

SERAF Guidance

Identifying & assessing sexual / criminal exploitation risks

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1. General guidance points

- The SERAF is a child exploitation risk assessment tool. Your professional judgement is as equally important as the score.
- A SERAF should be completed as soon as potential concerns regarding Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) are identified. This may follow a missing episode, or increasing occasions of a child truanting from school, staying out late, associating with new peers/associates where there may be some concerns etc. It will guide you as to the level of CSE/CCE Risk, and the level and type of intervention which should follow.
- Gather information from multiple sources including family members, school, other professionals, the child, to ensure that you have the fullest information about risk indicators and any explanations for these.
- Give **timeframes** for when indicators have been identified – frequency and extent of concerns/incidents should be informing your view of the level of risk.
- You should **provide relevant details** for each vulnerability and risk indicator identified as this will be informing your understanding of the nature and extent of risks – including how it may be linked to CSE/CCE. Refer to Sections 2 – 4 of this guidance for examples of the details you should seek.
- **Be mindful of your use of language.** Children are not responsible for their own abuse, and often they do not recognise the risks we may be concerned about. Try to think about how you would feel if you were writing about yourself as the child, or how they would feel if they read what you were writing about them.
- **Use the scoring guidance** (page 8) to ensure that you are scoring the SERAF correctly.
- A SERAF should be **carried out at regular intervals** to record any increase or reduction in risk and should **inform appropriate intervention**.
- A SERAF should always be carried out following a **change in circumstances** (e.g. change in placement) as this can have a significant impact on risk.

Recording the SERAF on Paris (Children’s Services staff only)

The SERAF needs to be recorded in the ‘child exploitation’ (type) case note. The case note reason is ‘SERAF CSE’, ‘SERAF CCE’, or ‘SERAF CSE/CCE’ depending on the nature of exploitation risk assessed. **Upload the SERAF and fill out the drop down boxes in the case note.**

- When completing the ‘**current CSE/CCE status**’ box in the case note – consider whether the child is:
 - ‘Vulnerable to CSE/CCE’ - the child’s previous experiences increase their vulnerability to exploitation but there is no indication of them being at risk (consistent with mild risk).
 - ‘At risk of CSE/CCE’ - a number of exploitation risk indicators have been identified which highlight the child is at risk of CSE/CCE but there is no evidence/indication that they are currently being exploited (consistent with moderate risk).
 - ‘Known victim of CSE/CCE’ - Information indicates that the child is known to have recently been/is being sexually or criminally exploited and there is evidence/disclosure to support this (consistent with moderate/significant risk).

2. Vulnerability factors:

This section of the SERAF includes factors that we know may render children and young people vulnerable to being targeted for child sexual / criminal exploitation.

2.1 Emotional neglect by parent/carer/family member:

THINK ABOUT – Has the child suffered emotional neglect and has this impacted upon their vulnerability to CSE/CCE? Do they feel wanted and loved within their family? Are they likely to be at increased risk of seeking out attention, affection or belonging due to their caregiving experiences?

2.2 Physical abuse by parent/carer/family member:

THINK ABOUT – Has the child suffered physical abuse which is likely to have increased their vulnerability to CSE/CCE? Remember to use your professional judgement to distinguish between isolated physical chastisement (which was not deemed abusive), and physical abuse which has significantly impacted upon the child.

2.3 Sexual abuse:

THINK ABOUT - Has the child suffered sexual abuse in the past? This is not about current sexual exploitation – it is about considering whether the child has past experiences of sexual abuse in some form, which will have increased their vulnerability to CSE / CCE.

2.4 Breakdown of family relationships:

THINK ABOUT – Has there been a breakdown in family relationships which leave the child vulnerable to others who may seek to befriend and groom them? Is the child likely to want to avoid being at home due to difficult relationships?

2.5 Family history of domestic abuse:

THINK ABOUT – Is there a known history of domestic abuse within the family? If so, this may have impacted upon the child's understanding of healthy relationships as well as their emotional wellbeing – this is likely to increase their vulnerability. Is their ongoing domestic abuse which may serve as a reason for the child to want to avoid being at home? Is the impact of domestic abuse likely to impair the parent's capacity to act protectively of their child?

