



EVALUATION OF THE NSPCC'S PROTECT & RESPECT CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ONE-TO-ONE WORK

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NSPCC

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Impact and Evidence series

This report is part of the NSPCC's Impact and Evidence series, which presents the findings of the Society's research into its services and interventions. Many of the reports are produced by the NSPCC's Evidence (formerly Evaluation) department, but some are written by other organisations commissioned by the Society to carry out research on its behalf. The aim of the series is to contribute to the evidence base of what works in preventing cruelty to children and in reducing the harm it causes when abuse does happen.

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The people pictured are models.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse (DFE, 2017). It is a process that involves the exchange of a resource for sexual activity with a child or young person. The recipient of the resource could be the child or young person with whom the sexual activity takes place. It could be a third party who is able to control the child or young person (DFE, 2017, p5). While the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation is not new (see Hallett, 2017) use of the term ‘child sexual exploitation’ is. The term appeared in government statutory guidance for the first time in 2009 (DCSF, 2009). The 2009 guidance gave Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in England responsibility for protecting children from sexual exploitation and preventing sexual exploitation (DCSF, 2009). The guidance led to professionals, statutory services and third sector organisations developing responses and services focused on sexual exploitation (Walker et al, 2019; Barnardo’s, 2019; The Children’s Society, 2019; Harris et al, 2017; Shuker and Harris, 2018).

In 2014, the NSPCC started an evaluation of its Protect & Respect programme of child sexual exploitation services. The services were provided from 15 service centres located in towns and cities in England and Wales. This report presents detailed findings from the evaluation of the one-to-one work. This is a companion report to a report, which discusses the key findings from the evaluation of the Protect & Respect programme (Williams, 2019a). An additional companion report presents detailed findings from the evaluation of a group work service (Williams, 2019b). An unpublished rapid evidence assessment (REA) on child sexual exploitation service responses has been also been produced (Walker et al, 2019¹). The NSPCC commissioned the REA because it wished to understand what its evaluation findings could add to the existing evidence.

The NSPCC Protect & Respect programme

The aim of the programme and the evaluation was to create a set of intervention models for working on sexual exploitation, and to deliver the first impact study of intervention models focused on child sexual exploitation. The programme comprised one group work service and four types of one-to-one work delivered to children and young people aged 11 to 19:

1 This report is available by request to: researchadvice@nspcc.org.uk

- **Preventative group work** was aimed at reducing the risk posed to children and young people in the medium to long-term, for those judged to be vulnerable to exploitation.
- **Four types of one-to-one work:**
 - **Preventative work**, which had the same aim as the group work.
 - **Risk reduction work** aimed at children and young people judged to be at risk of exploitation.
 - **Child protection work** aimed at stopping the exploitation and reducing the risk of exploitation of children and young people judged to be being exploited.
 - **Recovery work** to reduce the trauma and risk of being exploited for children and young people traumatised because of exploitation.

The one-to-one work was designed to be delivered in two parts: engagement and assessment work were to be done within the first six weeks of the work; a period of three to six months was then to be spent working on an intervention plan. Staff were recommended to use socio-educative work, resilience work, rights and advocacy work and therapeutic approaches:

- Socio-educative work was work done with children and young people's thinking or cognitions 'to help the young person recognise the deliberate nature of the targeting and grooming that is so indicative of exploitation' (NSPCC, 2014a, p3). Topics to be covered were grooming, consent and healthy relationships, gangs and recruitment, technology and substance misuse.
- Resilience work was work done to 'positively influencing a young person's coping strategies' (NSPCC, 2014a, p12) including a focus on: self-image; identity; confidence and positive attributes (NSPCC, 2014a, p41).
- Rights and advocacy work was focused on emphasizing that being at risk of exploitation did not mean children or young people had 'bad' or criminal behaviour and that the responsibility for exploitation lay with the abuser (NSPCC, 2014b, p9).
- Recommended therapeutic approaches included creative therapies (Axline, 1964), symbolic play (Goodyear-Brown, 2009), motivational interviewing (Miller and Rollnick, 2012), cognitive behavioural therapy (Cohen et al, 2010) and trauma-focused play therapy (Gil, 2006) (NSPCC, 2014b, pp13-24; NSPCC, 2014d, pp23-24).

Evaluation

When the Protect & Respect programme was launched the NSPCC initially aimed to carry out an impact study of its service delivery models. First steps towards conducting the impact study included attempting to implement the services in line with the model guidance and the administration of a set of standardised measures. It was felt that if the models could be delivered consistently and the measures administered then an impact study could be conducted with a control group. However, a review conducted one year into the delivery of the programme concluded that the programme was not yet ready for this. The aims of the evaluation were therefore amended to studying and documenting:

- The work that was done, in practice, by NSPCC practitioners with children and young people, carers and professionals.
- The challenges faced in assessing, preventing and stopping exploitation and what was done to attempt to overcome those challenges.

The majority of data collected for this evaluation report came from interviews with NSPCC staff (n=60) but also from: interviews with children and young people (n=6) and referring professionals (n=10); a review of case notes written by NSPCC practitioners (n=8), and quantitative data collected on the characteristics and needs of the children and young people allocated to the service, length of service, service and evaluation attrition. The findings in this summary cover the period between June 2014 and November 2017.

A note on language

Risk in the short-term and medium to long-term

This evaluation report uses the terms ‘being at risk of exploitation in the short-term’ and ‘being at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term’. The need for this distinction came about because practitioners talked about children and young people who were not at risk of exploitation in the immediate future or short-term who, if nothing was done to intervene, were at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term. Being at risk of exploitation in the short-term should be taken to mean having an increased chance of exploitation happening within the next month when compared with the average child or young person. Being at risk in the medium to long-term should be taken to mean having an increased chance of exploitation happening within the next six months (i.e. in the medium term) or any time up to the end of the young person’s childhood (i.e. in the long-term), when compared with the average young person.

Risk avoidant actions

The Protect & Respect programme aimed to reduce the likelihood of children and young people being exploited through providing direct support to them. In particular the programme was designed to improve children and young people's ability to take actions, which could help reduce the likelihood of their being involved in situations and relationships, where the risk of sexual exploitation was heightened. In this way the programme was focused on working with children and young people's agency. During the delivery of the Protect & Respect programme experts and researchers working in the field of child sexual exploitation developed a critique of interventions focused on teaching children and young people risk-avoidant actions. It was suggested that in focusing preventative initiatives on educating children and young people, professionals placed the responsibility for keeping safe on children and young people rather than on the people who perpetrated exploitation or on the adults whose role it was to keep children safe from exploitation (Eaton, 2017; Eaton and Holmes, 2017). The NSPCC recognises that children and young people should not be made to feel responsible for exploitation. It has also recognised that during the programme it has used terms, which on reflection, were felt to be unsatisfactory in that they implied that:

- It was within the power of the child or young person to stop exploitation.
- Children and young people had a responsibility for avoiding situations where they could be exploited.

Since the beginning of the development of the programme the NSPCC has moved on from the use of such terms and has sought to develop a language, which communicates that:

- The responsibility for exploitation lies with those who perpetrate it.
- The responsibility for safeguarding children and young people lies with carers and child protection professionals and agencies.

However, whilst the NSPCC has been keen to adopt a language which removes responsibility and blame from children and young people it maintains an open mind as to the possibility that educating children and young people and supporting them to take risk-avoidant action could play a limited role in helping to reduce victimisation. In this report the author describes attempts to build children and young people's skills to take what are termed 'risk-avoidant actions'. This term 'risk-avoidant actions' is used without meaning to imply that children and young people have a responsibility for avoiding or lowering the risks of exploitation posed to them or that children and young people are to blame for being in situations or relationships where the risk is heightened or where exploitation occurs.

Key findings from the evaluation of the one-to-one work

Scale: In total, 1,014 children and young people were referred and allocated for one-to-one work during the period of the evaluation. Nine out of 10 children and young people allocated to the work, and whose gender was known, were female (n=766 from 821).

Engagement: In some cases, children and young people were referred without being informed about the service or without being asked for their consent to the referral. Assumptions in the programme guidance about the child or young person's readiness to engage were not always realised, meaning that engagement and assessment work could take much longer than had been anticipated. To promote engagement, practitioners sometimes chose to start the work by focusing on issues of key significance to the child or young person rather than undertaking a formal assessment process focusing on risk of sexual exploitation. Given the circumstances and preferences of some children and young people, practitioners found they needed to be more flexible with their availability and appointments.

There can be challenges in building a supportive relationship where a child or young person has been let down by services and where they have had previous experience of dysfunctional and exploitative relationships. Young people were said to have not turned up to appointments or to have turned up late to test the practitioner's commitment. Practitioners reported that perseverance was a key part of engaging young people.

Assessment: An assumption underpinning the programme model was that the assessment process would enable practitioners to be clear about whether the child or young person had been sexually exploited, was being exploited and on what the risks of exploitation were. In practice this was not the case, meaning that practitioners had to work with uncertainty over the experiences and levels of risk faced by the young person. Not all children and young people were willing to discuss sexual exploitation. Practitioners could find creative ways of asking questions or framing challenges, which were effective in opening up a discussion on safety, although there could be a risk that the child or young person would disengage.

Intervention work: Practitioners often used the approaches recommended in the programme guidance. Some of the work could involve supporting children and young people during periods of personal crisis. A tension was experienced between trying to ensure the work was child-led and wanting to address significant risks to the child or young person's safety or actual harm.

Work with carers and the professional system: Where practitioners tried to engage with carers, it was usually to improve the relationship between them and the child or young person. The work could be problematic, however, where the carer themselves had experienced significant harm from abuse.

Despite experience significant risks some children and young people were not being safeguarded by statutory services. Key challenges were the perception that the child protection system was intended to address risks within the family home and a reluctance to prioritise child protection resources for children 16 or over. Budgetary cuts could make the delivery of effective help for children and young people feel overwhelming.

Change and outcomes: There were different ways in which children and young people could experience a lowering of risk to exploitation. Positive changes were more likely when children and young people had a relationship with an adult who cared for them, and when perpetrators' ability to access the child or young person was minimised. Practitioners also felt that things could have been improved for some young people if they had been provided with therapeutic support, although in practice practitioners found it difficult to get therapeutic support. In addition, some children and young people were supported to take risk avoidant actions. Practitioners identified four steps that children and young people needed to be supported to take risk avoidant action:

1. Increase understanding about key concepts concerning exploitation.
2. Accept the relevance of information about exploitation and grooming to their life.
3. Accurately assess the risks they faced.
4. Be determined to take actions to reduce those risks.

The feedback provided by practitioners and children and young people suggested that there could be challenges at each of these steps. Key activities that helped overcome the challenges included:

- Reflective discussion with the child or young person to help them apply the key concepts to assess the risks experienced in their own life, and to think about possible steps that could be taken to lower those risks.
- Modelling a caring and nurturing relationship, which helped the child or young person develop a belief that the types of relationship they experienced could be improved on.

Crucially, NSPCC practitioners felt that experiencing a safe and nurturing relationship with an adult and being protected from people who had an interest in exploiting them, were preconditions for children and young people being able to take the four steps.

Case closure: Cases could be closed on the basis that the risk of exploitation in the short-term had been lowered, although the risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term remained high. This could occur when the underlying difficulties for the child or young person had not been addressed.

Discussion

Professional responses to concerns around sexual exploitation should identify ways of ensuring that children and young people are able to give meaningful consent that is voluntary and informed. In addition workers and services should:

- Be focused on ensuring that the child or young person is provided with a caring and nurturing adult in their life, that perpetrators' access to the child or young person is minimised and that children and young people, where they need it, are provided with therapeutic support.
- Use the teaching of risk avoidant actions as a preventative measure, for children and young people who are already safe and being cared for. It should not be used as a measure to reduce risk, when the risk posed is high.
- Accept that reaching a clear judgement on whether the child or young person is being exploited or at risk of exploitation may not be possible in the short-term, which means they need to work with uncertainty.
- Look beyond risks that are posed to the child or young person in the short-term and take into account factors that pose a risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term.

The findings from this evaluation have been fed into a more detailed discussion of the key findings from the programme evaluation (see Williams, 2019a, pp79-101).

Chapter 1: The Protect & Respect programme

Introduction

This is a report on the findings from an evaluation of a set of one-to-one services delivered to children and young people affected by sexual exploitation. It forms one of three reports that have been published on the NSPCC's Protect & Respect programme of services to support children and young people affected by sexual exploitation. Readers with an interest in the programme are advised to read the discussion report first (see Williams, 2019a). The discussion report summarises the key findings from the programme, which includes the key findings from this report. This report serves as a detailed companion report to the discussion report, providing more detail on the implementation of the one-to-one service. The third report is also a companion report and provides detailed findings from the implementation of the preventative group work programme (Williams, 2019b). An unpublished rapid evidence assessment (REA) on child sexual exploitation service responses has been also been produced (Walker et al, 2019²). The NSPCC commissioned the REA because it wished to understand what its evaluation findings could add to the existing evidence.

This introductory chapter sets the context to the report by:

- Providing a note on the NSPCC's position on the use of child sexual exploitation films and the lessons that the NSPCC has learned over the course of the programme.
- Explaining the NSPCC's position on children and young people's agency, the use of victim-blaming language and the lessons that the NSPCC has learned over the course of the programme.
- Summarising the current definition of child sexual exploitation.
- Describing the guidance provided to NSPCC managers and practitioners on providing the Protect & Respect one-to-one services.
- Providing a brief note on the evaluation methodology.
- Aiding the reader's understanding of this report by providing an explanation of some of the language that is used in this report on 'vulnerability' and 'risk'.

Information on the following can be gained through reading the introduction chapter to the discussion report (Williams, 2019a):

2 This report is available by request to: researchadvice@nspcc.org.uk

- A summary of recent policy developments in the area of sexual exploitation.
- A summary of the evidence base for the effectiveness of professional responses and services in working on sexual exploitation.
- A description of the NSPCC's recent involvement in working with sexual exploitation and the reasons for establishing the Protect & Respect programme.
- A description of the evaluation methodology used.

A note on child sexual exploitation films

Prior to and during the course of the evaluation of the Protect & Respect programme, a number of agencies in the UK, including the NSPCC, created films containing dramatised accounts of grooming or child sexual exploitation. These films were used in the Protect & Respect programme with children and young people with the intention of raising their awareness of how grooming and exploitation worked. In 2018 (the year following the end of the evaluation data collection period), a campaign was launched to stop showing dramatised accounts of grooming and exploitation to children and young people. The campaign was accompanied by a report. The report author drawing on what was acknowledged to be a limited evidence base around 'trauma informed practice' reasoned that showing dramatised accounts would be likely to harm children and young people (Eaton, 2018; 2019).

