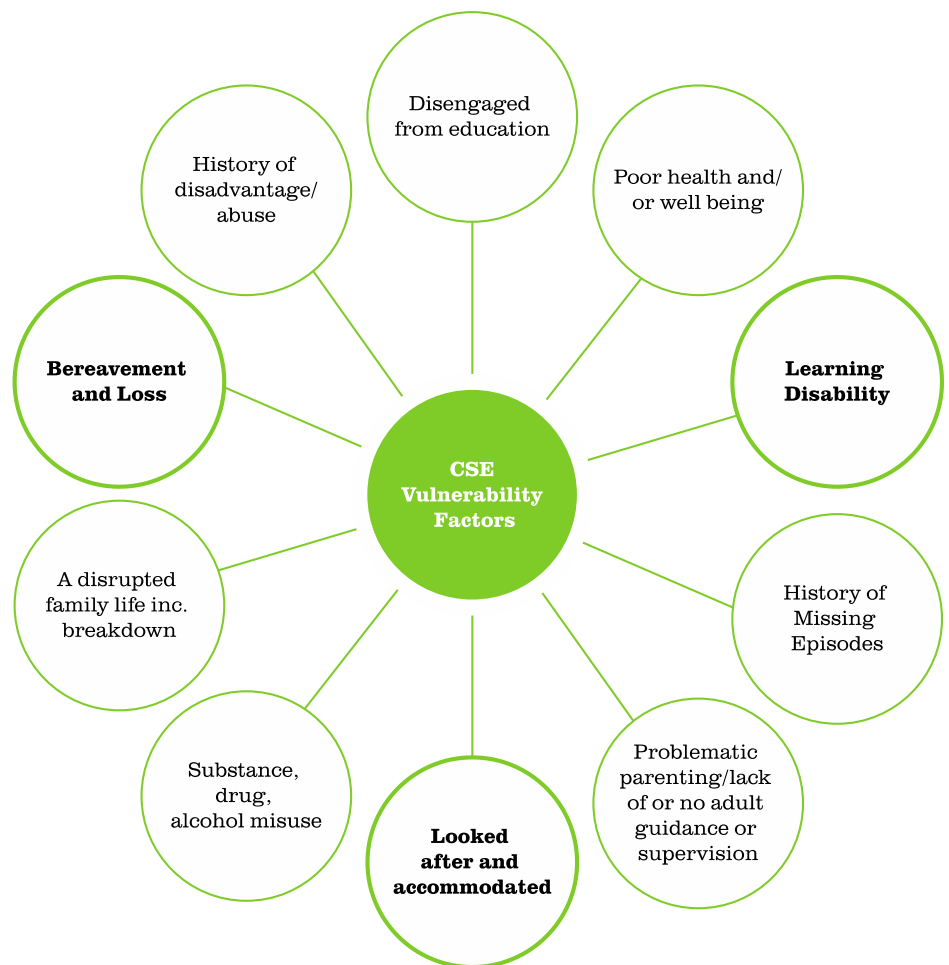
It can include:

- Abuse through the exchange of sexual activity for some form of payment, including non-financial exchanges such as food, shelter, protection and affection.
- Abuse through the production of indecent images and/or any other indecent material involving children whether photographs, films or other technologies.
- Abuse through grooming whether via direct contact or the use of technologies such as mobile phones and the internet.
- Abuse through trafficking for sexual purposes.
- CSE may be associated with child criminal exploitation (CCE). CCE is not defined in law but is a term that has come to be associated with ‘*county lines*’. County lines is a term used in the UK to describe organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas (within the UK), using dedicated mobile phone lines or other forms of ‘deal line’. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money, and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

The key factor that distinguishes CSE from other forms of sexual abuse is the presence of some form of exchange: i.e., the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse receive something in return for the sexual activity.