2.6 Family history of substance misuse:

THINK ABOUT – Similar to above. Use your professional judgement to consider whether the 'family history of substance misuse' has been significant enough to increase the child's vulnerability.

2.7 Family history of mental health difficulties:

THINK ABOUT – Similar to above. Again, use your professional judgement to consider whether the extent of the mental health difficulties within the family has been significant enough to increase the child's vulnerability.

2.8 Low self-esteem:

THINK ABOUT - Self-esteem relates to our view of self, the value we give ourselves (our self-worth). When thinking about low self-esteem think about: does they child consider themselves unlovable or inferior, unworthy, that they deserve bad things to happen to them, do they accept when bad things happen to them and is this a sign of their lack of self-worth?

2.9 Unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation:

THINK ABOUT – Is unsuitable or inappropriate accommodation an issue and is this increasing the child's vulnerability to CSE / CCE? Is the child sofa-surfing or street homeless? Are they in accommodation which is not very suitable for their needs e.g. young people supported accommodation when they are known to be vulnerable?

2.10 Isolated from peers/social networks:

THINK ABOUT – Does the child lack a stable friendship group? Do they have appropriate friends their own age? Do they struggle to maintain appropriate friendships and tend to drift around? Do they feel lonely and like they have no real friends?

2.11 Lack of positive relationship with a protective/nurturing adult:

THINK ABOUT – Does the child have a positive relationship with an adult who is protective and nurturing of them? This doesn't necessarily have to be a parent, it may be an extended family member, or a family friend, or even in some cases a particular professional? They do not need to have this type of relationship with everyone.

2.12 Physical or Learning Disability

THINK ABOUT – Does the child have a physical or learning disability which is increasing their vulnerability / susceptibility to being targeted for grooming / exploitation?

3. Moderate Risk Indicators:

This section of the SERAF includes indicators that are associated with risk of or that may indicate abuse through sexual / criminal exploitation.

TIMEFRAME: These should be ticked if they are currently present or have been present during the past 3 months.

3.1 Staying out late:

THINK ABOUT – Is the child demonstrating a pattern of staying out late? Has there been a recent change? If the child is staying out late, provide details! Are they coming home 15 minutes or not coming home until 3am? These are very different ends of the spectrum – are they just pushing boundaries or does it appear to be indicating something more concerning?

Relevant details: Dates of occasions where the child has stayed out late is useful to understand frequency and any pattern, how late they are staying out, anything else relevant known about these incidents (e.g. did they stay out with someone else, is anything else known/reported about where they went etc).

3.2 Multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people):

THINK ABOUT – Are there *multiple* unknown people coming to the child's address to look for them or contacting them? Are there suspicions these people present an exploitation risk to the child?

3.3 Use of a mobile phone that causes concern (e.g. multiple phones, coerced to take/share indecent images; contact from unknown / concerning people):

THINK ABOUT – Does the child's mobile phone use give cause for concern regarding CSE / CCE? Are they are using their phone to communicate with someone of concern in relation to CSE / CCE? Are there issues with explicit images of themselves or others? Are they receiving lots of phone calls from unknown sources? Does their demeanour change following contact on their phone? Do they leave the house as soon as they receive a call/texts? Do they receive calls at odd times of the day/night? Do they have more than one phone, or is there phone use indicative of involvement in drug supply?

Remember: It is quite usual for teenagers to have sole control of their mobile phone so this in itself should not give you cause for concern. You need to think about the connection with the child's mobile phone use and possible CSE/CCE.

3.4 Expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression, carrying weapons, other sudden change in wellbeing):

THINK ABOUT – Is the child demonstrating behaviours which could be considered 'expressions of despair' and may indicate that the child is experiencing CSE / CCE or at risk of this happening? Has there been a change in their emotional wellbeing and/or behaviour? If a child began self-harming, acting very aggressively or withdrawn, taking overdoses etc, these may well indicate that something traumatic

has happened to them that they are yet to disclose. Is the child carrying weapons and is this an indication they feel threatened / at risk of harm from others – consider if this links to exploitation risks.

Remember: Always consider whether there are any other likely explanations for the child's behaviour e.g. could the child's challenging behaviour have resulted from an experience of neglect including lack of appropriate parental boundaries and responsiveness, which have resulted in them having difficulty regulating feelings of anger or distress, and/or escalating behaviours in order to receive a response; perhaps they are angry about other things in his life. You need to think about the context around the behaviour you have observed and any potential triggers.

