

The purpose of the child safeguarding practice review process, at local and national level, is to identify improvements that can be made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. They should seek to prevent or reduce the risk of recurrence of similar incidents. They are not conducted to hold individuals, organisations, or agencies to account. Sharing from the learning of these reviews is vital for all practitioners to reflect on to ensure practice is continually evolving in the best interest of children, young people and families.

Introduction

Child AM was a 15-year-old young person who experienced escalating child criminal exploitation over a number of years. Early concerns included changes in behaviour, reduced engagement with education, missing episodes, vulnerability within peer groups and increasing exposure to extra-familial harm. As more information became available, professionals developed a clearer understanding of the extent of exploitation, coercion and control affecting AM's life.

The review considered how agencies identified and responded to emerging exploitation risks, how information was shared, how risk was assessed and how multi-agency plans worked together to safeguard AM. The learning highlights important considerations for practitioners working with children experiencing child criminal exploitation, contextual harm, educational disruption and complex safeguarding needs.

Areas of Good Practice

Early recognition of vulnerability Education professionals identified early changes in behaviour, self-esteem and emerging vulnerability, making an Early Help referral and ensuring concerns were escalated appropriately.

Relationship-based practice Practitioners worked persistently to build trusting relationships with AM and gain insight into his lived experience. Where strong relationships were established, professionals were better able to understand the pressures, fears and exploitation affecting him.

Strong multi-agency intelligence gathering Police, education, Youth Justice, safeguarding services and parents worked collaboratively to build a clearer understanding of risk over time. Information sharing enabled professionals to identify peer networks, contextual risks and indicators of organised criminal exploitation.

Professional persistence The review found sustained professional involvement despite increasingly complex circumstances. Agencies remained committed to reducing harm, safeguarding AM and exploring every available opportunity to improve safety and outcomes.

Recognition of exploitation as abuse As understanding developed, professionals increasingly recognised AM as a child experiencing exploitation and coercion rather than simply displaying challenging or offending behaviour. This reflected child-centred and trauma-informed practice.

Context

- AM experienced increasing vulnerability to child criminal exploitation, with concerns escalating over time.
- Professionals were working within a complex picture involving exploitation risk, behavioural changes, educational disengagement and emerging vulnerabilities.
- Missing episodes, peer associations and concerns regarding organised criminal exploitation became increasingly evident as multi-agency intelligence developed.
- Education was recognised as a key protective factor, but exploitation and wider vulnerabilities increasingly affected engagement with learning.

Resources & Further Information

All NYSCP practice guidance can be accessed [here](#).

- [BeAware - Child Exploitation Awareness and resource Hub](#)
- [Voice of the Child Toolkit](#)
- [Professional Curiosity Practice Guidance](#)
- [Missing Children Protocol](#)
- [North Yorkshire and York Menu of Disruption Tactics](#)
- [National Working Group](#)

Learning from other Safeguarding Practice Reviews can be accessed [here](#).

Areas of Development

- **Early identification of exploitation:** Emerging indicators such as missing episodes, peer associations, behavioural change and educational disruption were not always recognised as part of a developing exploitation picture.
- **Contextual understanding of risk:** Vulnerabilities were sometimes viewed individually rather than considered together within the wider context of peer influence, environments and exploitation.
- **Multi-agency planning:** Multiple plans and interventions were in place, but connectivity, ownership and oversight were not always clear.
- **Education as a protective factor:** Education was recognised as important, however educational concerns and safeguarding planning were not always fully aligned.
- **Child voice and disruption:** There are opportunities to strengthen how children's lived experiences are understood through behaviour and to further develop coordinated disruption of perpetrators, locations and networks causing harm.

Recommendations

- **Recognise exploitation earlier:** Consider missing episodes, peer associations, behavioural change and educational disengagement as part of a wider pattern of risk.
- **Use contextual safeguarding approaches:** Understand the influence of peers, places, neighbourhoods, schools and online environments when assessing risk and planning interventions.
- **Strengthen multi-agency planning:** Ensure plans are connected, responsibilities are clear and agencies work towards shared outcomes for children and families.
- **Listen to the child's voice:** Recognise that behaviour, withdrawal, fear, distress and non-engagement may be important indicators of exploitation and lived experience.
- **Focus on disruption and prevention:** Work together to identify and disrupt the people, places and networks causing harm, whilst supporting parents as safeguarding partners.

Actions and recommendations will be reviewed as part of the NYSCP Subgroup meetings

Questions for Reflection

- **Are we recognising patterns of exploitation early enough, or responding to incidents in isolation?**
- **How well do we understand the impact of peers, places, education and online environments on the children we support?**
- **Are we hearing and evidencing the child's voice, including through behaviour, withdrawal and non-engagement?**
- **How effectively are we using education information to understand vulnerability, risk and protective factors?**
- **Are parents being supported and engaged as safeguarding partners throughout the child's journey?**
- **How effectively are we disrupting the people, places and networks that are causing harm to children?**

What to do now

Consider the questions for reflection in your team meetings and think about how the learning can be embedded into practice.

Familiarise yourself with the additional resources and information and promote across your teams.

Share your learning and the key messages with your colleagues. Further audits and learning can be accessed [here](#)