The Children's Society

Criminal Exploitation: Stages of Recruitment

Children At Risk of Exploitation (CARE)

childrenssocietyeast.org.uk/care

No child should feel alone

Criminal exploitation 'involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive "something" (eg food, accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them completing a task on behalf of another individual or group of individuals; this is often of a criminal nature.'

Criminal exploitation often occurs without the child's immediate recognition, with the child believing that they are in control of the situation. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability' (Knowsley Safeguarding Children's Board).

This document has been designed with young people to outline the grooming process as they experience it. This is the full outline of stages to be used alongside the young person's handout, and guidance which can be downloaded from **childrenssocietyeast.org.uk/care**

There are four main recruitment stages when somebody is trying to exploit a young person. Knowing what signs to look out for can help you to keep young people safe from exploitation.

Targeting stage

This is when an exploiter targets a young person who is vulnerable, reducing their chances of getting caught. Exploiters pick their targets based on things like your age, strength or situation. Signs of this stage include an exploiter:

- Observing a young person.
- Finding out a young person's vulnerabilities, needs and wants.
- Selecting a young person as a target.
- Glamourising their lifestyle.
- Gaining and developing a young person's trust.
- Sharing information with other members of their gang.
- Recruiting a young person to their gang or friendship group.
- Marking a young person out as someone to watch.

Experience stage

This stage is where an exploiter might try to get a young person used to their lifestyle, or train them up in what they're doing. At this stage an exploiter might:

- Make a young person feel wanted.
- Give them gifts and rewards.
- Include them in their activities.
- Test out a young person's loyalty.
- Listen to a young person and remember what they say.
- Offer a young person protection.
- Relate to a young person and offer them advice.
- Give them a sense of belonging.
- Praise a young person.
- Give them a weapon.
- Introduce a young person to more established members of their gang.
- Ask to see and test a young person's skills.

Hooked stage

This is the stage where an exploiter will make a young person feel like they're a member of their gang, even though they're just exploiting them. Signs that a young person is in the hooked stage of being exploited can include them:

- Having an identity in the group.
- Being given a bigger role in the group (eg people running for them).
- Getting more responsibilities within the group eg more money.
- Engaging in thrill seeking behaviour/ committing low level crimes.
- Feeling more powerful (although this may not be the reality).
- Feeling they've made a progression in the group (although this may not be the reality).
- Others may know their name, helping them feel more powerful (but this can result in rivalry).
- Having a dependency created by their exploiter.
- Being exposed to possible consequences to their actions.
- Being given access to information.
- Engaging in activities such as drugs, alcohol and sexual behaviour.
- Being asked for favours/to keep secrets/to recruit others to the gang.
- Becoming involved with trap houses.

Trapped stage

Now a young feels dependent on the group, their relationship with their exploiter may start to become unpleasant, as their exploiter's true intents or character is revealed. At this stage a young person may experience:

- Threatening behaviour.
- Attempts to reinforcing their dependency/make them indebted to their exploiter.
- Blackmail – include 'fake' mugging organised to create a debt.
- Physical violence and sexual assaults including strip searches, drugs being inserted for running (plugging).
- People playing on their guilt, shame and fear and attempting to isolate them from their family, friends and society.
- People forcing them to abuse others, assault or even shoot people.
- People humiliating them, either sexually or by exposing their mistakes to others
- Being made to feel trapped.
- Involvement in Class A drugs (cooking or running).
- Running a trap house.
- Drug addiction (encouraged by others) or dependency on their exploiter (resulting in them having less money).

About County Lines

The Children's Society Youth Experts describe 'county lines' as invisible borders that separate a person's hometown from where they are sent to 'work' (selling drugs, sex, firearms etc) for older members of a gang or crew. Young people are usually sent in twos or threes for intimidation purposes and 'backup'. A young person will typically spend less than two weeks away from home, keeping in regular contact with their 'olders' via burner phones.

Right now in Britain there are children and young people who feel scared, unloved and unable to cope. The Children's Society works with these young people, step by step, for as long as it takes.

We listen. We support. We act.

There are no simple answers so we work with others to tackle complex problems. Only together can we make a difference to the lives of children now and in the future.

Because no child should feel alone.

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If you would like to know more about The Children's Society and our work with children and young people, please visit **childrenssociety.org.uk** or call us on **01245 493 311**

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