



South Hetton Primary School

Child Sexual
Exploitation Policy
September 2023

Introduction:

This policy has been developed in response to growing concerns about the scale of sexual exploitation and the recognition that any child might be targeted for grooming and exploitation.

Policy aims:

The aims of this policy are to:

- demonstrate South Hetton Primary's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils
- raise awareness about sexual exploitation and grooming
- help staff to identify warning signs and vulnerable children
- explain the school's procedures to be followed if sexual exploitation and grooming are suspected
- stress the importance of multi-agency cooperation.

Application

This policy should be followed by all staff, volunteers and governors.

Definitions

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. We are aware that child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology.

Like all forms of child sex abuse, child sexual exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
- can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
- can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and noncontact sexual activity;
- can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;

- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (e.g. through others copying videos or images they have created and posted on social media);
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and
- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

Grooming is the process of 'preparing' a boy or girl for a sexual purpose. Grooming is often slow and subtle, continuing for several weeks or months and lulling the child into a false sense of security. It always involves manipulation and deceit.

Two types of grooming are recognised: street grooming which occurs in the community, and online grooming using technology including the internet and mobile phones.

The complexity and challenge of sexual exploitation and grooming

It can be difficult to identify children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation. The grooming process draws children in to what they initially perceive as a new and caring relationship with an exciting older boyfriend or girlfriend. Attempts to explain the risks to the child may be met with derision and hostility. By the time the child realises the reality of the 'relationship' they may have been seriously sexually and physically abused, threatened with the distribution of indecent photographs or videos of their abuse and warned that they will put themselves or their family in danger if they speak out. Unsurprisingly, the child will be reticent to disclose their abuse, particularly to people in positions of authority such as teachers, social workers or police officers. The child may find it impossible, for a number of reasons, to speak to their parent and their abusers will have sought to isolate them from their family and friends. Some children may have developed drug or alcohol addictions and rely on their abusers for supply.

Some of the following signs may be indicators of child sexual exploitation:

- children who appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- children who associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- children who have older boyfriends or girlfriends;

- children who suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- children who suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- children who misuse drugs and alcohol;
- children who go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late; and
- children who regularly miss school or education or do not take part in education

(Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges (DfE))

A fundamental learning point to emerge from cases of sexual exploitation such as those in Derby, Rochdale and Oxford and the Jimmy Saville case is that many children who try to disclose their abuse are not believed, or value judgements are made by professionals about the young person, suggesting they are 'willing partners' in a lifestyle they have 'chosen'. Remarkably, some young people's concerns and disclosures have been dismissed as groundless because of their challenging behaviour, involvement in crime or history of going missing from home, school or care.

As a school we have a responsibility to do all we can to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and grooming and to identify and support any pupil who is at risk of abuse.

School Action

School staff are the only professionals in daily direct contact with children and we play an important role in keeping pupils safe and supporting them when things go wrong. To help keep our pupils safe from sexual exploitation and grooming we will:

- Promote healthy and safe relationships through Science and PHSE lessons. Older pupils will participate in Sexual Relationship Education, which will be led by school staff in support with the school nurse;
- Raise pupils' awareness of sexual exploitation and grooming at an age appropriate level through PHSE lessons, which will be led by staff;
- Raise staff awareness of sexual exploitation and grooming through staff meetings;
- Help parents to understand the issues by sharing information at parents' meetings and signposting through additional communication, e.g. newsletters;
- Contribute to multi-agency safeguarding and child protection arrangements;
- Participate in regular child protection training, which also includes information on CSE.

The age of consent

Although in UK law a child is anyone under the age of 18, the age of consent to sexual activity (whether heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian or bisexual) is 16. Children who have reached the age of consent may nevertheless be capable of being victims of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or rape.

Regarding children (that is, those under the age of 18) sexual activity is a criminal offence and school will always refer concerns about this to children's social services. School staff should report any concern about sexual activity to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), who will decide on the most appropriate course of action. The school will follow the Durham LSCB guidance on dealing with under-age sexual activity.

School staff who are approached by a pupil wishing to discuss sexual matters must make it clear to the pupil that they cannot guarantee confidentiality but will act in the child's best interests.