In reflecting on the concerns raised by the campaign the NSPCC has recognised that its use of child sexual exploitation films in the Protect & Respect programme may have caused distress for some children and young people and therefore could have caused harm. The NSPCC is in agreement with the view that child sexual exploitation films should not be used if they are going to cause harm. However it acknowledges that there is a place for using appropriate film in work with children and young people as long as this meets specific criteria. To this end, the Protect & Respect service has agreed to sign up to the working principles identified by Barnardo's in its 'basic practice checklist for schools work on child sexual abuse' (Barnardo's, 2018). Key points the checklist requires practitioners to address include:

- Preparing children and young people so they are aware and ready for the content and have been given the option of saying no to the work.
- Ensuring that resources that include 'victim-blaming language' are not used.
- Ensuring films that depict scenes of explicit abuse stories or scenes of violence are not used.

A note on agency and the use of ‘victim-blaming’ language

The Protect & Respect programme aimed to reduce the likelihood of children and young people being exploited partly through providing direct support to them. In particular the programme was designed to improve children and young people’s ability to take actions, which could help reduce the likelihood of them being involved in situations and relationships, where the risk of sexual exploitation was heightened. The guidance provided to NSPCC staff was premised on the theory that:

“If the young person has timely and proportional access to information, advice and guidance they will be able to appropriately process it in order to make safe decisions... The young person will have a greater understanding of sexual exploitation and the grooming process, and so be less vulnerable to sexual exploitation.”

NSPCC, 2014a, p1

The guidance pointed out that the aim of risk reduction and child protection work was to improve the decision-making of children and young people who were felt unable to keep themselves safe. The criteria for children and young people allocated to risk reduction or child protection work was:

“The young person is unable to keep himself or herself safe; they are exposed to high levels of risk in relation to CSE and/or their own behaviour demonstrates an impaired ability to process information sufficiently to make safe decisions.”

NSPCC, 2014b, p1; 2014c, p1

Similarly, the author of the guidance, when interviewed as part of the evaluation, explained that the programme services were designed to lower risk through impacting on children and young people’s behaviour:

“The focus of intervention for P&R is on risky behaviour and risk-taking behaviour, with the consistent aim to stop it escalating into CSE or into exploitative behaviour. For the prevention group you’re trying to stop it getting from risky, and in [the risk reduction work] you’re trying to stop it getting from risky to exploitation. Then almost, [in the child protection work], you’re trying to get it

from exploitation back down to risky. And then in the recovery, you're trying to maintain healthy behaviour and stop risky behaviours re-emerging."

However, during the delivery of the Protect & Respect programme NSPCC workers, academics and researchers working in the field of child sexual exploitation began to develop a critique of interventions designed to improve children and young people's ability to avoid or withdraw from situations and relationships, which heightened the risk of exploitation. It was suggested that by focusing preventative initiatives on educating children and young people, professionals placed the responsibility for keeping safe on children and young people, rather than on the people who perpetrated the exploitation or on the adults whose role it was to keep children safe from exploitation (Eaton, 2017; Eaton and Holmes, 2017). Placing the responsibility on the child or young person, in turn, was said to lead to them feeling to blame for exploitation where it occurred (Eaton, 2017; Eaton and Homes, 2017).

The NSPCC recognises that children and young people should not be made to feel responsible for exploitation. Terms like 'keep safe work', 'safe decisions', and 'risky behaviour', used in NSPCC guidance and sometimes by NSPCC staff, were on reflection, felt to be unsatisfactory in that they implied that:

- It was within the power of the child or young person to stop exploitation.
- Children and young people had a responsibility for avoiding situations where they could be exploited.

Since the beginning of the development of the programme the NSPCC has moved on from the use of such terms and has sought to develop a language, which communicates that:

- The responsibility for exploitation lies with those who perpetrate it.
- The responsibility for safeguarding children and young people lies with carers and child protection professionals and agencies.

However, whilst the NSPCC has been keen to adopt a language which removes responsibility and blame from children and young people it maintains an open mind to the possibility that educating children and young people and supporting them to take actions, which reduce the risk of exploitation, could play a limited role in helping to reduce victimisation. In this report the author describes attempts to build children and young people's skills to take 'risk-avoidant actions'. The term 'risk-avoidant action' is used without intending to suggest that children and young people:

- Have a responsibility for avoiding or lowering the risks of exploitation posed to them.
- Are to blame for being in situations or relationship where the risk is heightened or where exploitation occurs.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse (DFE, 2017). Over the last decade a definition of sexual exploitation has been provided by each of the governing authorities from across the United Kingdom's four nations. Beckett and Walker (2018, p11) state that common to all four nations' policy positions is a recognition that exchange is key to differentiating between CSE and broader definitions of child sexual abuse. Whilst exchange of a resource for sexual activity with a child is central to the current definition of CSE the recipient of the resource can vary. The recipient could be the child or young person. It could be someone who controls the child or young person. This can be seen in the definitions provided in England and Wales, the two nations where the Protect & Respect programme was provided during the period of the evaluation. Guidance for England defines child sexual exploitation as being:

"... 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."

DFE, 2017, p5

It adds:

"The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."

DFE, 2017, p5

Guidance issued from the Welsh Assembly Government, which at the time of writing is under review (Hallett et al, 2017) states that:

“Child sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, ‘protection’ or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent.”

Welsh Assembly Government, 2010

Beckett and Walker (2018, p11) also point out that common to all four nations’ policy positions is a recognition that CSE:

- Is an umbrella term covering many different manifestations of abuse; both contact and non-contact.
- Can affect both males and females.
- Can be perpetrated by a range of abusers – male/female; adult/peer; any social class or ethnicity, operating alone, in groups or organised gangs.

Whilst the term ‘child sexual exploitation’ first appeared in statutory guidance in 2009 the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation has been documented as far back as 100 years ago (Hallett, 2017). Prior to 2009 the term commonly used to describe child sexual exploitation was ‘child prostitution’ (Hallett, 2017; Phoenix, 2012). In 2009, a switch to ‘child sexual exploitation’ was made to promote an understanding that children involved in exploitation were ‘victims of abuse’ rather than ‘criminals’ (Sparks, 2000; DOH, 2000, p10; Beckett and Walker, 2018). Beckett and Walker (2018) point out that because early definitions of child sexual exploitation were created to foster a move away from use of the term ‘child prostitution’ the concept of exchange referred to financial gain only. However in the years since the birth of the concept of ‘child sexual exploitation’ the notion of ‘exchange’ has been widened to include other types of gain including love, acquisition of status and protection from harm. Widening the concept of exchange in this way has caused some to question the value of the concept of child sexual exploitation, given that exchange can be found across many types of child sexual abuse, many of which wouldn’t be considered exploitation (Beckett and Walker, 2018, pp13-15). The key question is whether the presence of exchange within a sexually abusive relationship presents distinct challenges to identifying, preventing and stopping abuse, that make it useful and meaningful to draw out child sexual exploitation as a distinct sub-type of child sexual abuse.

The definition of child sexual exploitation used in the United Kingdom can be contrasted with the definition of child sexual exploitation used in other places. Europol, the European Union's law enforcement agency, rather than treating child sexual exploitation as a sub-category of child sexual abuse, equates child sexual exploitation with child sexual abuse:

"Child sexual exploitation refers to the sexual abuse of a person below the age of 18, as well as to the production of images of such abuse and the sharing of those images online."

Europol, 2019

The United Nations, too, have adopted a more expansive notion of sexual exploitation, directed both at adults and children, which includes all forms of child sexual abuse:

"The term "sexual exploitation" means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another."

United Nations, 2003

The Protect & Respect programme

In 2014, the NSPCC started an evaluation of its Protect & Respect programme of sexual exploitation services. The services were provided from 15 service centres located in towns and cities in England and Wales. The aim of the programme and the evaluation was to create a set of intervention models for working on sexual exploitation, and to deliver the first impact study of intervention models focused on child sexual exploitation. The programme comprised one group work service and four types of one-to-one work delivered to children and young people aged 11 to 19:

- **Preventative group work** was aimed at children and young people, who were considered vulnerable to exploitation but not at risk of exploitation.
- **Four types of one-to-one work:**
 - **Preventative work** was also targeted at young people who were vulnerable to exploitation but not at risk of it.
 - **Risk reduction work** was aimed at working with young people where the risk of exploitation was considered high.
 - **Child protection work** was aimed at young people who were being exploited.

- **Recovery work** was aimed at children and young people traumatised because of exploitation.

A review conducted one year into the delivery of the programme concluded that the programme was not in a position to deliver on the ambition of an impact study. This was because, in practice, the service delivery models were not being delivered according to programme guidance. The review findings triggered a decision to amend the aim of the evaluation to study and document:

- The work that was done, in practice, by NSPCC practitioners with children and young people, carers and professionals.
- The challenges faced in assessing, preventing and stopping exploitation and what was done to attempt to overcome those challenges.

One-to-one work

One-to-one work was to be provided to children and young people who were ‘ready to engage’ with the practice model (NSPCC, 2012). Following allocation, the practitioner was expected to spend:

- The first six weeks engaging the child or young person and completing an assessment.
- The next three to six months delivering the agreed intervention work plan with the child or young person.

Assessment was to involve the administration of two self-report measures, measuring the wellbeing and traumatic symptomatology of the child or young person. Assessment was also to involve the completion of a risk assessment tool, which required that the child or young person and the practitioner assess risks posed across 17 areas of the child or young person’s life (see Appendix A). At the end of the assessment, the NSPCC practitioner was expected to provide a total score for the risk of exploitation posed to the child or young person. The practitioner was expected to use the score, together with other information, to reach a decision on:

- Whether the child or young person was being exploited.
- The extent to which they were at risk of exploitation.
- Which, if any, of the four types of ‘one-to-one’ service was appropriate to their needs.

If a decision was reached that one of the one-to-one services was appropriate, the NSPCC practitioner was expected to devise an intervention plan, in consultation with the child or young person, to address those needs. When planning and delivering intervention work, NSPCC practitioners were expected to do so in line with

guidance that had been issued for each of the four types of one-to-one work (NSPCC, 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d). Each guide recommended several approaches, including socio-educative work, resilience work, rights and advocacy work and therapeutic approaches (see Appendix B for detailed information on these approaches):

- Socio-educative work was described as work done with ‘children and young people’s thinking or cognitions (NSPCC, 2014a, p3). Topics to be covered were grooming, consent and healthy relationships, gangs and recruitment, technology and substance misuse. The guide instructed NSPCC practitioners to use the work ‘to help the young person recognise the deliberate nature of the targeting and grooming that is so indicative of exploitation’ (NSPCC, 2014a, p3).
- Resilience work was described as work done to ‘positively influencing a young person’s coping strategies’ (NSPCC, 2014a, p12). Topics to be covered included coping, self-image, identity, confidence and positive attributes (NSPCC, 2014a, p41).
- Rights and advocacy work was focused on emphasizing to children and young people that being at risk of exploitation did not mean that they had ‘bad’ or criminal behaviour and that the responsibility for exploitation lay with the abuser (NSPCC, 2014b, p9). NSPCC practitioners were required to help children and young people ‘speak out’, express their view, defend their rights, access information and services, and explore choices and options (NSPCC, 2014b, pp10-11).
- Therapeutic approaches included creative therapies (Axline, 1964), symbolic play (Goodyear-Brown, 2009), motivational interviewing (Miller and Rollnick, 2012), cognitive behavioural therapy (Cohen et al, 2010) and trauma focused play therapy (Gil, 2006) (NSPCC, 2014b, pp13-24; NSPCC, 2014d, pp23-24).

Evaluation Methodology in Brief

The majority of data collected for this evaluation report came from interviews with NSPCC practitioners, but also from interviews with children and young people and referring professionals. Some of the data came from case notes written by NSPCC practitioners, where children and young people consented to the notes being used. This report also draws on quantitative data collected on the characteristics and needs of children and young people, service length and service and evaluation attrition. A detailed description of the evaluation methodology can be found in the discussion report (Williams, 2019a).

In this report the findings on the experiences of staff and children and young people involved in the four one-to-one services are presented as a whole, rather than being divided into different types of one-to-one service. This reflects that the aims and approaches of the one-to-one work did not differ significantly across the four types of service. In addition, because a principal focus of the one-to-one work was on reducing the risk of exploitation, the chapters on change, impact and effectiveness in this report are focused on reducing risk.

A note on language

Use of the term ‘children affected by exploitation’

The Protect & Respect programme covered services focused on prevention, risk reduction, child protection and recovery. In some parts of the report, reference is made to children who receive any services covering these areas. Where this is the case, the children are referred to as ‘children affected by exploitation’.

Vulnerability and risk

The concepts of vulnerability and risk were central to the implementation of the Protect & Respect programme. Two of the programme’s services were focused on meeting the needs of children and young people who were considered vulnerable to exploitation and one of the services was designed to meet the needs of children and young people who were at risk of exploitation. In this way, the programme guidance drew a clear distinction between children and young people who were vulnerable and who were considered at risk of sexual exploitation:

- Children and young people who were vulnerable to exploitation but not at risk of exploitation were considered to be those who had some characteristic or condition, which meant they were more likely to be exploited in the long-term, although they were not deemed to be involved in situations or relationships that suggested they were about to be exploited.
- Those who were deemed to be ‘at risk’ were those who were involved in a relationship or situation where there was felt to be a heightened risk of exploitation in the immediate future. The term ‘at immediate risk’ was sometimes used by programme staff in addition to ‘at risk’ to refer to this type of risk. Although the term ‘at immediate risk’ together with the term ‘at risk’ implied the child or young person was more likely to be exploited in the short-term, the guidance did not indicate the period of time that was indicated by these terms.

While this evaluation report attempts to understand how NSPCC practitioners used and worked with the categories of vulnerability and risk defined by the guidance, the report also uses the terms ‘being at risk of exploitation in the short-term’ and ‘being at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term’. Use of the term ‘being at risk of exploitation in the short-term’ is preferred to the term ‘at risk’ or ‘at immediate risk’, which was often used by programme staff. While risk itself cannot be qualified by time, the type of experience to which the risk refers can be. This means the description ‘being at immediate risk’ does not convey what is intended when the phrase is used. If use of the word ‘immediate’ is to be used a more suitable wording would be ‘at risk of being exploited in the immediate future’. Use of the term ‘being at risk of exploitation in the short-term’ is preferred in this report. Furthermore, use of the term ‘being at risk of exploitation in the short-term’ is preferred over the term ‘being at risk’ when used to refer to risk in the short-term, because the term ‘at risk’ could also be used to refer to the risks of exploitation in the medium to long-term.