3.5 Exclusion from school or unexplained absences from or not engaged in school / college / training / work:

THINK ABOUT – Is the child out of education/training/employment and their whereabouts unknown a lot of the time? Is the child truanting from school and their whereabouts unknown or concerns about where they are going / who they are meeting?

3.6 Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), pregnancy/termination of pregnancy:

THINK ABOUT – Has the child contracted STI's, or got pregnant and/or had a termination? Remember you are thinking about whether this is an indicator of CSE and if so, this indicator is likely to be seen in conjunction with others. If the child is accessing sexual health services in relation to the above issues, does the sexual health nurse/health professionals have concerns about the information the child shared? Was the child accompanied to any appointment by anyone? Recurring STI's and/or pregnancies/terminations should be a cause for significant concern.

3.7 Drug misuse:

THINK ABOUT – Are concerns regarding drug use for the child which potentially highlight concerns regarding risk of CSE / CCE? Is their drug use beyond more common teenage experimentation (as this in itself is not an indicator of CSE/CCE but could increase vulnerability)? Could drugs be being given to the child as part of a grooming process? Does the drug use reduce the child's capacity to keep safe? Are there indications of an increasing dependency? Could the child be accruing a debt?

Relevant details: how is the child accessing / funding the drugs? Who is providing them? Who is the child using them with? What is the extent of their usage? What type of drug is the child using and what effect does it have on the child (this should assist you in considering why a perpetrator may provide the child with this drug)? Remember: this is about the child's drug misuse, not their parents or anyone else's.

3.8 Alcohol misuse:

THINK ABOUT – See drug misuse considerations above. Remember: this is about the child's alcohol misuse, not their parents or anyone else's.

3.9 Use of the internet that causes concern:

THINK ABOUT - Does the child's internet use give cause for concern regarding CSE / CCE? Has their use of the internet changed and is this giving cause for concern? Are they are using the internet to communicate with someone of concern? Are they are sharing explicit images of themselves or receiving them from others? Are they arranging to meet up with strangers? Are there indications that they are being groomed?

3.10 Living independently and failing to respond to attempts by worker to keep in touch:

THINK ABOUT - This relates to young people who are living independently (not at home) e.g. they may be in some form of supported accommodation. Consideration should be given as to whether the child's failure to respond to the workers attempts to keep in touch are a change in their usual behaviour or have a cause other than CSE / CCE? Are they engaging with anyone else? Are there cuckooing risks? This indicator relates to the concern that the cause for the young person's non-engagement is because they are experiencing or at risk of experiencing CSE / CCE.

4. Significant Risk Indicators:

These risk indicators are very prevalent in cases where children and young people are at risk of or are being abused through sexual / criminal exploitation.

In order to monitor any change in risk over time as a result of intervention or a change in circumstances is important to know whether the risk indicator is **current (on date of referral or in past 3 months) or recent (between 3 and 6 months ago)**. Remember to provide in your explanation details of why you have ticked “current 3 months” or “previous 3-6 months” in order that this is clear.

4.1 Disclosure of sexual/physical assault (which may be followed by withdrawal of allegation)

THINK ABOUT – This indicator is suggestive of there being an individual / group who is grooming / exploiting the child and the child’s withdrawal of the allegation is an indication of the presence of the abusers control over them. There may be possible use of violence in advance of exploitation in order to control the child. Also consider issues relating to being forced to internally insert drugs inside the body to transport or hide them (‘plugging’).

Remember: you need to be thinking in the context of CSE / CCE – this is not about the child having a parent who has been/is being physically/emotionally abusive (unless we think they are a perpetrator of CSE/CCE).

4.2 Peers suspected/known to be being sexually or criminally exploited

THINK ABOUT – Is the child associating with other children/peers who are it is believed are being exploited sexually or criminally? Are there indication the child may also be at risk because of this association?

4.3 Periods of going missing overnight or longer:

THINK ABOUT – Has the child gone missing overnight or longer? Provide details of when, what is known about where they have stayed or who with etc. Has the child be travelling out of Southampton whilst missing, or found in another area with no obvious link (consider trafficking and county lines risks). It is important to provide details of how often this has occurred within a period and the duration of the missing periods, as well as any other known details regarding the episodes.