Vulnerability to CSE

All children and young people are potentially at risk of CSE; however, research tells us that some children and young people are more vulnerable than others. When a young person is exposed to contextual risks it can overwhelm families and disrupt safe and protective parent-child relationships. Neither individual nor contextual vulnerabilities cause exploitation – there has to be a person or people who have the motive to abuse another in order for exploitation to occur and an insufficient set of protective resilient factors in place to disrupt them. These people will then exploit vulnerabilities in order to abuse children and young people. The lack of protective structures interplay with contextual factors, individual characteristics and the motivations of those who are abusive to create the interconnected conditions of abuse.



The Policy Framework

The National Approach

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is complemented by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They underpin the Scottish Government's early intervention agenda.

Article 34 of the UNCRC requires public authorities to undertake to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, in particular, by taking all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

- The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity.
- The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices.
- The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

In line with the Scottish Government's 2021 revision to the National Child Protection Guidance, our partnership is committed to adopting an approach known as "Contextual Safeguarding." This ecological approach extends beyond traditional child protection frameworks, specifically targeting the risks and challenges young people may encounter in environments outside of their homes. By examining the multifaceted interactions between a young person and their surroundings, such as family, peers, schools, and local neighbourhoods, we aim to provide a more holistic understanding of needs and create tailored support plans. It is a methodology that places considerable emphasis on both individual and environmental interventions, addressing the social conditions that contribute to vulnerabilities, such as sexual exploitation.

Contextual Safeguarding moves beyond an individual-centred view of risk and protection. It recognises the significance of peer influence, especially during adolescence, and shifts the focus toward the contexts in which young people make choices, aiming to create conditions that enable safer choices. Key to this is partnership working and lawful information sharing across sectors, to interrupt patterns of harm, ensuring a comprehensive safeguarding net for vulnerable young people. This approach remains cognisant of structural issues like poverty and discrimination as part of the context in which risk occurs. Through implementing Contextual Safeguarding, we seek to strengthen our current child protection strategies, enabling a more nuanced and effective response to the complexities of harm and risk faced by young people today.

Together these initiatives provide the overarching context for the development of a co-ordinated and common approach around child protection, supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

Sat alongside this is the Scottish Government's [National Action Plan](#) 2014 and updated [plan](#) 2016 to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). This plan has 3 long term outcomes.

1. Sexual exploitation of children and young people is eliminated.
2. Children and young people are protected from harm.
3. Society in Scotland is a hostile place for perpetrators and facilitators of child sexual exploitation.

These are structured around 4 intermediate outcomes.

1. The risk that children and young people are sexually exploited is reduced through a focus on prevention and early identification.
2. Children and young people at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation and their families receive appropriate and high-quality support.
3. Perpetrators are stopped, brought to justice and are less likely to re-offend.
4. Cultural and social barriers to preventing and tackling CSE are reduced.

The multi-agency [National Child Sexual Exploitation Group](#) was established to oversee the implementation of actions within the action plan. [Guidance](#) for Practitioners was published in 2016. In 2017 Scottish Government [A Guide for health practitioners](#) was published.

The government set up a national awareness-raising campaign for parents, carers and young people with a range of organisations details of which are contained [here](#).

The work of the National CSE Action Group concluded when the [Final Delivery Report - National Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation \(2020\)](#) was published. The momentum set during this extensive period of activity continues at the local level.

Our Local Approach

Fife's Child Wellbeing Pathway and Fife's Child Protection Guidance, in conjunction with Fife's CSE Guidance for Practitioners, underpin our practice. The group implementing contextual safeguarding plays a critical role in driving forward this CSE strategy as part of its broader work to address extra-familial harm. This group will ensure that the strategy is effectively integrated into the wider contextual safeguarding efforts, creating a cohesive approach to tackling all forms of harm young people may face outside their homes.

Training opportunities are offered to staff to understand and respond to CSE. Additionally, we have created access to comprehensive resources for the multi-agency workforce from [CELCIS - CSE Knowledge Bank](#) and associated Hub.

Our work aligns with the expectations set by the [Quality framework for children and young people in need of care and protection \(2022\)](#) focusing on the following quality indicators:

Quality Indicator 5.1: Recognition and response to initial concerns.

Quality Indicator 5.2: Assessing risk and need.

Quality Indicator 5.3: Care planning, managing risk and effective intervention.

Quality Indicator 5.4 Involving individual children and young people and families.