The term ‘being at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term’ was used because NSPCC practitioners talked about children and young people who although not at risk of exploitation in the immediate future or short-term were felt to be more likely to be exploited in the medium or long-term compared with other children and young people. For example, one practitioner talked about how a young person, who was safe from exploitation because work had been done to improve the care and nurturing received from a carer, had increased chances of being exploited in the next six months because the conditions within the family were likely to deteriorate once the practitioner had stopped supporting the young person’s carers.

‘Risk of being exploited in the medium to long-term’ was also a useful concept for understanding the aim of the preventative one-to-one work. The preventative work, while directed at children and young people who were classified as being ‘vulnerable’ but ‘not at risk’ was expected to ensure that children and young people’s score on the programme’s risk assessment tool remained low. The assumption was that the risk assessment tool would provide an indicator of the likelihood of the child or young person being exploited in the medium to long-term. This report’s use of the term ‘being at risk in the medium to long-term’ covers some of what the programme guidance meant by the term ‘vulnerability’. This report prefers use of the term ‘being at risk in the medium to long-term’. This is because the term ‘vulnerable’ could also include children and young people who were not at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term, but who did have a characteristic that, were they not receiving support, would have made them more likely to be exploited. One example of such a characteristic is having a learning disability.

The terms ‘being at risk of exploitation in the short-term’ and ‘being at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term’ were used in conversations with practitioners without being strictly qualified by a specification of the time period. It is nevertheless suggested that the terms presented in this report, in line with the understandings that implicitly underpinned the report author’s use of them, should be understood as having the following qualifications:

- ‘Being at immediate risk’ or ‘at risk’ or ‘at heightened risk of exploitation in the short-term’ should be taken to mean having an increased chance of exploitation happening within the next month when compared with the average child or young person.
- ‘Being at risk in the medium to long-term’ should be taken to mean having an increased chance of exploitation happening within the next six months (i.e. in the medium term) or during any time up to the end of the child or young person’s childhood (i.e. in the long-term), when compared with the average child or young person.

Key Findings from the Introduction

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse (DFE, 2017). It is a process that involves the exchange of a resource for sexual activity with a child or young person.

In 2014, the NSPCC started an evaluation of its Protect & Respect programme of sexual exploitation services. The programme was provided from 15 service centres located in towns and cities in England and Wales.

The programme comprised five types of service delivered to children and young people aged 11 to 19. The NSPCC group work service was intended to deliver group work to children and young people who were considered to be vulnerable to exploitation but not at risk of being exploited in the short-term. Four NSPCC one-to-one work services were intended to support children and young people who were vulnerable to exploitation, at risk of exploitation, being exploited and in need of recovery from exploitation.

One-to-one work was to involve a period of engagement and assessment that lasted six weeks. This was to be followed by a period of intervention, which was to last three to six months.

The evaluation of the one-to-one work sought to study the experience of delivering and receiving the work and the challenges to preventing and reducing risk of exploitation.

Chapter 2: Service implementation

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on how the one-to-one work was implemented. The chapter starts by describing the number of children and young people who participated in the service and evaluation. It then summarises NSPCC practitioners' accounts of the delivery of Protect & Respect one-to-one work. It covers the preparedness of NSPCC practitioners for delivering the work, referrals, allocation and the challenges in gaining informed consent. The processes of assessment, engagement and intervention planning are then explored.

Service delivery in numbers

In the period covered by the evaluation, between June 2014 and November 2017, 15 NSPCC service centres delivered Protect & Respect services across England and Wales. Each service centre had:

- A service manager with overall responsibility for the service.
- One or more team managers with operational responsibility for the service.
- A team of NSPCC practitioners who delivered the service.

Referrals and children and young people allocated to the service

At least 1,579 referrals were made for one-to-one work³ most of them made by professionals. Two thirds of referrals (n=1,014) resulted in one-to-one work being attempted. In the other cases the centre lacked capacity to provide a service or the needs of the young person were felt to be inappropriate. Children and young people allocated to one-to-one work tended to be:

1. Female – where service user gender was known (n=821) 93 per cent were female (n=766).
2. Aged 16 or under – where service users age was known (n=824) 90 per cent were 16 or under (n=738).
3. White British – where service user ethnicity was known (n=779) 68 per cent were White British (n=533).

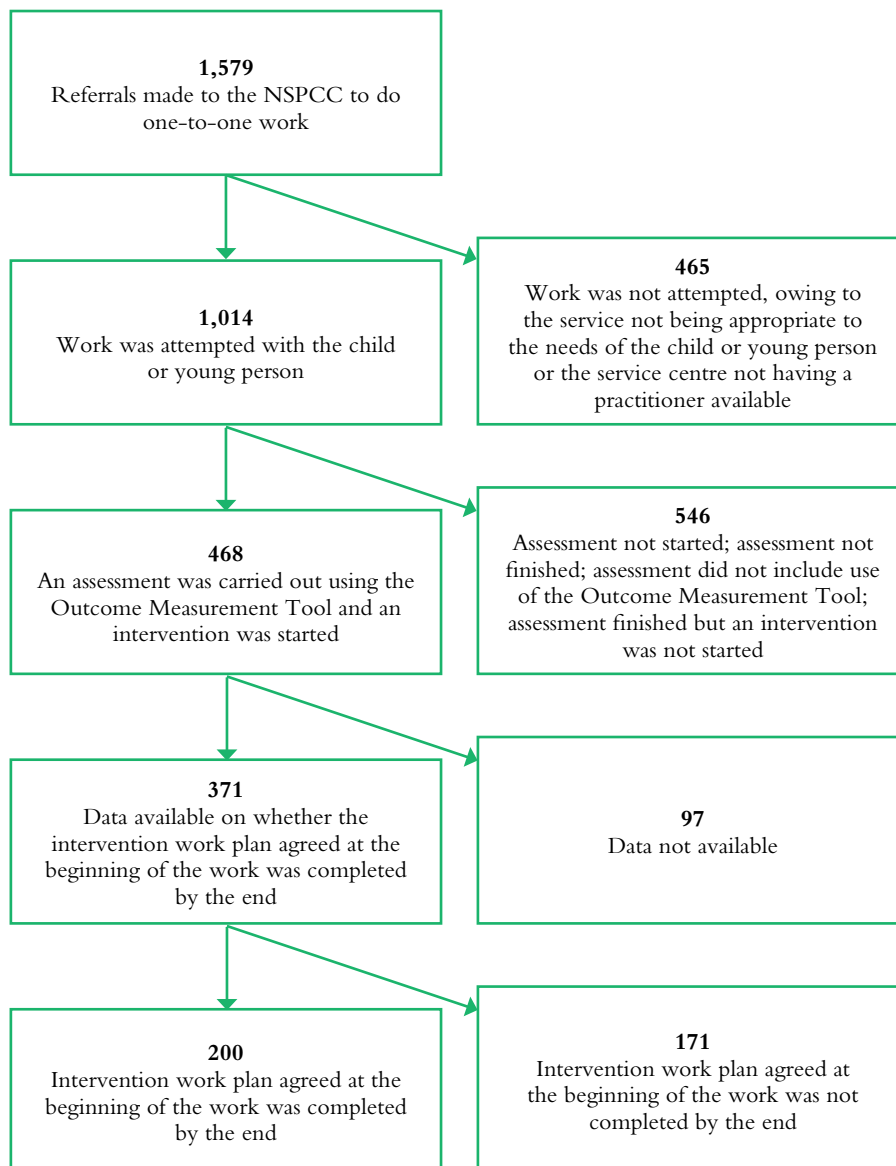
³ The NSPCC's data collection system did not allow for the accurate recording and reporting of all referrals made to the service. Where a referral was made and it did not result in the child or young person being allocated to a service, the system did not require the service for which the referral was made to be recorded. Consequently, the figure arrived at for referrals is for the number of children and young people who were referred and then allocated or assigned to the Protect & Respect service.

Service delivery, attrition and retention

Approximately one half of cases progressed to the point where an assessment, using the Outcome Measurement Tool, had been completed and an intervention started (n=468, see Diagram 1). Of these, approximately one half progressed to the point where the intervention work plan was completed (n=200).

The average time taken to complete an assessment was 12 weeks – twice as long as the six weeks envisaged by the designers of the programme. The average time taken to complete an intervention was six months, which reflected the three-to-six months stipulated by the programme guidance. However, the time taken to complete an intervention could vary between a few days and two and a half years.

Diagram 1: Service attrition and retention in Protect & Respect one-to-one work



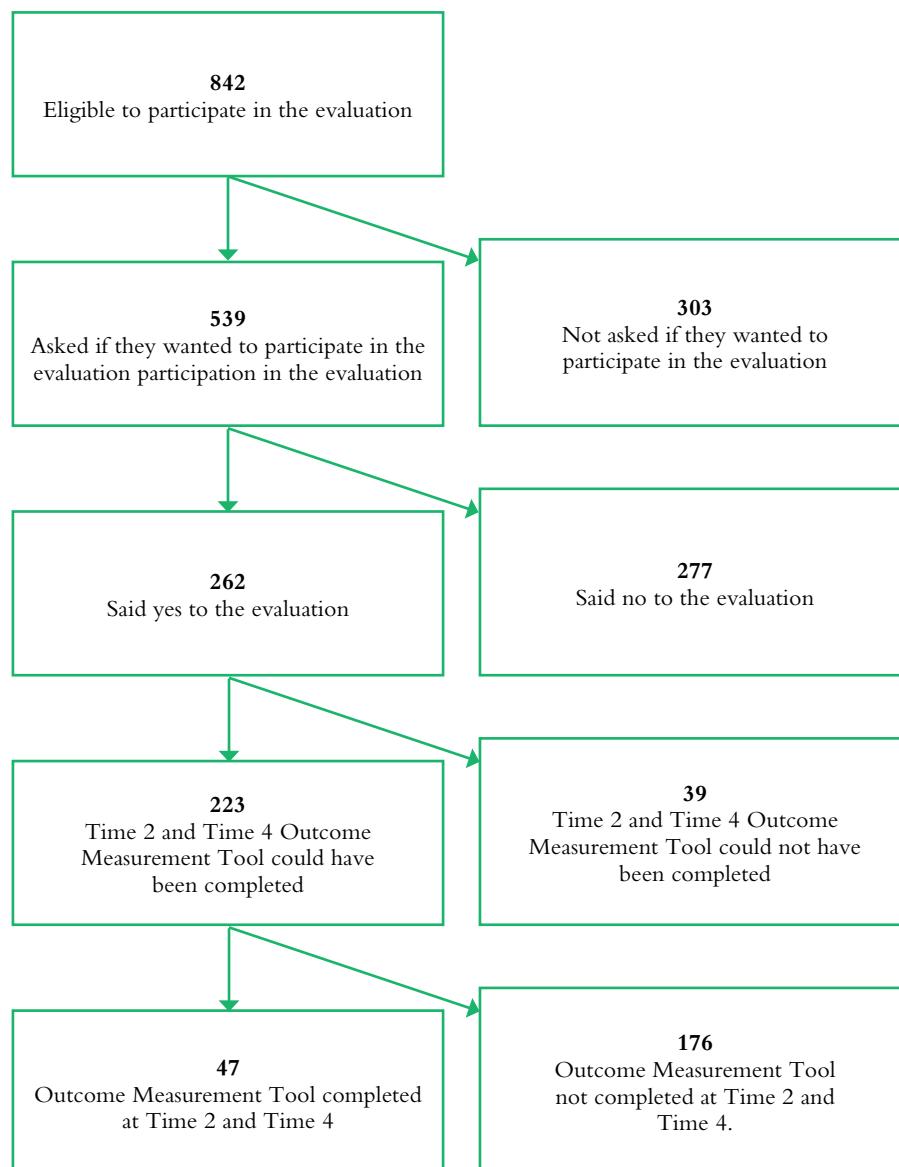
Where cases had progressed onto intervention work and where the type of one-to-one work done with the child or young person was known (n=417), the majority of it focused on prevention and risk reduction:

- 171 cases were preventative work.
- 151 were risk-reduction.
- 35 were child protection.
- 60 were recovery work.

Evaluation attrition and retention in numbers

Evaluation attrition could occur from between when an NSPCC practitioner asked for consent through to the practitioner completing a measure for the child or young person (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2: Evaluation attrition and retention in Protect & Respect one-to-one work



Data was collected on wellbeing, trauma and risk of being sexually exploited, at the beginning and at the end of the service intervention. Detailed information about the tools used to collect this data is provided in Appendix D of the discussion report (Williams, 2019a, pp125-34). When the evaluation started in June 2014, NSPCC practitioners and children and young people were asked to provide data at eight different time points. This report, to simplify matters for the reader, is focused on data collected at four different time points:

- Time 1, at the beginning of the assessment.
- Time 2, at the end of the assessment.
- Time 3, at the beginning of the intervention.
- Time 4, at the end of the intervention.

Data on wellbeing and traumatic symptomatology was collected at all time points; data on risk was collected at Time 2 and Time 4 only. A measure of change, comparing the score that was provided at Time 1, Time 2 or Time 3 with a score that was provided at Time 4 was possible in less than 50 per cent of cases for all scales:

- In 42 per cent of cases it was possible to measure change in wellbeing.
- In 23 per cent of cases it was possible to measure change in traumatic symptomatology.
- In 21 per cent of cases it was possible to measure change in professionals' rating of the risk of sexual exploitation.
- In 5 per cent of cases it was possible to measure change in children and young people's rating of the risk of sexual exploitation.

The reasons for evaluation attrition are detailed in Chapter 2 of the discussion report (Williams, 2019a, pp55-60). See Appendix C in this report for a more detailed presentation of the quantitative evaluation data.

Preparedness for delivering Protect & Respect one-to-one work

Prior experience

While NSPCC practitioners had a large range of experience in working with children and families. Most practitioners had a social work qualification and several years of practice in delivering services to children and families. Some had also worked on the issue of sexual exploitation, with a few having worked on the NSPCC's old sexual exploitation service, *Street Matters* (see Williams, 2019a, p36). Other staff had relevant experiences that included working with adolescents

or working therapeutically with children who had been sexually abused and with sexual offenders. However, some of the staff had not had previous experience of working on child sexual exploitation, with some being unqualified social work students.

Training

When NSPCC practitioners received training, they reported receiving a combination of:

- Protect & Respect core training, based on the 2014 model guidance.
- Training delivered by NSPCC practitioners with experience of delivering one-to-one work from a neighbouring service centre.
- A five-day training course on developing therapeutic skills.
- Training on supervising sexual abuse work.
- Local training courses.
- Reading around the subject.

Training on supervising sexual abuse work was welcomed because it gave opportunities to apply the learning:

“Personally I valued the training that I did on supervising sexual abuse or post-sexual abuse work... It was staggered over time so that we could practice things, and it gave us some good models to work with within supervisions. We were able to have the time to practice those in-between... It also mirrored some of the therapeutic training that practitioners had recently had, so it gave us information of what they had just learnt. Then it gave us the models about how we could help them to think about that, which I thought was really good.”

