

Recognising CCE: Practical Examples

- Ben, a 15-year-old male is coerced by a gang to transport drugs across various locations. He is threatened with violence if he refuses and is given a mobile phone to communicate with gang members. Ben travels alone, often missing school.

“It’s all about money. They get the kids in to do the running about-if they sell for them they (the kids) take the fall”

- Lucas, a 16-year-old male is manipulated into opening bank accounts and transferring money for a criminal group. He is threatened with harm if he does not comply and is unaware of the illegal nature of his actions.
- Jen, a 13-year-old female, is forced to steal items from stores and ‘pickpocket’ strangers. She is monitored by older gang members who ensure she hands over the stolen goods. Jen feels trapped and unable to seek help.

“You can actually put yourself in more danger if you tell anyone or tell anyone about the threat or anything. You can make it worse for yourself and put yourself in more danger”

- Beth, a 17-year-old female’s home is taken over by a gang to use as a base for drug dealing. She is threatened and forced to allow gang members to stay and operate from her home, making her complicit in their activities.



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- Jamie, a 16-year-old male living in a neighbourhood with a high level of gang activity. He has been struggling at school and feels isolated from his peers. He was approached by an older gang member who gradually involved him in minor criminal activities. As tensions rise in the community due to controversial local issues, the gang plan a disturbance to create chaos and distract the police from their other criminal activities. Jamie is coerced into participating in the civil unrest, given a mask, weapon and instructions on how to act during the disturbance. He is threatened with violence if he refuses to participate. He, along with other young people, is placed at the front lines of the public disorder and instructed to throw objects at the police and vandalise property. The gang members stay in the background, using the young people as a shield to avoid direct confrontation with the police. Jamie is subsequently arrested during the civil unrest and faces legal consequences. He has suffered trauma and physical injuries as a result of the violence.

“There’s this boy now and he’s really young-like he only turned 13 now. When he first started coming round here he was 10 ...by getting into his head, because he was so young, they said all these things and got him to fight...he didn’t know he was being used-he still doesn’t know... because of the amount of influence he put on him, he’s been kicked out of school...he’s the most used and manipulated one ever... if he found our friend group before he found them, he would be like us...it’s kind of sad though just thinking about it...he wants them people to respect him...see now thinking about it, I’m just realising it”

The quotes above are from young people involved in research conducted by Dr Colm Walsh “Child Criminal Exploitation: From Criminal to Contextual Harm. Young People’s Perceptions and Experiences of CCE in Northern Ireland”; December 2022



What can you do to help a child or young person who is being exploited?

Identify Signs

Training: Ensure all practitioners are trained to recognise signs of exploitation.

Observation: Regularly monitor and document any concerning behaviours or physical signs.

Provide Immediate Safety and Support

Safe Environment: Create a safe and supportive environment where the child or young person feels secure and can speak openly.

Emergency Measures: If the child or young person is in immediate danger, take necessary steps to ensure their safety, including contacting police and social services.

Multi-Agency Collaboration

Coordination: Work collaboratively with other agencies such as social services, health, police, youth justice, education and those within the community and voluntary sector to provide comprehensive support.

Information Sharing: Share relevant information with other practitioners to ensure a coordinated response.

Offering Emotional and Psychological Care

Counselling: Provide access to counselling and mental health services to help the child or young person cope with trauma and emotional distress.

Support Groups: Encourage participation in support groups where the child or young person can connect with others who have had similar experiences.

Legal Guidance and Advocacy Support

Legal Advice: Offer legal advice and representation to help the child or young person navigate any legal proceedings related to their exploitation.

Advocacy: Advocate for the child or young person’s rights and ensure their voice is heard in all decisions affecting them.

Practitioner Awareness of Child Criminal Exploitation

A Guide for Practitioners



The Departments of Health, Justice and Education have developed a 2-year action plan in collaboration with multi-agency stakeholders to address Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) in Northern Ireland by:

- Increasing awareness to create a shared understanding of CCE as child abuse
- Preventing the criminal exploitation of children and young people
- Ensuring that there is an effective protection and intervention response when exploitation occurs and
- Pursuing and bringing to justice those responsible for exploiting young people, making the best use of existing legislative powers.

The action plan includes a definition for CCE to assist people to recognise when children and young people are being exploited. You can find a copy of the Child Criminal Exploitation Action Plan below:

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/child-criminal-exploitation-action-plan>



A Definition of CCE

The CCE Action Plan is underpinned by an agreed definition of CCE, which was developed jointly with children and young people.

Child Criminal exploitation is a form of child abuse which occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an **imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive** a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity. The exploitation may be through **violence or the threat of violence** but may also appear to be transactional and in the context of perceived relationships and friendships. **The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears to be consensual.** CCE does not always involve physical contact. It can also occur through the **use of technology and social media.**

The criminal exploitation of children and young people can include being exploited **into storing drugs or weapons, drug dealing, theft, violence, intimidation, vandalism, forced labour** and other forms of criminality through grooming by people who children and young people trust or look up to.”

(CCE Action Plan).

Signs and Indicators of CCE

Identifying CCE is the responsibility of all agencies and practitioners who have duties for the care and protection of children and young people. Early and proactive identification can assist with preventing criminalisation of victims and further exploitation.

Be aware of these common signs that a child or young person might be a victim of CCE:

- Possession of unexplained money, goods, or new mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts or phone calls
- Changes in behaviour and routine such as going missing or regularly returning home late without explanation
- Significant decline in attendance or absence from school or work
- Sudden changes in behaviour or appearance, signs of physical harm or distress
- Association with older individuals or new groups of friends
- Starting or increasing alcohol or drug use
- Significant changes in emotional well-being
- Carrying weapons
- Becoming isolated from peers or social networks
- Self-harm
- Increasingly disruptive or violent behaviour
- Coming to police attention

Sometimes children and young people, because they have committed crimes or are associated with a gang or group, are not considered victims by adults and practitioners, despite the harm they have experienced.

We all have a statutory responsibility to protect children and young people from abuse irrespective of whether or not they view themselves as a victim of abuse.

How CCE affects Children and Young People

CCE can have severe physical, emotional and psychological effects on children and young people including:

- Trauma and anxiety
- Physical injuries
- Isolation from family and friends
- Long-term mental health issues
- Legal consequences, impacting the child and young person’s future