Quality Indicator 6.3 Participation of children, young people, families and other stakeholders.

Linking to the CPC Improvement Plan

This Improvement Plan outlines our collective efforts and strategic actions to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people in Fife. Key actions from the CPC Improvement Plan are highlighted and integrated into our CSE

Six for Safety Statement

The needs of the **Child are at the centre** of all practice.

Outcome 1

We ensure Children's voices are heard and are central in the decisions that affect them, and these voices influence how we support families.

No.	Actions	Strategic Lead	Timescale	Outcomes
1.1	Review child protection protocols and guidance to ensure that children's voices are actively sought, heard, and considered in all aspects of child protection work, including risk assessment and planning in line with good practice from the national guidance and principles of the Promise.	Lead Officer CPC	August 2024	Fife Child Protection Guidance has systems to gather the views of children and their families as an integral part of their arrangements.
1.2	Develop a systematic approach to involving children and their families in the appraisal, review and development of child protection policies and processes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In conjunction with the strategic partnership groups leading on rights and engagement, develop the business activity. 	Lead Officer CPC – in collaboration with wider partners	August 2024	The views of children and families are considered in relation to child protection issues that affect them and inform practice, policy, and service improvements.

No.	Actions	Strategic Lead	Timescale	Outcomes
<u>Six for Safety Statement</u>				
Ensuring that all <u>relationships with children, parents/carers</u> are effective, constructive and are central to improving wellbeing and minimise risk of harm.				
<u>Outcome 2</u>				
We develop and maintain constructive, positive, trusting relationships with children, their families and those significant within their life. We recognise the impact of Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences on wellbeing, welfare, and risk. We achieve this through having a confident and competent multi-agency workforce applying trauma informed intervention to establish positive engagement and relationships with children and families.				
2.1	Continue to develop a multi-agency approach towards raising awareness and understanding the impact of childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences.	Lead Officer for Trauma/All	Ongoing	Our workforces are trauma informed and our assessments are iterative, taking account of both current and past information and the child's developmental stage. Our parents and carers experience supportive, trusting relationships, improved capability for sustained change. (ACE and Impact of Trauma).
<u>Six for Safety Statement</u>				
All <u>assessments and plans</u> are effective in achieving outcomes in meeting needs and minimising risk of harm. All available resources, techniques and tools are used to best effect.				
<u>Outcome 3</u>				
Children and young people in need of care and protection are safer as a consequence of high-quality timely responses to concerns about possible or actual risk of harm. We have embedded complementary approaches to assessment - enhancing collaboration, streamlining procedures, and improving decision making.				
3.2	The partnership to develop an integrated strategic response to contextual safeguarding which addresses the needs of young people including CSE, Substance Use, and Criminal Exploitation.	Contextual Safeguarding Group	January 2025	Children who are at risk of extra familial harm are safeguarded.

Six for Safety Statement

Early and effective intervention is achieved where possible, minimising the risk of harm to children and young people.

Outcome 5

The partnership work across the continuum from wellbeing to protection within the 'Getting it Right for Every Child' framework ensures children receive appropriate assistance at the right time and when they need it.

No.	Actions	Strategic Lead	Timescale	Outcomes
5.1	Local guidance is in place to ensure that the interface between wellbeing and protection is effective. This guidance is supported by training and development activities.	Children in Fife and the Child Protection Committee	December 2024	Children's needs are responded to appropriately in Child Protection or GIRFEC/Child Wellbeing Processes.
5.2	Evaluation activity is undertaken around the use of the Child Wellbeing Pathway (CWP) and team around the child meetings identifying if services are adopting a GIRFEC approach in relation to earlier intervention and the interface with Child Protection.	Children in Fife and the Child Protection Committee	December 2024	Children's emerging needs are responded to in an early and preventative manner through Child Wellbeing Pathway.

Governance

Tasking relating to this strategy will be undertaken by the Contextual Safeguarding Group directed from the Child Protection Committee and linking with the Children in Fife Partnership. Actions undertaken in relation to this strategy will be reported to the Child Protection Committee and Children in Fife Partnership.