NSPCC team manager

In some cases, it was felt that the experiences and training of staff had been insufficient for them to provide the full range of intervention techniques outlined in the model guides. When asked about the model training they had received, some practitioners felt it had provided a ‘basic introduction’ to sexual exploitation and as an ‘experience-sharing day’ but they did not regard it as ‘training’. In some centres it was felt staff had not received sufficient training to deliver therapeutic recovery work. One practitioner doubted whether she had a sufficient understanding of trauma:

"You're working with trauma on a daily basis and I didn't get trauma training till two years after I actually started working on Protect and Respect, which I felt was very poor. That knowledge you need to protect yourself as well as work best you can for the young people... I certainly felt at times that I wasn't providing the best services that I could for some young people because I was perhaps pushing them in a way that they weren't ready for or I didn't fully understand the impact of trauma."

NSPCC practitioner

This could also apply to team managers, who could feel 'out of their depth' in supporting staff in working therapeutically on sexual exploitation.

Some NSPCC practitioners reported not receiving any training prior to delivering one-to-one work. Not all staff were aware of or use the Protect & Respect model guides to guide and shape their work. Reasons for not using the model guide included not having attended the training for the programme or feeling that the training had not covered the interventions identified in the model guide:

"You've got... an intervention guide that people don't look at, because actually about a third of it makes sense... they're not trained in some of the areas. "

NSPCC Service Centre Manager

Rather than using the model guide it was reported that staff relied on advice from managers and colleagues and drew on past experience:

"I've not had any training from the NSPCC on Protect & Respect and have had to make it up myself a lot. At least I've [worked on sexual exploitation] before. So I felt able to use those skills that I've had before to really just get involved and do it, if that makes sense. Whereas I know other people are worried because they've not done it before and not had training... it's challenging really."

NSPCC practitioner

Even for staff who felt well prepared to deliver the service, there could be a gap between their perceptions of their competence and others' expectations of them as experts:

“I think [professionals referring children and young people into the service] see us very much as the experts, which I wouldn't necessarily say we are. I think we're good at building relationships with the young people and working with them, but I certainly wouldn't class myself as an expert in child sexual exploitation work. I think I use my skills from over the years to do the work; I've got a good understanding, I've done some good training, but I certainly wouldn't say I'm a CSE expert...”

NSPCC practitioner

A perception that the programme model was not evidence based was said to weaken confidence in the model:

“It's not evaluated. It's not grounded. It's not developed. It's not a long-standing service that we can say anything about.”

NSPCC team manager

Supervision

Supervision and support were considered essential in helping practitioners manage the stresses of the work. Staff wellbeing was impacted by the challenge of:

- Managing uncertainty about whether the child or young person was at risk of exploitation.
- Managing risks of harm posed to children and young people.
- Managing personal crises faced by children and young people, including family problems, mental health problems and self-harming.
- Communicating with professionals and updating them on changes in the risks faced by children and young people.
- Advocating with professionals for support for the child or young person.
- Meeting the organisational requirement to see the child or young person once every 28 days, when the child or young person did not want to engage.
- Meeting the organisational requirement to complete practice measures, when the young person did not want to talk about personal issues or how they felt.
- Dealing with hostile and rejecting behaviour from the child or young person.
- Finding that the work was ineffective in reducing the risks posed to the child or young person.

Some of these points were encapsulated in the following quote from a practitioner:

“One of the things that I never really thought about, and that’s one of the surprises that I got... but when every single case is sexual abuse and it’s really high risk and it’s incredibly complex you can’t not take on some of that. I think in therapeutic terms they call it secondary victimisation or traumatisation, and you need to be able to separate some of that stuff out so that you don’t start thinking that’s your stuff. If you’re walking round feeling heavy and feeling like ‘oh, sexual abuse is everywhere’ and there’s a fear inside of you or whatever and you’re not sure where that’s from, getting that extra supervision or that extra consultation helps you let go of it and realise what it is... And because of the high pressure and the fastness and the quickness of the work we’re doing on child sexual exploitation, often there wasn’t the time to process that, so you ended up just being left with more and more feelings and you’d get tired and worn out and angry... And just that level of complexity and managing that risk is scary and so you need to pick apart some of that... so that you don’t end up pushing children and young people in the wrong direction because you’re overwhelmed with all their stuff...”

NSPCC practitioner

Team managers reported playing a role in helping practitioners plan and organise their work. This included helping assess the risk posed to the child or young person, thinking through strategies for engagement, dealing with hostile and rejecting behaviour, and dealing with children and young people’s crises. Some managers have practitioners a blend of cases with varying levels of risk and vulnerability. Achieving success in cases where the risk was high was felt to be particularly difficult, so providing practitioners with a caseload where the level of risk varied was felt to be useful because it raised the chances of practitioner success.

The accounts of managers and practitioners suggested that the quality of supervision varied. This could feel unsatisfactory where the team manager had not had previous experience of working with sexual exploitation and so could not guide the practitioner:

“I was learning on my own and no one was showing me. You know what I mean? [laughs] I don’t feel like I had good supervision, or I don’t feel like there was somebody here who really had a handle on what the CSE was and who really knew about this.”

NSPCC practitioner

It was suggested that a supervisor's lack of practice experience could lead to their not fully appreciating the anxiety and stress that the NSPCC practitioners faced. Another constraint on supervision quality could be the other demands made on team managers:

"I think if you're going to be able to continue doing this work then you need to be able to have a chance to deal with some of that stuff, like you can't do this work and not be impacted by the people that you're working with. And I think that's why supervision is really important and unfortunately there was a time in our team where our manager wasn't able to provide us with the supervision that we needed because there were expectations made of our manager that just meant they didn't have the time for us, which was just rubbish."

NSPCC practitioner

Resources

While the NSPCC had established a shared online folder for resources to be stored in, not everyone was aware of the store and NSPCC practitioners reported not using it. Some staff felt the organisation, distribution and training on resources could have been better. While the model guide had suggested types of work that practitioners might do, staff teams were left to find the resources and identify the activities themselves. Teams maintained their own resource banks. They collated activity sheets, arts and crafts materials and a range of videos. Videos covered dramatised examples of exploitation, harassment and abuse; documentaries of exploitation and grooming, and educational films explaining concepts like consent. Resources were created by NSPCC practitioners, charitable organisation and government organisations.

Some NSPCC practitioners reported struggling to find resources for boys while other practitioners felt there were a large number of such resources. Other groups that practitioners could struggle to find resources for included:

- Adolescent children with learning disabilities.
- Lesbian, gay or transgender children and young people.

Referrals

The source and motivation of referrals

NSPCC staff reported that the majority of referrals were made by professionals who worked with children and young people, with other referrals coming from carers, children and young people and friends of the child or young person. In some areas, referrals were received from multi-agency sexual exploitation partnership groups, which a member of NSPCC staff sat on.

Referrals happened when the referrer perceived that the service could address a need that the child or young person had, and when the service was viewed as being the best-placed agency or the only agency placed to deal with that need. They could be triggered by an incident or the development of a new relationship, which triggered a conclusion or suspicion that grooming, exploitation or sexual assault was happening or was likely to happen.

Some professionals expected the NSPCC practitioner to improve the child or young person's understanding as a means of helping them to 'safeguard themselves' or 'keep safe':

"Statutory agencies can do a lot of work to try and safeguard a young person but really key to their own safeguarding is their own ability to understand risk, to know about situations, and to know processes should anything have happened or be happening, understand and have the support to go forward with any criminal proceedings."

Local authority social worker

Professionals referred because they felt children and young people needed someone to work effectively to change the way they thought about and understood the relationships they were getting involved with. Police officers explained that they referred partly in the hope that children and young people would feel sufficiently comfortable to disclose exploitation or provide information that could lead to a conviction or disruption work. Referrals were also made in the hope that NSPCC practitioners would provide a space for children and young people to talk through their experiences of exploitation and abuse and for the child or young person to experience a supportive relationship.

Sexual exploitation was not the only issue that referrers hoped NSPCC practitioners would work on. Referrals were made in hope that practitioners could support young people around the practice of sharing naked images, being sexually assaulted, being at risk of sexual assault and sexually harmful behaviour. In some cases NSPCC practitioners felt that referrals had been made in the hope that the programme could provide support for a child or young person who had a range of needs. NSPCC workers felt that one of the key motivations was for the local authority social worker to get the child or young person off their child protection plan, so that the worker could contribute to the wider organisational objective of lowering the number of children and young people on child protection plans.

Gender bias

NSPCC practitioners and referrers reported that girls were more likely than boys to be referred to the service. Several reasons were given for why boys, who were at risk of being exploited, were less likely to be referred:

- Boys affected by exploitation could be involved in criminality and anti-social behaviour and professionals tended to refer boys into youth justice and criminal justice services.
- Boys were said by NSPCC practitioners to be more likely to turn down the offer of the service pre-referral, because they were more likely to feel ashamed of the implication that they were affected by sexual exploitation.

Initial engagement

Use of the term 'child sexual exploitation'

When practitioners sought to engage young people for the first time their use of the term 'child sexual exploitation' to describe the service varied. In some cases, practitioners used the term and helped the child or young person understand what it meant. Other practitioners avoided use of the term fearing it might put children and young people off engaging because it would make them feel:

- Ashamed.
- Cast as helpless 'victims'.
- 'Labelled'.
- Confused because they did not understand the term.
- Under pressure to provide an account of the exploitation they had experienced.

One practitioner described ‘softening’ her language and talking about ‘healthy relationships’:

“To begin with, I presented it to her as... ‘You getting to know me and me getting to know you’... I didn’t at that point say, ‘I think you’re being exploited’, I just said part of the service is ideally we’d like to work with every young person, for children and young people to know about some of the risks that are out there in the community so this is an opportunity for you to explore what we think are risks to children and young people and how to go into adult life with a toolkit around understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships.”

NSPCC practitioner

Some practitioners avoided mention or detailed examination of incidents the child or young person had been involved in that had raised concerns about exploitation. For example, one NSPCC practitioner said that in her work she would allude to an ‘incident’ without going into the detail and imply that it would be worth working together on ‘safe choices’, given the greater range of freedoms that children and young people have when they are older.

Seeking informed consent

The model guidance required staff to gain the informed consent of children and young people and their carers when the child or young person was below the age of 16. However some children and young people were referred without having been informed or asked for their consent. Initial engagement could be affected, getting to meet the child or young person and getting them to a point where they could make a decision on whether they wanted the service could take a lot of time:

“We have a lot of cases that don’t progress because... I’m not sure that we’ve got consent to make the referral in the first place... We need to be a bit smarter on how we gain consent before we pick up pieces of work rather than chasing it around for a month asking, ‘Do you want this service or not?’.”

Service centre manager

Where practitioners were able to meet with the young person they would explain the service to the young person and reiterate the fact that the young person could stop seeing the practitioners if they wished. Nevertheless NSPCC practitioner’s attempt to gain *freely given*

consent could be compromised by the fact that the child or young person was experiencing pressure from other people to participate in the intervention. During their initial visit the NSPCC practitioner could find carers and professionals insisting that the child or young person see the NSPCC practitioner. The level of insistence in some cases amounted to what was sometimes described as ‘bullying’. It could be suggested that failure to see the NSPCC practitioner would result in a young person being sent back to secure accommodation. Attendance at Protect & Respect sessions could be included as a requirement made of the young person in their child protection or child in need plan.

Some children and young people, rather than feeling pressurised to see the NSPCC practitioner, were said to have agreed to participate because they were used to going along with anything professionals suggested to them:

“My worker said they were going to transfer me to the NSPCC to do work with them, that was it really...They didn’t tell me [what it would involve] to be fair. It wasn’t really a description. I remember a practitioner coming out to school and I didn’t know she was coming. I didn’t realise what was going on.”

Young person

NSPCC practitioners reported that in some cases the range of adversities faced by the young person combined with the complexity of the service offer meant that young people, who consented to participating in the service, did not really fully understand what it was that they were signing up to. To overcome this problem some practitioners took a phased approach to informing the young person and seeking their consent:

“To begin with, I presented it to her as for the first part, first however many sessions of us working together, ‘It’s about you getting to know me and me getting to know you’ and I very much encouraged it to be a time for her to make a choice whether she wanted to do any longer-term work with me. We did different activities; I used one session, the teenage life blog cards, which is one tool that we use as part of the assessment process and just helping to get a picture of what teenage life is like for a young person at that time.”

NSPCC practitioner

In one one-to-one case the practitioner explained that consent had not been obtained from the child or young person because she did understand English very well, had learning difficulties and the practitioner had not been able to get access to an interpreter. In some cases the carer of the child or young person could turn down the service offer without the child or young person knowing about it. Reasons for the carer refusal could include that they did not accept that the child or young person was at risk. In some cases a failure to recognise that the young person was at risk was felt by NSPCC practitioners to have been influenced by the fact that the carer was traumatised, the result of the carer having been subject to abuse.

Children and young people did not always want to receive the service. They could argue that they were happy with the relationships and situations they were involved in that referring professionals had concerns about. Other children and young people were said by NSPCC practitioners to have not wanted any professionals involved in their life, and their rejection of the offer of the service was part of a strategy to exclude professionals generally.

Some children and young people said they would see the practitioner, but laid down conditions for their participation, insisting that they would commit only to attending a few sessions. When children and young people did consent to the service NSPCC staff said it was because the child or young person wanted to learn about 'how to be safe online' and how to be assertive in relationships. In some cases, it was because the child or young person was 'bored' and felt that seeing the NSPCC practitioner would be better than doing nothing:

"When I asked him why he attended the sessions, he said it was because he 'enjoyed' it and because it was 'not boring', which he contrasted with his experience of being out on the streets, which happened when he got kicked out of school. He told me that he had never told the NSPCC practitioner that this was why he came to the centre, and added when asked why not, that he had never been asked. I asked him what he thought the NSPCC practitioner wanted to achieve as a result of the work. He said he didn't know, and when I asked him why he thought she did what she was doing with him, he said, 'because it's her work'."

Note of a conversation with a young person during an evaluation interview

Having support from another professional could be a factor in helping the child or young person accept the service. Having another professional could provide the young person with an opportunity for a debrief after the session with the NSPCC worker, which lowered the feeling of anxiety that young people had about accessing the service.

Consent was sought from children and young people for their participation in the evaluation, but not in all cases. In principle, participation in the evaluation involved giving permission for the practice measure data and demographic information to be included in the data set subject to quantitative analysis. It also involved the option of participation in a case study. Some NSPCC practitioners felt that when children and young people were at a higher level of risk they were more likely to say no to evaluation.