Remember: There will be occasions when a child goes missing overnight and it is completely unrelated to CSE / CCE however it should always be in our mind to be considering this.

4.4 Relationship/s with older or controlling individual / group (e.g. older boy/girlfriend, gang / organised crime group) The control element is important when considering this significant risk indicator – an exploitative relationship between a perpetrator and their victim is going to involve some degree of power imbalance and potentially control, intimidation, threats and violence.

THINK ABOUT – Does the child have an older boyfriend or girlfriend which gives cause for concern? Are there concerns regarding relationships with an individual or group who have some control over them (this could be peers or adults)? Has the child become indebted to others and now need expected to pay this off?

Details: Provide any details of the relationship, how long has it been going on for, where did they meet/continue to meet, what do they do together, what explanations have been given for their friendship/association/relationship, details of any indications of control. Consider young person feeling indebted; being coerced to do things they wouldn’t normally do; online or offline.

4.5 Physical abuse by controlling person / physical injury without plausible explanation:

THINK ABOUT - This indicator is about recognising that if a child is being physically abused by a controlling person, or presenting with injuries that they cannot give a plausible explanation for, this may indicate that they are being sexually / criminally exploited and that physical violence is being used as a way of controlling or punishing them.

Remember: you need to be thinking in the context of CSE / CCE – this is not about the child having a parent who has been/is being physically abusive (unless we think they are a perpetrator of CSE/CCE).

4.6 Emotional abuse by controlling person (who may be exploiting them):

THINK ABOUT – This indicator is about recognising that if a child is being emotionally abused by a controlling person who is likely to be seeking to or is sexually / criminally exploiting them. It's about considering whether there is someone who is emotionally abusing the young person in order to control/coerce, or as part of a grooming process.

Clearly outline any evidence/indications of emotional abuse e.g. someone who is doing some of the following - humiliating, embarrassing, constantly putting down, overly-criticising, ignoring/excluding, unreasonable jealousy, emotional blackmail, domination and control, withdrawal of affection, isolating from family and friends, threatening to hurt people you care about to get you to conform etc.

Remember: you need to be thinking in the context of CSE – this is not about the child having a parent who has been/is being emotionally abusive (unless we think they are a perpetrator of CSE).

4.7 Entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown people (not taking and driving away: car theft):

THINK ABOUT – Has the child been seen or known to have been entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown people/people of concern? If so – when did this occur, date/time, how many occasions, is there a description or details of the car / individuals in the car etc.

4.8 Unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothing or other items:

THINK ABOUT – Has the child been observed to have money, clothing, mobile phones or any other significant items that they cannot account for how they obtained or give an implausible explanation? If so, this could be an indication of goods they are receiving in return for sexual / criminal activity, or being given as part of a grooming process?

4.9 Frequenting areas known for sexual / criminal exploitation / associated with county lines (e.g. “trap houses”): THINK ABOUT – Is the child frequenting somewhere where there are known concerns about children being targeted and groomed for sexual / criminal exploitation, or where sexual or criminal exploitation is taking place? Consider locations/addresses/properties (sometimes abandoned) linked to exploitation concerns

Terms ‘trap house’ and ‘bando’ sometimes used in relation to addresses used as base for drug supply. Could also relate to other locations including B&B's, hotels, parks etc which may be linked to exploitation concerns etc.

Additional potential CCE warning signs to consider (adaption by Southampton City Council, 2019)

4.10 Travelling / located out of area without plausible explanation / known link; arrested out of area (especially for drug related offences): This may be an indicator of a child's involvement in county lines (model of drug supply where drugs are exported into other areas and a dedicated phone/deal line is used to manage supply). Children/vulnerable adults may be used to move/store drugs or money, or may be sent to other areas to sell the drugs often being forced to stay in poor conditions.

4.11 Child found with large quantities of Class A drugs or suspected of movement and selling of drugs: Indicator/evidence that the child is involved in significant drug supply activity with the potential for them to be being controlled/exploited by others as part of this. Due consideration needs to be given to what and who has led to the child becoming involved in this high risk situation, who is gaining from their involvement (often the child gains very little and/or may not have a sound understanding of the risk they are at).