Sexually active young people:

In law, a child is a person under the age of 18. Not all sexual activity involving a child is criminal, nor is it always abusive. Consideration should be given in every case of sexual activity involving a child aged 13–15 as to whether there should be a discussion with other agencies and whether a referral should be made to children's social services. The professional should make this assessment using the considerations below. Within this age range the younger the child the stronger the presumption must be that sexual activity will be a matter of concern. Cases of concern should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and, subsequently, with other agencies if required. Where confidentiality needs to be preserved a discussion can still take place as long as it does not identify the child (directly or indirectly). Where there is reasonable cause to suspect that significant harm to a child has occurred, or is likely to occur, there should be a presumption that the case is reported to children's social services and a strategy discussion should be held to discuss appropriate next steps. Again, all cases should be carefully documented including where a decision is taken not to share information.

The following factors should be taken into account when assessing the extent to which the child may be suffering or at risk of harm:

- The age of the child. Sexual activity at a young age is a very strong indicator that there are risks to the welfare of the child (whether boy or girl) and possibly others
- The level of maturity and understanding of the child
- What is known about the child's living circumstances or background

- Age or status imbalance, in particular where there is a significant age or status difference
- Overt aggression
- Coercion or bribery
- A history of child sexual offences within the family
- Behaviour of the child, e.g. Withdrawn, anxious
- The misuse of substances, including alcohol, which may act to lower inhibitions
- Whether the child's own behaviour, including a tendency to misuse substances, might place him/her at risk of harm so that s/he is unable to make an informed choice about any activity
- Whether any attempts to secure secrecy have been made by the sexual partner, beyond what would be considered usual in a teenage relationship
- Whether the child denies, minimises or accepts concerns
- Whether the methods used are consistent with grooming and
- Whether the sexual partner/s is/are known by one of the agencies.

On the basis of careful assessment of the above factors a decision should be made about whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that significant harm has occurred or might occur. If there is reasonable cause a referral should be made to children's social services who are expected to apply child protection procedures and hold a Strategy Meeting/Discussion to discuss appropriate next steps.

The Police should normally share required information about the sexual partner without beginning an investigation. The Strategy Meeting/Discussion must consider issues of consent and confidentiality in respect of informing parents/carers without the young person's consent, seeking legal advice as appropriate.

A Child/Young Person 16 or 17 Years Old

Sexual activity involving a 16- or 17-year-old, although it might not constitute an offence, may still involve harm or the risk of harm (For example, rape or harassment etc). Professionals should bear in mind the considerations and processes outlined above in this guidance in assessing that risk, and should share information as appropriate.

It should also be remembered that where someone is in a position of trust or authority in relation to a child (that is, anyone under the age of 18) it is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with the child.

The Legal Framework

Sections 175 and 157 of The Education Act 2002 require the governing bodies of all schools and colleges and the proprietors of independent schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils.

The statutory child protection guidance for schools is 'Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment'. This guidance was replaced by 'Keeping Children Safe in School' in 2013. The new advice document explains the role of the school.

'It is important that children receive the right help at the right time. For that to happen, everyone who comes in contact with children in school has a role to play in identifying concerns early, sharing information and taking prompt, informed action. Therefore all professionals in schools should be vigilant and act quickly when they suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, harm.'

The multi-agency child protection guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2018) emphasises that:

'... professionals working in universal services have a responsibility to identify the symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect, to share that information and work together to provide children and young people with the help they need. Practitioners need to continue to develop their knowledge and skills in this area. They should have access to training to identify and respond early to abuse and neglect, and to the latest research'

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 covers sexual offences against children, including offences involving grooming and the internet and trafficking.

Warning Signs:

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse and the range of indicators of sexual abuse can be found in Appendix 1 and in the school's child protection policy.

Procedures to be followed when sexual exploitation or grooming are known or suspected:

Early identification of risk is known to be a crucial factor in reducing harm so the vigilance of school staff is critically important. Staff should not attempt to manage concerns about sexual exploitation or grooming in isolation. The DSL must always be informed and school leadership will enlist the advice and support of children's social services and the police as appropriate. This policy was shared with teachers, teaching assistants, kitchen staff, caretaker and cleaning staff, administration staff, lunchtime staff and governors. This policy can also be accessed through the school's website.