Conducting the assessment

Programme model requirements

The Protect & Respect model required that the assessment for one-to-one work involve administration of two self-report measures, measuring wellbeing and traumatic symptoms. It also required the completion of a risk assessment tool, called the Outcome Measurement Tool, which required the child or young person and practitioner to separately assess risks posed to the child or young person in 17 areas of their life (see Appendix A). At the end of the assessment, the NSPCC practitioner was expected to provide a total score for the risk of exploitation posed to the child or young person and was then expected to reach a conclusion on:

- Whether they thought the child or young person had been or was being exploited.
- If the Protect & Respect service would be appropriate for the child or young person.

The four categories of need that the Protect & Respect one-to-one services were focused on addressing were:

- Vulnerable to exploitation but not at risk of being exploited in the immediate future.
- At immediate risk of exploitation but not being exploited.
- Currently being exploited.
- Needing help recovering from exploitation.

It is worth noting that in the early stages of the programme, the assessment tool provided advice on which type of one-to-one work the young person should receive, based on the total score provided by the assessment tool. However, halfway through the programme this guidance was removed from the assessment form after staff raised concerns that the assessment tool score could not be used as an accurate indicator of risk (this experience mirrored the conclusions reached by a review of child sexual exploitation risk assessment forms conducted in 2016 by Brown and colleagues).

If the child or young person's needs fitted one of the categories above, the NSPCC practitioner was expected to create an intervention plan aimed at lowering the risk of those areas in the Outcome Measurement Tool that had been rated at high risk.

Tools and data collection activities

Tools used by NSPCC practitioners during the assessment, alongside or in place of those required by the model, were:

- A bespoke assessment form created by an NSPCC practitioner.
- A set of cards, which involved the practitioner asking the child or young person to identify what their goals were and to score themselves 1 to 10 on how they were doing.
- The risk assessment form used by the local multi-agency child sexual exploitation group.
- The NSPCC Safeguarding Risk Assessment form, which was focused on the risk posed by the work to the practitioner and child or young person.
- The NSPCC Health & Safety Assessment form, which was focused on the health and safety issues for the practitioner.

A variety of tools and techniques were developed and used to help practitioners collect information, which informed the score provided on the Outcome Measurement Tool:

- Activities encouraging children and young people to choose images that represented their wellbeing, circumstances and experiences.
- Sand-tray work, where children and young people used and moved plastic figurines located in a sand-tray to indicate the state and nature of their relationships.
- Socio-educative activities, which involved the practitioner discussing areas of risk with the child or young person and supporting them to talk about relevant personal experiences.

- An eco-map exercise in which the child or young person mapped out on a piece of paper the people in his or her life, and used different styles of line to connect people, to indicate different types of relationship (i.e. close, distant, abusive).

Other activities done during the assessment period included:

- Participation in child protection planning meetings where further information about risks of abuse and harm could come to light.
- Crisis management work, done when the child or young person reported a familial or personal crisis.

In some cases, practitioners were not able to get information directly from children and young people or were not able to get sufficient information from them to cover the 17 areas of the Outcome Measurement Tool. Where this happened, the assessments relied (in full or in part) on information from professionals. Reasons for not being able to get full information from children and young people included:

- Not being able to see the child or young person during the period covered by the assessment.
- Being able to see the child or young person but deciding to focus discussion on issues that were more salient to the child or young person.
- Not having enough time to cover all the topics in the six-week assessment period.

Assessments could be informed by social network mapping exercises, conducted in meetings of professionals, where professionals mapped the relationships between children and young people they were concerned about and the adults who they believed posed a risk of exploitation. In one such exercise professionals established that three families where sexual exploitation had happened were all in contact with each other. This was treated as an indicator of increased risk for all the children within those families. Social network mapping could also prompt professionals to consider if concerning relationships were formed in particular locations and whether work needed to be targeted on those locations. For example, in one case, a school and a particular website were identified as the places that united many of the children and young people that were known to the multi-agency group.

Getting the child or young person to rate their own risk

Part of the requirement of the assessment stage was for the child or young person to rate themselves on the 17 items of the Outcome Measurement Tool. In some cases NSPCC practitioners felt that children and young people were intimidated by the size, wording and look of the Outcome Measurement Tool. Where this happened practitioners did not show the form to the young people but instead engaged them in a series of conversations around the topics in the assessment form. Sometimes, children and young people were then asked to score themselves after the conversation. In one service centre, staff created a pop-psychology style questionnaire, which could be completed via a hand-held tablet. Staff then used the scores that children and young people had given them on the tablet to score the child or young person's self-rating form.

Identifying and addressing concerns

During the assessment the practitioner could find that the child or young person was experiencing a variety of adverse situations and circumstances. Where information about adverse situations came to light the information required verifying and validating with other professionals working with the young person. In this way, one NSPCC practitioner felt that conducting an assessment was akin to doing a 'mini section 47 enquiry'. In some cases, referrals were made to children's social care departments. Where it was difficult to prompt action, NSPCC staff reported expending a considerable amount of time advocating for a response.

The focus of assessment

This section looks at the extent to which assessment was focused on:

- Sexual exploitation generally.
- Whether the child or young person was being exploited at the time of the assessment.
- Whether the child or young person had been exploited prior to the assessment.
- Whether there was a risk of exploitation in the immediate or long-term.
- The reason for exploitation or the risk of exploitation.

Focus on sexual exploitation

The Outcome Measurement Tool required the NSPCC practitioner to provide a total 'risk' score by adding up the risk rating they had given the child or young person across the 17 areas covered by the tool. This was intended to help practitioners reach a judgement on whether the child or young person had been exploited, was being exploited, and what their risk of exploitation was. However, in practice, some practitioners focused assessment discussions on those areas of the Outcome Measurement Tool where the child or young person was felt to be at particular risk. Here the focus of the assessment was not on reaching a judgement on the risk of exploitation per se, but rather on addressing those areas within the Outcome Measurement Tool that were of particular concern.

In some assessments there was a conflation of sexual exploitation with incidents, where the act of sexual abuse did not include the element of 'exchange' central to the government's definition of exploitation (DFE, 2017, p5). Such incidents included where people using some kind of trickery or power to get the young person into a situation where they could then be sexually assaulted or to obtain sexual images.

While being alert to possible child protection concerns, practitioners could make a decision not to actively establish whether the child or young person was being exploited. Sometimes, they preferred to orient discussion around what could be done in the future to lower the risk of exploitation. The reason for doing this was that practitioners did not want to give the child or young person the impression they were under pressure to disclose information. They felt that asking children and young people about exploitation would lead them to experience this pressure. Related to this, practitioners perceived that children and young people, who were being sexually exploited, could find being taken through a process, that sought to establish what was happening to them as psychologically overwhelming and traumatising:

"If she did accept it, it's going to be a more traumatic experience for her because she realises what's happening to her and can't get out of it."

NSPCC practitioner

In some cases, practitioners perceived that where children and young people did not think they were being exploited, they would not respond well to the suggestion that they were. In the absence of support from family or professional services, practitioners felt children and young people could judge that the relationship was the best on offer. Where this was the case, it was felt that the child or young person needed to remain in denial about the dangers they faced:

“You get so many children and young people that say, ‘But I want to be in a relationship with this person, this is a good situation for me, it works for me, in fact it feels better than my life without this situation’. So this young person that we’ve been talking about, it definitely felt better for her than the situation at home... a chaotic home life, where she wasn’t getting the right parenting or attention, so it definitely felt better for her to have somewhere to go, for her to be wanted, looked after. So to her of course she was choosing to be there rather than at home but not realising that she’s choosing something different to what actually was happening.”

NSPCC practitioner

Where NSPCC practitioners attempted to establish if the child or young person had been sexually exploited early on in their assessment, they said this could pose challenges for the child or young person. Some children and young people did not want to talk about such intimate issues so early on in the work:

“And children and young people have fed back on the assessment that actually they’ve only just met you, they don’t want to talk about all this stuff with you in the first few sessions.”

NSPCC practitioner

There were several examples from the case reviews and interviews where practitioners had changed their approach following the child or young person’s initial response. For example, on one occasion a practitioner had attempted a ‘cognitive behavioural therapeutic approach’, making the experience of exploitation central to the work. The practitioner said the young person expressed a preference for not wanting to go back to the experience, which meant the practitioner changed approach.

Sometimes teams or individual NSPCC practitioners made a decision not to focus on whether children and young people had been exploited in the past. This included cases where the referrer had reported indicators that had suggested exploitation could have happened. In some cases NSPCC workers had been informed that the young person did not want to talk about the experience, having explained it to many professionals in the past. In other cases managers and workers saw the purpose of the work to be more about helping the young person with the present and future, rather than looking back on the past:

I haven't tried to find out what happened in between times, because I don't really need to know. My interest is what young person brings to the session and how she makes sense of it and recover from it.

NSPCC Worker

It was feared that going over what had happened to them could create a victim identity:

“The work creates a sense of identity that might not be very helpful for the child. That's something we try and avoid. In some ways it's necessary for consciousness raising, to realise that what they thought was going on wasn't what was happening, that they were being abused, and to be helped through that. But I don't think that consciousness raising is necessary to help them. A degree of naming it is important, but then you don't want to create a sense of identity as victims, which you then leave them with, and they can't move on from.”

Team manager

One worker said that when he did recovery work he took a 'young person centred approach', which meant doing the things that the young person wanted to do, acknowledging that the young person might not be ready to go into what happened to them. In some cases letting the young person take the lead could lead to the young person disclose information, that they would not have had the worker asked about it early on.

Six sessions like that can make for one really good session where they trust and talk a lot, whereas if you're pushing to really try and get stuff you would have never got the value.

NSPCC Worker

The consequence of not addressing whether exploitation had happened or was happening, was that in some cases young people could be referred, allocated, assessed, worked with and have their case closed, without it being clear as to whether they had been or were being exploited during the work.

Risk of exploitation

Children and young people were assessed to be at risk of exploitation when they had:

- Ongoing involvement in relationships or situations where exploitation was suspected to be taking place or where exploitation could take place in the future.
- Been recently subject to incidents of sexual exploitation or sexual assault.

Where children and young people were deemed to be safe from exploitation in the immediate future, assessments could conclude that young people were at risk in the medium to long-term. In some cases NSPCC practitioners focused on what they referred to as 'vulnerability' factors. In one case, for example, a practitioner concluded that while a young person was not at risk, she would always be vulnerable to exploitation due to having experienced chronic abuse as a child, a substance dependency and mental health difficulties. However, in some cases, assessments neglected whether children were at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term. One practitioner felt other practitioners did not consider the implications of trauma on the risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term. The practitioner felt that in such cases a 'trigger' incident could provoke a reaction that could result with involvement in a situation where exploitation could occur. In another case, a young person was considered to have been at low-risk once the perpetrator of her sexual exploitation had been identified. However, this judgement was reached accepting that the young person was in a neighbourhood where a number of perpetrators were known to be operating in the locality.

The exclusive focus on addressing factors that contributed to the child or young person experiencing a risk of exploitation in the short-term meant that cases could be closed in the knowledge that, while there was unlikely to be exploitation in the short-term, risks remained in the medium to long-term:

"Hand on heart I can't say that for some of them I'm not really concerned that in months or years' time they won't be in risky situations... I feel like, although we've helped in this immediate, you know, however many months, six months but look at it in two years' time and I can't say that I'm necessarily that confident that they won't be at risk."

NSPCC practitioner

Some cases were closed because the likelihood of the child or young person running away from home had decreased as their relationship with the carer had improved. However, it was acknowledged that:

- The carer's engagement with the child or young person was likely to worsen once they stopped seeing the NSPCC practitioner.
- The carer's ability to care for the young person would be likely to be impaired by financial, housing or employment pressures in the future.

In some cases, practitioners closed cases acknowledging that the child or young person remained at risk of exploitation, but on the basis that the risk appeared to be being managed by professionals. However, in some of these cases, it was suspected that professionals would pull out of supporting the child or young person soon after NSPCC had withdrawn:

"You might have this plan that the local authority puts in place and things settle down and the missing episodes reduce, and the young person starts going to school and things look much more positive. But that's potentially because there's been such a big multi-agency response and then you might end your work, but then you question whether that's going to be sustained and how much support potentially that young person, that family, needs to sustain that change. And also some of these issues that the children and young people that are working with are so deep rooted, it's going to take years of therapeutic work in a lot of these situations to get that young person to a place where they're able to make safe choices."

NSPCC practitioner

In addition, the child or young person's needs could be so varied that they remained vulnerable while they were not being addressed:

"Cases that we struggle the most with are ones where we've tried to do something, but we can't actually make the influence because of what's happening in the family home. Actually the local authority has stopped working with the young person, so we're struggling to move it on...eventually we have to go, 'We've done all we can. We've tried to give you this information, we can't actually do anything more for you because your problems are now different, they're housing problems, finance problems, education problems, work problems, and we can't resolve those for you. We can't provide mainstream generic social work support

for you. We need to move on...'. We have to say we've done what we can do and end up closing something that's not totally satisfactory, and we don't know that we've made the difference. Because if you've got money issues or housing issues, you could go back to exploitation, because these people [perpetrators] could offer you money, housing, employment. We need access to a social work assistant type of role, but the local authority doesn't have resources to provide services to everybody. So we've got to ask, 'Is it good enough?'... 'Probably, yeah?'"

Service centre manager

The Protect & Respect model guide placed an expectation on NSPCC practitioners to reach a judgement on the factors that contributed to vulnerability to exploitation, risk of exploitation or being exploited. In practice, NSPCC practitioners attempted to understand why exploitation was happening or why there was a risk of exploitation by identifying:

- 'Push' and 'pull' factors. That is, factors that 'pushed' children and young people into situations where exploitation was more likely and factors that 'pulled' them into those situations.
- 'Protective' factors, present in the child or young person's life, which helped lower the risk of exploitation.
- 'Vulnerability' factors, which were sometimes felt to increase the likelihood of children and young people being exploited over the medium to long-term.

Accuracy in assessment

Accuracy in establishing whether exploitation was taking place or had taken place

Where practitioners tried to reach certainty over whether the child or young person had been or was being sexually exploited, they could feel that the child or young person was not providing them with the information they required, for the following reasons:

- Children and young people did not want to acknowledge the risks they faced and the dangers they experienced:

"I can't say 100% that she's not meeting strangers on the internet, because I just don't know if she's being open about it, because she would come and say like, 'Oh, I've deleted my Facebook, I've deleted my Facebook,' and then she would say, 'Oh yeah, someone messaged me on

Facebook,' ((laughingly)) so I don't know if, at times, she was just trying to tell me what I wanted to hear. "

NSPCC Worker

- Children and young people doubted whether the practitioner would respond in a constructive and supportive way.
- Fears of reprisals from people who posed a risk were those people to find out that information had been shared with a practitioner. These fears were triggered by threats made by the persons who posed a risk. Threats included sharing images of the child or young person with family members or reporting the children and young people to police for activities that they had been exploited into, which could possibly lead to the police initiating charges resulting in a criminal conviction:

"One group of children and young people find themselves being exploited into selling and providing drugs to children and young people, as well as being sexually exploited. Perpetrators threaten to report their drug dealing to the police if they refuse to be exploited. Perpetrators will then say to them, who is going to believe you if you are seen to be someone who is giving drugs to kids?"