REMEMBER: Whenever significant quantities of drugs are seized from children there is potential for them to become indebted to exploiters and risk of further harm, exploitation and trafficking increased. Safety planning around this must always be considered.

5. Scoring Guidance

Vulnerabilities

Each vulnerability carries a **score of 1**.

Moderate risk indicators

Each moderate risk indicator carries a **score of 1**.

Significant risk indicators

Risk indicators that are current or occurred in the past 3 months carry a **score of 5** (right hand column).

Risk indicators that were present between 3 and 6 months ago carry a **score of 1** (left hand column).

If a significant risk factor has been present during the past 3 months and was present between 3 and 6 months ago both column should be ticked generating a **score of 6** in relation to that significant risk indicator.

Additional factors:

- If child is under 13 and there is at least 1 significant risk factor present: **Add 5 to the final score**. This is to reflect the additional vulnerability of their age.
- If any of the **significant risk indicators** are identified but the child is categorised as 'not at risk' or as at 'mild risk' a discussion with the team manager and any other professionals or carers involved in the child's life should take place. This is necessary to ensure that all the information relevant to the case has been included in the risk assessment.

Next steps:

- Once the form is completed a total score can be worked out.
- Each score generates a category of risk.
- Each category of risk has an associated action (see SERAF Categories of Risk Framework on page 9).

Scoring and risk levels:

Score	Risk Level	
0 - 5	Not at risk	Child may be 'in need' but grooming/exploitation not current concern
6 - 10	Mild risk	Child is vulnerable/susceptible to grooming/exploitation
11 - 15	Moderate risk	A number of warning signs suggesting opportunistic exploitation risks
16 +	Significant risk	Strong indicators/evidence that exploitation is occurring and risks/harm to child are significant

6. SERAF risk categories & associated actions

Remember to apply your professional judgement - there will be instances where the risk level may come out as higher or lower than your view of the current risk (this may be linked to the frequency of concerns, a sustained period of less risks, a change in circumstances, or a lack of available information).

Review the descriptions provided below and consider this against your professional judgement of the risk - use the professional judgement section in the SERAF detail why you agree or disagree with the risk level indicated.

SERAF risk category	Indicators of risk	Description	Associated actions
Not at risk	No risk indicators but may have one or more vulnerabilities present.	A child who may be 'in need' but who is not currently at risk of being groomed for CSE/CCE.	Educate child to stay safe. Seek to address any vulnerability factors. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances. Update intervention/support plan
Mild risk	Multiple vulnerabilities. One or two risk indicators may also be present.	A vulnerable child or young person who may be vulnerable to being targeted and groomed for CSE / CCE	Consider multi-agency meeting to share information and agree a plan to address risk and/or need. Work with child on risk awareness and safety. Seek to address vulnerability factors. Review risk following any significant change in circumstances. Update intervention/support plan.
If the SERAF outcome is moderate or significant risk and the child is not open to Children's Services – contact Southampton Children's Advice and Duty Service on 02380 833336 to discuss the safeguarding concerns.			
Moderate risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators present.	A child who may be targeted for opportunistic abuse through exchange of sexual/criminal activities for something they need/want.	CRU referral & Strategy meeting convened to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree safety plan. Consideration of child protection enquiry or CIN assessment/ intervention. At least one review meeting to be convened. Work should be undertaken with this child/young person around risk reduction and keeping safe – consider referral to MET Hub Exploitation Service. Update intervention and risk management plan.
Significant risk	Multiple vulnerabilities and risk indicators. One or more significant risk indicators also likely.	Strong indicators/evidence that exploitation is occurring and risks/harm to child are significant. Child is judged to be at immediate and/or continuing harm.	CRU referral & Strategy meeting convened to ensure effective exchange of information with multi-agency colleagues and agree safety plan. Joint child protection enquiry and any required immediate/emergency safeguarding actions. Regular monthly/six weekly review meetings until risk reduced. Protection plan should include long-term intensive direct work with the child or young person – refer to MET Hub Exploitation Service. Update intervention and risk management plan.
Moderate or Significant risk	As above.	Young person aged 18 years or above.	Sexual exploitation should be addressed as an issue in relation to this young person through the Pathway or other work plan; liaison between Social Services and Police Public Protection Unit to address the young person's protection. Update intervention and risk management plan