Team manager

Some practitioners felt that the only way they could get relevant information from the child or young person was if they worked to pull them out of the situation they were in first. In other words, NSPCC practitioners suggested that explicit discussions about exploitation could only happen once the child or young person had been brought to a place of safety.

Children and young people who would have been categorised as 'being exploited' at the point of referral could be recategorised as needing prevention or recovery work by the time the assessment was completed. This happened when all of the following criteria applied:

- The child or young person had been exploited, assaulted or groomed in a single incident.
- The incident had happened several months before the end of the assessment.
- There was no further information suggesting that the child or young person had been exploited.

Where this occurred, NSPCC practitioners made an assumption that the absence of information about further incidents was indicative of the fact that the child or young person was no longer being exploited and no longer at risk of being exploited.

Outcome Measurement Tool: strengths and weaknesses

Practitioners identified the following strengths of the Outcome Measurement Tool or benefits from its use:

- It provided a useful guide to the overall level of risk of exploitation.
- It helped consider key areas of the child or young person's life that research and theory had suggested affected risk of exploitation.
- It could help focus the conversations they had with children and young people, so that they could develop a broad perspective on their life before reaching a judgement more specifically on risks.

There was dissatisfaction too among practitioners, including about the accuracy of the scoring. They reported occasions when their score for the child or young person had suggested that they were not at risk, after which the child or young person had gone missing or had been exploited. The Outcome Measurement Tool was felt to lack several important risk factors for children and young people:

- Risks posed by particular individuals.
- Their level of social isolation.
- Their friendships.

Practitioners highlighted a contradiction in the scoring provided by the Outcome Measurement Tool. To understand this contradiction, it is first useful to know that while the tool was composed of 17 subscales, one of those subscales was 'risk of sexual exploitation'. This meant that the tool provided two scores on 'risk of exploitation' – one given by the subscale and one given by the sum of all the subscales. NSPCC practitioners noted that there could be discrepancies between the total score provided by the Outcome Measurement Tool and the sexual exploitation subscale.

Practitioners also doubted whether the seventeen areas of the Outcomes Measurement Tool were good indicators of risk of sexual exploitation. Doubt emerged when practitioners found that after having worked to address areas of risk on the Outcome Measurement Tool there was little evidence that the young person was at risk of exploitation:

"With the people that we've worked with CSE hasn't been a real factor. There's been something that happened, so that's how they've come through the process, and they're vulnerable because of all the things, but not because of CSE. So you can always find something to do, if the young person's engaging you can identify something, like not going to school, but it's about who you get to do the work. CSE might be a tiny bit and loads

of other stuff. And yet you could run through the assessment if the person would sit cooperatively and then go, 'OK then, it's not quite CSE, but its drugs and alcohol'. You could pick out any adolescent and find things that are useful to do, because of the age they are, or that they are in care, without really focusing on CSE."

NSPCC practitioner

One final weakness with the Outcome Measurement Tool, identified by workers, was that it was not possible to score it all at the same point in time. Completion of the tool required a series of discussions over a period of weeks, which meant that while some of the scores on the tool could be up-to-date by the end of the assessment, other scores could be based on information that was two months old.

Deciding which service children and young people needed

At the end of the assessment period, NSPCC practitioners were expected to categorise the child or young person into one of the four needs groups set out by the model:

- Vulnerable to exploitation but not at risk of being exploited in the immediate future.
- At immediate risk of exploitation but not being exploited.
- Currently being exploited.
- Needing help recovering from exploitation.

Practitioners could not always be certain about the vulnerability, risk, presence of exploitation and history of exploitation for children and young people. One team manager suggested that NSPCC practitioners preferred to categorise children and young people who it was thought might be being exploited as at 'risk' rather than 'being exploited'. This was because lacking sufficient evidence to make a clear judgment about exploitation; practitioners were worried at what might happen if they were held to account for the conclusion that the young person was being exploited.

In some cases, where a child or young person was known to have experienced an incident of exploitation or grooming prior to the referral but where there was no evidence of exploitation during the period of assessment, children and young people could be categorised as needing preventative work. This was because preventative work was often conflated with socio-educative work, and it was felt socio-educative work had a value in helping the child or young person

understand what had happened to them and to build up their skills in being able to recognise and avoid situations that heightened the risk of exploitation.

NSPCC practitioners reported that, in some cases, children and young people had needs that meant they could be allocated to several of the needs groups. For example, children and young people who were initially allocated to do recovery work were, with time, felt to need work to reduce their vulnerability or risk of exploitation. Some children and young people who were deemed to be at risk of exploitation were provided with narrative work to address traumatisation, which required recovery work.

Sharing the assessment information

When practitioners completed their rating of the child or young person on the Outcome Measurement Tool, some of them shared their scores with the child or young person. When sharing their scoring, practitioners could explain to the child or young person that the purpose of the work was to get them from areas that were scored 4 or 5 on the Outcome Measurement Tool down to a 1 or a 2. However, sometimes practitioners did not share their scoring, believing that children and young people would be offended by the scores the practitioner had given and would not want to continue working with them. In other cases, children and young people had made it clear that they did not want to do any paperwork and so the practitioner did not show the assessment results. Instead, the practitioner made a verbal summary of their conclusions, focusing on the child or young person's strengths and what work would be useful to do going forward.

Intervention planning

At the end of the assessment process, NSPCC practitioners were expected to create an intervention work plan, based on the information and judgements reached during the assessment. In some cases, informed by the model guide, they focused their work around the factors in the Outcome Measurement Tool, which they had scored as high risk. Practitioners took a variety of approaches to working with children and young people, including:

- Goal-based work, which involved working on issues that were of concern to the child or young person, but which were not necessarily about sexual exploitation.
- Socio-educative work, which involved providing children and young people with information about how grooming and exploitation worked.

- Situational risk management, which involved supporting children and young people to think about what they could do to lower the risk of exploitation or assault in particular situations, real or imagined.
- Modelling a supportive caring relationship with the child or young person.
- Providing practical and emotional support when the child or young person experienced a crisis.
- Narrative-based identity work, which involved working with the child or young person to explore how they understood past events, how that understanding could impact on how they felt about themselves, and how these things could be changed for the better.
- Teaching children and young people about being able to recognise, articulate and respond to fear and emotions.
- Advocating for children and young people in meetings with professionals and service providers.
- Supporting children and young people through the process of taking an alleged perpetrator to court.
- Providing practical support, by taking children and young people to appointments, helping them move house and helping them complete forms.

A more detailed exploration of the approaches taken by practitioners is provided in Appendix D of this report. NSPCC practitioners often interwove several approaches. For example, socio-educative work was interwoven into modelling a relationship and situational risk management. While practitioners created an intervention plan to be done with children and young people at the beginning of the intervention period, in practice the work they did could change and depart from that plan. Changes to or departures from the plan were triggered by circumstances that children and young people could find themselves in and by practitioners finding out more about the needs of children and young people as the work progressed.

Engagement between children and young people and NSPCC practitioners

Aspects of the working relationship

There were several aspects of the working relationship between the child or young person and the NSPCC practitioner, where work was done to promote engagement:

- Meeting on a weekly basis for a one-hour session.
- Establishing a common language through which to communicate.

- Being physically and emotionally responsive to one another.
- A willingness to engage in the activities set out in the assessment.
- Agreement over the type of support that should be offered by the practitioner.
- Acceptance of the practitioner's concerns about sexual exploitation.
- Involvement in activities set out by the practitioner to address concerns about exploitation.

Young people's engagement could vary across the different aspects and included:

- Attending all the sessions and participating in the work activities agreed.
- Accepting and feeling supported without attending appointments. Relationships could be developed by text, phone and through the practitioner advocating for the child or young person in multi-agency professional meetings. NSPCC practitioners reported that some children and young people appreciated the practitioner making themselves available for meetings, even when they themselves did not attend appointments.
- Attending appointments but not engaging in the activities. An NSPCC practitioner reported that one young person attended her appointment but brought a friend, knowing the work could not proceed with the friend present.
- Attending appointments, being clear that they wanted to continue seeing the practitioner, but also being clear that they did not to discuss personal issues.
- Processing and being affected by what the practitioner was doing and saying, while remaining physically and emotionally unresponsive.

NSPCC practitioners described how engagement could vary over time:

- Participation at meetings could switch from weekly to monthly and from regular to sporadic.
- Meeting duration could vary from 15 minutes to one hour.
- Young people could be punctual on some occasions but late on others.
- The attitude towards the practitioner could switch between accepting and rejecting:

“You go out one week, they’re fine, you go out the next week and they tell you to ‘fuck off’.”

NSPCC practitioner

Steps to engagement

NSPCC practitioners identified a range of steps that they felt needed to be taken to achieve engagement:

- The child or young person needed to feel free to say yes or no to the work.
- The NSPCC service centre needed to be able to provide a practitioner.
- Engagement needed to be offered at a time and place to suit the child or young person and the practitioner.
- The child or young person needed to be able to remember planned appointments.
- The child or young person needed to have the time to attend appointments, given other demands.
- The child or young person and the practitioner needed to find a way of communicating with each other that was intelligible to both.
- The child or young person and the practitioner needed to feel affect for each other.
- Agreement needed to be reached on the level of personal information that would be shared.
- Agreement needed to be reached on the type of support that would be provided.
- The relationship and activities needed to be enjoyable for the child or young person.
- The child or young person needed to be comfortable with the prospect of the relationship ending.

The remainder of this section identifies challenges to taking these steps and what was done to attempt to overcome them.

Being free to say no to participation

NSPCC practitioners perceived that some children and young people were attending appointments because they felt obliged to. Where this happened, practitioners considered that the effect could be minimisation of the emotional and mental investment in the work or in the time spent with the practitioner:

- In one case, a young person who felt obliged to attend made it clear that she understood she was being obliged to attend term-time only, and that she would not be attending during the holiday period.
- Where the work was arranged to take place at school, children and young people avoided school to avoid seeing the practitioner. This could lead to the child or young person being informed about the practitioner visiting on the morning of the visit, or the practitioner collecting the child or young person from home.

Where the practitioner considered that the child or young person felt obliged to attend, they could take a 'light touch' approach to working with them:

"Children and young people might say they'll do it because the parent, social worker or school expects them to, but then they'll find lots of way not to engage. When you do the initial home visit the parent might show that they are definite that the young person should attend the service to learn about CSE and what they might be doing to increase the risk. It's very difficult for the practitioner to put across to the young person that it's a voluntary process. So to begin with you do relationship building and keep it quite light, just to get to know the young person, and then you'll find that they'll engage if they're thinking it's not too bad, or you'll get ones who still think 'I don't want to do this'."

NSPCC practitioner

Providing an NSPCC practitioner

Service centres were not always able to provide a practitioner to see a young person. This could happen when the allocated practitioner went on holiday, was ill or resigned from post. In one case, a young person spent a 'few months' without seeing anyone:

"I was only with her for a few weeks and I think she fell ill so she wasn't in work again. So I hadn't seen the NSPCC for, like, a few months and then a new practitioner came."

Young person

During the course of the evaluation, three of the participating NSPCC service centres were closed. In these cases, it was explained to the children and young people that the work being done with them would need to come to an end.

Young people could sometimes be informed that a decision had been taken to end the work rather than feeling that they had the option of continuing:

“He kind of told me, he was talking and he was like he was talking to his manager and... because there’s more people, like there’s more kids that are going to obviously need his help who are more kind of [in need] than I am, and so it was like, ‘Well we’re coming to a stage where we’ll have to, like, kind of close it’. And stuff and I was like, ‘Why?’ And he was like, ‘Because you understand how to protect yourself and there’s not much more I can tell you that you don’t already know’. And I was like, ‘True’. He was just like, ‘There’s more people out there who need my help’, and everything and I was there like... because I like him and I think he’s proper fun and... but I don’t really need to stay if I’m getting told what I already know so...”

Young person

Children and young people could feel let down and frustrated with changes of practitioner and when their work was brought to an end because there was no practitioner. One young person, who had been allocated three different NSPCC practitioners, and who was then told that the work would need to come to an end, described the NSPCC ‘breaking her heart’ twice and being ‘extremely upset’ with the centre closing. Some practitioners felt the support the child or young person received was of a better quality and more intense than what they had received from other service providers. This made it difficult for young people to relinquish the working relationship:

“We provide a really intensive and a really good service here. And not many other agencies can offer that... and the children and young people will find it very difficult to find something similar elsewhere. So when I do my endings, I make sure they’re really kind of planned and the young person knows and we have like a wind down of sessions and things to kind of get them used to the idea that we’re not going to be there anymore. But it’s quite difficult for really vulnerable children and young people.”

NSPCC practitioner

Practitioners noticed that children and young people would start to turn up late to appointments or not to turn up to appointments at all, knowing and fearing that the work with the practitioner was due to come to an end. In this way, children and young people were felt to be distancing themselves from the practitioner, to reduce the pain they

would feel when the work would come to an end. After the work had finished some children and young people attempted to re-engage a practitioner by dropping in on the centre or phoning. Some service centres ran participation groups, which gave those who had accessed one-to-one work the opportunity to maintain engagement with a practitioner.

Agreeing a time and a place

If the child or young person and the practitioner were to meet, they needed to agree on times and days that suited them. Some children and young people wanted the ability to drop-in to see the practitioner, at times in their week that suited them or when they felt they needed support. One service centre attempted to accommodate this by providing an informal drop-in service, making a practitioner available whenever a child or young person turned up. Some children and young people sought support in the evenings or weekends, through texts and phone calls, or through dropping into the centre at closing time. This posed a challenge for staff paid to provide support on weekdays between the hours of 9am–5pm. In some cases, staff responded to children and young people in the evenings or weekend:

“I had staff running out and about in the evenings, looking for kids who had taken drugs and were sending text messages.”

Service centre manager

In some cases, an expectation was set that the child or young person would attend appointments at the service centre, although this could be problematic where the child or young person did not have the means to get to the centre. One practitioner explained that, in one case, with the closure of the service centre, she and the young person resorted to meeting in the offices of a local agency. However because the local agency did not have space on the days that suited the young person, the work came to an end. Having a service centre located out of the city centre and away from major transport routes was said by NSPCC staff to make meeting the young person harder to achieve. Carers and practitioners sometimes helped children and young people by giving them a lift to the centre. Practitioners also reported going out to meet the child or young person on the street, if they had indicated that they had time available and had given their whereabouts.

Remembering planned appointments

Attending planned appointments required the ability of working to a diary. Some children and young people were said by practitioners to not have this ability and to lack carers who could help them plan their week and attend appointments. In some cases the stresses experienced by children and young people, who faced adversities and experienced

abuse, were said to impair their ability to remember the appointments they had agreed.

Time

Attending appointments required having the time available and the personal resources to engage with a conversation with the NSPCC practitioner. Demands placed on children and young people by people who were grooming or exploiting, school, personal or family crises or other professionals diminished these things. Some practitioners responded by reducing the amount of time children and young people needed to commit to:

“It can take up to six months to engage a young person. A lot of them, it's not that they don't want to work with us; it's what's going on in their world, which creates a situation where they can't engage. Because they're being groomed, exploited, they're being pulled in so many different directions. They haven't got the capacity to be able to turn up to a session every week. I think a lot have needed that flexibility in approach at the beginning, of taking any opportunity, even if it's just 15 minutes talking with a young person at a bus stop. If they'll give you that, we take it because it's any kind of window of engagement.”

NSPCC practitioner

Another approach was to reduce the adversity and demands put on young people by getting them into safe accommodation:

“She's a big advocate of NSPCC, she organises me with sessions, she gets nervous if we haven't got a block of sessions booked in and she'll write it all in her phone. She gets there early, texts me when she's there, texts me if she's running late. She's a completely different young person. I wouldn't have been able to do the work if Nan hadn't taken her in, got her out of the city and [sustained] her home life in terms of boundaries, containment, emotional nurturing.”

NSPCC practitioner

Language

The ability of the practitioner and the child or young person to work together required that they speak the same language. NSPCC practitioners expected the work to be conducted in English, but children and young people did not always speak English. Where this was the case, interpreters were sometimes used. Where interpreters

had a good grounding in the topic of child sexual exploitation, engagement was improved. However, preparation work was not always done with interpreters because finances were not made available to support it. This could impair the ability of interpreters to facilitate communication.

Affect

NSPCC managers and practitioners felt that a precondition of engagement between the child or young person and the practitioner was that the child and practitioner ‘liked’ each other. Affection, understood in this way, was talked about in common sense terms, rather than as a scientific or professional term. As discussed by NSPCC staff it was important that children and young people felt that practitioners, beyond respecting the commitment to meeting the young person and assessing safeguarding concerns, liked the young person.

Affect was said to be something that practitioners and children and young people needed to work together to build up:

“For adolescents taking an adult parental role is unlikely to work. If you can get side by side, and engage in a shared way, those are the sorts of magic moments you are looking for where there can be that sort of connection. Some children can be very antagonistic or oppositional... and it's the practitioner's role to find out what's likeable about that child, that connection.”

Team manager

Sometimes this required overcoming a disaffection that children and young people had for professionals. Such disaffection resulted from:

- Attitudes introduced and reinforced by friends and family.
- Having felt admonished and shamed by professionals.
- Experiencing professionals leaving them when they still needed support.

Disaffection was said by NSPCC practitioners to manifest in several ‘tests’ of practitioners’ commitment and ability to listen:

- Not turning up to appointments, sometimes on multiple occasions.
- Stepping over boundaries during the work done together (e.g. cheating at board games).
- Leaving appointments earlier than planned.
- Pointing out that they would see the practitioner for just 10 minutes.

- Being verbally hostile towards the practitioner.

NSPCC practitioners did a range of things to pass the tests and trigger affect. Some of these are detailed in sections on ‘modelling a relationship’ and ‘building a therapeutic relationship’ in Appendix D of this report. They included:

- Sending texts to demonstrate they were thinking about the child or young person or to indicate they had turned up to the appointment.
- Showing an interest in the child or young person’s life.
- Being self-deprecating.
- Helping to contain the child or young person’s emotions when the child or young person was reflecting on or experiencing distress.
- Allocating a male practitioner where it was felt the child or young person would appreciate the opportunity to be supported by a male.
- Choosing activities that were sensitive to the mood of the child or young person.
- Advocating for the child or young person in multi-agency professional meetings:

“It takes lots of time and it takes lots of energy and you’ve got to establish yourself and prove yourself as a trustworthy person in their life. So they’re going to have times where they’re going to really test you and they’re not going to be where they say they’re going to be, they’re not going to turn up to appointments. But it’s about going back the next week and proving yourself, that they can trust you and you are reliable, and you are going to support them. And often stuff that helps is more the advocacy stuff. So we’ve had young people that haven’t engaged particularly well at the beginning but then there’s been a problem that they’ve needed support with. So they might have needed some support, they’ve got kicked out of school and they want some advocacy support to try and get them back into education. Quite often that’s a really good way of proving to the young person that you’re there to help them and you’re there to support them. And then you’ll quite often find they’ll then see you a different way and actually want to see you rather than you having to chase them around the city.”

NSPCC practitioner

- Demonstrating a degree of happiness to see the young person. One young person described having felt welcomed by various staff at the service centre indicating that receptionists and other centre staff had a role in engagement.

- Persevering despite hostility:

“They’re sometimes such a challenge to work with, in terms of just teenagers full stop. You know? But also, you know, if you throw in the added kind of components of neglect or, you know, sexual exploitation, and years of potential damage, they can be very defensive and unwilling to engage, and challenging and rude and non-compliant at times. And you’ve actually got to be able to kind of just kind of cut through all of that. Not to take things personally, you know? Some of the things which have been said to some of my practitioners, you know, people would feel, you know, kind of outraged at, really. But actually it’s just being able to stick with it and go, ‘Whatever you say to me, whatever you do, I’m actually going to stick with you, and I’m going to show that I’m kind of committed to you’.”

Service centre manager

Overcoming the challenges to achieving affect was not felt to be something that practitioners always achieved. One team manager felt that staff had not always shown enough persistence:

- Staff had expected children and young people to come to the service centre when, in the opinion of the manager, staff could have attended a venue suitable to the child or young person.
- When appointments were cancelled staff did not demonstrate enough hunger for trying to fit in another appointment as soon as possible.

The team manager also questioned whether NSPCC practitioners always felt comfortable engaging the children and young people they were working with. Professional reluctance to engage could be triggered by hostile responses and when children and young people did not turn to appointments.

The persistence required to win the affection of the young person raised the question of how long practitioners should tolerate a lack of attendance before closing a case. One manager was of the view that if a child or young person was only seeing the practitioner once a month the case should be closed because once a month was not enough to create change. This view was in line with the NSPCC policy on case closure, which required direct work with children and young people

to be closed if the practitioner had not seen the young person within 28 days. However, an alternative view was that meeting a person once a month was sometimes a necessary first step to achieving full engagement and change. Seen in this context, the 28-day rule was seen to hinder long-term strategies for engagement.

In some cases children and young people could prefer to spend time with people who, while exploiting them, also provided them with accommodation, attention and access to alcohol and drugs. In this way practitioners felt they were involved in a 'tug of war' for the attention of the child or young person. One manager noted how people who posed a risk were willing to offer types of engagement at times that the NSPCC practitioner could or would not:

"It might be drugs. It might be money. It might be what they see as an intimate relationship... We're not really going to be having that with them in that way. They could go to this person's house and have that time, a cup of tea and that nice feeling and, 'Ah, you understand me' type of stuff, 'You allow me to do stuff that those others won't'... They're there overnight when they're lonely, aren't they... when they've had an argument and they want to run away from the residential. We're not, we're closed."

Team manager

Enjoyment

For some children and young people, the motivation to see the practitioner was influenced, in part, by the extent to which the experience was seen as 'enjoyable'. One young person explained that the seeing the practitioner was better than spending time on the streets. Another young person appreciated spending 'calm' time away from home. Practitioners too felt that doing 'fun' or 'interesting' activities promoted attendance and affect. Having a 'social' element to the work was important:

"Just going to McDonalds or even going for a coffee, it just makes it more relaxed and it's like something that you want to do. For teenagers that's really important to make them feel comfortable. There is a social element to it."

NSPCC practitioner

Practitioners also suggested that children and young people could engage because they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss sexual matters with an adult.

Being willing and able to provide personal information

Finding out about the child or young person's experiences and feelings was often central to NSPCC practitioners' ability to meet the requirements of the service model guide. However, some children and young people preferred not to provide personal information. There were several reasons for this:

- Wanting to take the relationship with the practitioner slowly at the beginning, spending more time on informal activities.
- Being afraid of what would happen if disclosure of abuse and exploitation were to:
 - Get back to the people in whose interests it was to stop such information getting to the authorities.
 - Lead to the child or young person's removal from the family home.
- Wanting to avoid going over experiences and feelings that were painful.
- Being uncertain about whether NSPCC practitioners would be able to handle the truth about what the child or young person had experienced. Some children and young people disclosed information tentatively to see how the practitioner would respond:

"I'm working with a young person at the moment and she's very intelligent, she says to me all the time, 'You have no idea the consequences I face in my life'. She can't talk to me about what her abuse is, she can't talk to me about what the consequences are because for her they feel so real and for us they might be, 'Just leave the relationship and we'll put you somewhere safe'. For us it's very practical and simple but for her it might be shaming, there might be videos of her, indecent images of her that will get shared. I have suspicions her family's linked into this so if she tells people what's going on mum could get sent to prison. The consequences can be massive and we might not see them as that but for these children and young people, they're really real."

NSPCC practitioner

NSPCC practitioners also identified ways of facilitating talk about feelings and experiences. The use of self-report measures helped pinpoint issues of concern that would not be mentioned in conversation:

“Yeah, I think, you know, I think some children and young people when they see you and you are chatting about how things are going it’s kind of everything’s fine and all good and... but I think actually when you’ve got it in black and white, in writing, it almost it can help them kind of really pinpoint what is going on for them and kind of give them permission to say if something is not going okay that may be harder to say, sort of face to face in chatting, as you’re getting to know someone.”

NSPCC practitioner

Physical ‘props’, such as cards displaying different emotions, could help children and young people who were traumatised to recognise and express feelings:

“My background is systemic social work, so I understand that very rarely do people [who experience trauma]...just tell you exactly what that is or even understand it. You need to have some kind of third item to make that process less intimidating. You’re asking the question but via the side door rather than the front door. Anything like visual aids or anything that’s hands on really helps children and young people articulate how they feel...[The young person I was working with] had never had any modelling back from her parents about how she felt because she wasn’t allowed to feel, she suppressed everything so she doesn’t really know how she feels...So I would do a lot of stuff with her around that and so those cards are really helpful...they kind of tapped into certain levels of her...what it was she was feeling.”

NSPCC practitioner

Practitioners regulated the stress placed on children and young people when discussing personal experiences and feelings. Sessions were interspersed with mindfulness and relaxation activities and ended with fun activities. Sometimes young people were given a week off seeing the worker.

Agreement on the support that should be offered

Working together depended on agreement over the issues that the practitioner could support the child or young person on. Some children and young people preferred spending time doing creative activities. Some children and young people were said by NSPCC practitioners to engage because they were keen to be supported generally, given the absence of adult support in their life. Children and young people referred for recovery work were said by

NSPCC practitioners to have been prepared to work on their past experiences because:

- The exploitation had ended, and they wanted to be able to talk about it.
- They were determined for it not to happen to them again.
- There was a realisation that what had happened to them was making them feel sad and they needed help to get out of the situation.

Children and young people could also want support on issues other than sexual exploitation. Some were said by NSPCC practitioners to have accepted that they were being exploited or at risk but were more concerned about addressing other adversities they were facing. These could be problems relating to school life, family, sexuality, friends, accommodation, education and personal crises:

“They tend to be children who have already got problems in their lives anyway. The problem that we think is the problem may not be the most important.”

Team manager

Practitioners differed in how they responded to children and young people who wanted support on issues not pertaining to sexual exploitation: some took the view that the child or young person was ‘not ready to engage’ and closed the case; others provided what was referred to as ‘goal-based’ or ‘child-led’ support. The provision of such support was felt to provide a series of stepping-stones that could lead to a point where a discussion about exploitation could take place:

“The nature of the children and young people is that they’re not going to do something that they don’t want to, because they’re not that compliant generally, and at the end of the service if they didn’t see something as a risk and you thought it was, hopefully that is something you could revisit. Yet the starting point if I’m going to have a relationship is what are the priorities for them, because it’s about their perceptions of things. You might as well put the energy into working on the things that they think, and then if there are additional things that you think could be done, they might be more amenable to that as time goes on.”

NSPCC practitioner

Alternatively, practitioners could operate a strategy of meeting the child or young person half-way, giving them an opportunity to receive support on some of the issues they cared about in return for engaging with the practitioner on the issue of sexual exploitation. When this approach was taken, the practitioner could sometimes be skilled in navigating the discussion on to sexual exploitation:

“Some of my practitioners are brilliant at engaging children on difficult subjects, so they can introduce sexual health, sexual abuse, trauma and so on into conversations, which a child may not really want to have and find a way of engaging them on it as well as taking care of the things the [children and young people] are concerned about.”

Team manager

However, in finding a balance between ‘child-led’ issues and issues that the practitioner wanted to focus on, practitioners could sometimes experience frustration when the child or young person wanted to focus on other issues:

“She’d sometimes become preoccupied with wanting to talk about stuff. Like she’s got this fascination with conspiracy theories and ghosts and she would sometimes try and talk about that stuff, which was difficult, because she can really talk sometimes [laughingly]. You want to give that space but then if she’s spending 20 minutes talking about a horror film or a ghost that she’d seen in the house, it took away from the work, and an hour is not really a long time, is it?”

NSPCC practitioner

Sometimes, ‘child-led’ work was accompanied with a decision to drop the requirement to get the child or young person to consent to completing the assessment and intervention plan in line with the model and having explicit discussions about sexual exploitation:

“As the years go by we’ve been bolder about the children and young people we accept on P&R. At the beginning we said that the young person had to totally consent before being involved in the service, and now we’re saying they’ve got agree to give us a go; these are some of the really higher risk younger ones in particular who don’t like sitting in a room with anybody, and in working with those children and young people we’re not expecting them to sit down and do little questionnaires with us

and neat pieces of work. It's that trust and building up. It can be difficult to contain them in a room for more than twenty minutes to doing anything constructive... So giving them it in chunks, giving them control of something short-term and doable, can lead to long-term change. We help them have some control over the process."

Service centre manager

When practitioners did persist with their attempt to provide the support expected of the model, including encouraging discussions about sexual exploitation, this could lead to the child or young person ceasing engagement or threatening to stop attendance:

"So there are sessions where you might work through what was called the grooming line, to start to identify grooming behaviours and you'd say, 'Can you recognise some of these?' And they just wouldn't get involved or they'd shut down or they'd want to go home, and they'd want to talk about something else. But you'd be trying to push, which meant they'd shut down even more. Then the next time you went out to see them either they wouldn't want to see you, or they wouldn't be there, or they'd pretend not to be in. Often you'd feel like you were pushing them, and you'd go 'Look, I'm sorry, I felt like I pushed you and I don't think that was right and let's start again, let's focus on just going back to getting to know each other.'"

NSPCC practitioner

Acknowledging and accepting risk and vulnerability

NSPCC practitioners were aware that some of the children and young people they worked with were being exploited or at risk, and that something needed to be done to change that. Part of their work involved working with the child or young person to get to them to the point where they recognised the risks and believed that things could be done to lower those risks. However, some children and young people did not want to discuss relationships they were involved in, which practitioners had judged to be exploitative or potentially exploitative. This was for two reasons. The first was that for some children and young people, the relationship that they were involved in was perceived to be the only means through which they could get a range of needs met. Practitioners felt that children and young people experiences being challenged on the relationship as a recommendation they should deny themselves the support and comfort that was also a part of the relationship:

“Children and young people may be getting money, phones, drugs and alcohol, which they might struggle to get access to from anyone else. Homeless children and young people may get a place to stay, and children and young people who feel their parents are overly controlling get a chance to be free of that control. For some, who may have experienced a life of neglect, it will help fulfil a longing for feeling valued and cared for, and for those who are loved by their parents but are unpopular among their peers, a feeling of romantic involvement. Children and young people are likely to feel ambivalent about developing a relationship with a practitioner who might challenge them about these relationships, because it is also challenging them to deny themselves from these forms of support and comfort.”

NSPCC practitioner

Two further inter-related challenges were children and young people not wanting to:

- Come face-to-face with the fear that came with acknowledging the reality of the risks they faced in the relationships they were involved with.
- Experience the sense of shame and embarrassment that came with acknowledging that the only people who they had assumed loved and cared for them did not.

Despite children and young people’s reluctance, some practitioners challenged them to accept the risks they faced. In one case, this was by focusing on the future rather than on past events:

“I said I did not want to argue about the truth and that the point of the work is to accept that there have been times when she has not told adults when things were happening and to look at why that was and what the results were of doing this. We refocused on how secrets can lead to more risks, more abuse and them being taken into care. I asked the young person if this is what she wants to continue to do and suggested that she thinks about the past and what she needs to do differently in the future.”

Practitioner’s case note from work with the young person

Some practitioners reported being able to challenge in a way that was tolerated by the child or young person. One practitioner focused on behaviours:

“I always go back to when I was working as a residential practitioner and we always worked with the person-centred view of counselling, which is like the person is okay, it's the behaviour that's not. So accepting them, listening to what they've got to say but holding down the line of what reality...”

NSPCC practitioner

When an attempt was made to explain how the practitioner had arrived at the conclusion that the child or young person had been a victim of grooming and exploitation, the practitioner's manner and use of humour could help lighten the burden of the conversation:

“The practitioner is funny as well, so, like, when, like, we talk about stuff, you can tell it's getting a bit deep, he'll make a little joke out of it, which is good 'cos it makes you realise it's not that serious...older people can manipulate you and its easy for them to get into your head, so we'll talk, he's like making out it's not my fault and he's just chilled, you know how some people are intense, like asking you questions and then, like, trying to write it all down, like he's more chilled and relaxed.”

Young person

Some practitioners provided information on exploitation but did not put pressure on the child or young person to apply those concepts to their own life:

“I said to her that, 'There are going to be times where we're going to have a difference of opinion and I've worked too long in this area and I know that this is a very real thing that affects children and young people and so I do believe that there are things that are a risk in this community'. In the early stages I would say to her, 'I don't know enough about your story to give a conclusive opinion on whether this is happening to you or not, all I can do is talk to you about what some of the risks could be and then it's up to you to process that in a way that you can process it.”

NSPCC practitioner

Practitioners considered that some children and young people would be in a better position to acknowledge the risks and vulnerability they faced or that they had faced in life once they were in a safer place. For this reason, they focused on moving the child or young person into safe accommodation. Rather than seeking to achieve safety through

improving the child or young person's understanding, safety was felt to be a precondition of improving their understanding.

Engagement between children and young people, carers and other professionals

Engaging carers

NSPCC practitioners sought to engage carers as a means to improving the relationship between carers and children and young people.

Challenges to carer engagement included:

- Carers had been sexually abused as children and engaging with socio-educative work triggered feelings and stress associated with past experiences.
- Carers could feel so devastated about what had happened to their children that they could not talk about their experience. Practitioners responded by breaking down topics into 'manageable chunks'.
- Carers preferring to discuss and receive support on issues other than sexual exploitation. Practitioners faced with this responded in differing ways, including: trying to keep the focus on sexual exploitation; offering support on the identified issue; or referring to a service that offered support for the issue:

"Working with parents is much more about socio-educative talking to them about their CSE but also trying to get them to focus on their children's needs rather than their own needs, which can be very frustrating...Parents often want to use the work as a counselling session, which is inappropriate and you need to try to steer them away from that. It's less relationship-based, but less energy goes into building up a relationship. Some of the work with the parent is to try and get the parent to access counselling."

NSPCC practitioner

There was a particular barrier identified in working with fathers:

"Practitioners prefer to avoid [involving dads] because, I don't know, it's just what we do. No good reason... Dads are happy not to be engaged and practitioners are happy not to engage them. It's just easier."

Team manager

In one case, when the father had made the point to a multi-agency group of professionals, including an NSPCC practitioner, that his role within the family was to make money, the professionals were reported to have accepted the implication that he was not going to be involved in working with them to address the concerns they had.

Engaging professionals and working together

Much of the work done with children and young people was in partnership with Children's Services and other professionals. Work often started as part of the initiation or development of multi-agency plans to address concerns about exploitation. In some cases, NSPCC practitioners sought to engage professionals, because their support was deemed to be crucial in lowering the risk of exploitation for the child or young person. When cases were closed, NSPCC practitioners worked to ensure that children and young people who needed ongoing support received it through the provision of a multi-agency plan or a service.

The process used by local authorities for dealing with concerns relating to the exploitation of individual children and young people varied. Two types of mechanism were used:

- The local authority's existing child protection procedures, based on the procedures and processes outlined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (HM Government, 2018).
- Special procedures and processes set up for handling concerns relating to sexual exploitation, which operated in parallel and separate to the local authority's child protection procedures.

Procedures and processes specific to child sexual exploitation could be used but these differed from child protection procedures based on *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, in that they involved:

- The use of child sexual exploitation strategy meetings, rather than child protection conferences, to discuss risks and actions to be taken.
- The creation of child sexual exploitation plans rather than the child protection plans.

Children at risk of exploitation could be subject to a child sexual exploitation plan rather than a child protection plan. Several reasons were given for why local safeguarding children boards preferred child sexual exploitation-specific procedures:

- Government requirement for local authorities to have plans and procedures in place for managing the risk of exploitation posed to children and young people.

- A perception held among staff in local authorities that child protection procedures were for children and young people where the risk of harm came from an identifiable person with the family home, and where the focus of a child protection plan was on carers' ability to nurture and safeguard the child or young person from the harm.
- A need for agency partners to discuss issues relating to exploitation in the absence of the child or young person's carers to protect the anonymity of suspected perpetrators. It was mentioned that carers could not be asked to leave child protection meetings.
- A need to discuss and analyse the risks posed to children and young people through an analysis of the social networks formed between victims, potential victims, perpetrators and potential perpetrators. Child protection meetings, which traditionally focused on the individual children, could not do this. In practice, sexual exploitation meetings could discuss several children or children and young people at the same time and so allow for a discussion about social networks.

NSPCC practitioners often viewed the success of the work as being dependent upon the engagement of professionals. The types of work NSPCC practitioners sought to engage professionals in included:

- Creating child protection plans to manage the risks posed to the child or young person.
- The development of sexual exploitation multi-agency plans or child protection plans.
- Focusing professionals' assessment, planning and service provision on whether the child or young person, who was safe from exploitation in the short-term, might be at risk of exploitation in the long-term.
- Encouraging other professionals to take actions that diminished the factors that both 'pushed' and 'pulled' children and young people into relationships, where the risk of exploitation was raised. This included:
 - Moving the child to a safer environment.
 - Providing more support to the child or young person at school.
 - Providing support on drugs and alcohol.
 - Providing therapeutic support.
 - Providing support to address the neglect experienced by a child or young person.

Challenges to achieving professional engagement included:

- Professional perceptions over the type of child or young person or circumstance that child protection plans were intended to address.
- Professional neglect of the risks of being exploited in the medium to long-term.
- A preference for non-analytical approaches.
- A pressure to minimise expenditure and costs.

Professional perceptions about whom child protection plans were for
NSPCC practitioners worked to get local authority practitioners to overcome the perception that child protection plans were only for:

- Families where the carers were not providing a sufficient amount of care and protection for their children in the home. In some cases, local authority practitioners wanted to close child protection plans where a child or young person remained at risk from exploitation, on the basis that while they faced risks from people outside of the family home, the carers were fulfilling their role in safeguarding them within the home.
- Children and young people who were experiencing risks from known family members within the home.
- Children and young people who were under the age of 16:

“I’ve never had a social worker say, ‘We don’t do child protection plans for children over 16’ but I’ve had social workers say on a few cases, ‘What would be the point of a child protection plan? What would a child protection plan achieve?’.”

NSPCC practitioner

Professional neglect of the risk of being exploited in the medium to long-term

Professionals could be focused on identifying and responding to the risk of exploitation or abuse occurring in the short-term, where the risk was indicated by a recent incident. This could lead to a narrow focus on whether there had been a reoccurrence of the event or continued involvement with people who were felt to have posed a heightened risk. Where the event had not reoccurred or where there was no further involvement with people who were felt to have posed a risk, there was a preference for closing the case. This was done without consideration being given to factors that suggested the child or young person was at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term. This included cases where the child or young person was traumatised or where they were living with a family where they had experienced neglect that had not been addressed.

A preference for non-analytical approaches

NSPCC practitioners described situations where the professionals working together to address the issue of exploitation were not focused on analysing the factors that were ‘pushing’ or ‘pulling’ children and young people into relationships and situations where the risk of exploitation was heightened. This could include cases where:

- Professionals’ concerns about sexual exploitation led to them providing a range of interventions to the child or young person and their family, in the hope that one of the interventions might change the situation.
- Professionals took an abstentionist approach to reducing the risk of exploitation. In these cases, professionals placed the responsibility for risk reduction on the child or young person:

“I think reflecting back on this young person’s journey, I think there were some things that the local authority could have done better, in terms of addressing the neglect. All the focus was on the young person changing her behaviour when she was living at home, her child protection plan was all about ‘she needs to attend education more’, ‘she needs to not be putting herself in risky situations anymore’. I’ve done a lot of work with the professional network thinking about it’s not this young person’s choice that she’s being exploited, she’s not choosing to put herself in these situations, we need to be doing more work in reducing those push and pull factors that have created her to be pushed into this situation. So I think there’s definitely a role around plans that support children and young people from local authorities to be looking at what is going on at home, how can we reduce the stress that is going on at home, the neglect that is going on at home because all that in turn reduces the risk of CSE. If we put resource into reducing those, we’re then in turn reducing the CSE rather than the focus being on the young person to stop what they’re doing when it’s not their choice, it’s not as simple as that, they can’t just stop being exploited.”

NSPCC practitioner

A pressure to minimise costs and expenditure

A pressure to minimise costs and expenditure was identified by NSPCC staff as underpinning the following range of tendencies or practices, which made it difficult to engage professionals:

- A tendency to want to close down child protection plans and cases even if the risks of exploitation had not been reduced. In some authorities, this led to the practice of closing a child or young person's plan once the NSPCC had started or had finished offering a service.
- A tendency to avoid assessments that concluded care proceedings were necessary.
- Local authorities relying on other agencies to provide a service to meet the needs identified in multi-agency assessments.
- A reluctance to open up child protection plans and care proceedings for children aged 16 and over, because there was a perception that working with children at this age was more challenging and costlier.
- A reluctance to involve NSPCC practitioners in multi-agency meetings, because NSPCC practitioners would highlight needs that would require investment of agency resources to meet:

“We have situations where a strategy meeting is called and we don't get invited... possibly because we create more work for them... we are the people saying this is what needs to be done but actually those other agencies don't have the resources to do what needs to be done, so... it gets to a stalemate...”

Team manager

Attempts to overcome the challenges of professional engagement

NSPCC staff took a range of actions to overcome the challenges of inter-agency working:

- Training was provided for local authority professionals on sexual exploitation and the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors.
- Chronologies were written, based on case file reads, to widen the focus of assessment to factors that raised the child or young person's risk of being exploited in the medium to long-term.
- Concerns about the case were escalated to an NSPCC manager who would hold a discussion with an equivalent in the local authority.

- To avoid the closure of child protection plans while the child or young person remained at risk, NSPCC managers made the provision of service conditional on the local authority keeping the child protection plan open.
- Engagement of the police in the conversation with the local authority.

On some occasions practitioners, when unable to engage local authority professionals:

- Provided the support they felt local authority professionals should be providing:

“In some cases we were taking on the role of a social worker, visiting them in hospital and checking up on their welfare, because we didn't think anybody else was doing it... We ended up doing the work of statutory child protection agencies.”

NSPCC administrator
- Kept cases open for a long time and until the point that the local authority was willing to become involved to help manage the risks posed to the child or young person.

Key Findings on service implementation

NSPCC workers who provided the service had a variety of relevant professional experiences but many had not worked on a child sexual exploitation service before.

Approximately 1,500 children and young people were referred to the NSPCC for one-to-one work.

Referrals for the service tended to come from professionals, sometimes having been initially referred to multi-agency groups focused on sexual exploitation.

Approximately two thirds of the children and young people referred were allocated to the one-to-one service. Over ninety per cent of children and young people allocated to the service were female.

When NSPCC practitioners sought to start the work they could find that the child or young person had not been properly informed about the service or had not felt free to turn the service down. In this situation NSPCC practitioners sought to inform the child or young person and make clear that they had the choice to say no to seeing the practitioner.

During the assessment stage of the work NSPCC practitioners could find it hard to establish if the child or young person had been exploited, was being exploited or was at risk of exploitation. Sometimes the child or young person did not want to talk about sensitive personal issues of sexual exploitation. The complexity and dynamic nature of the child or young person's social environment also made assessment a challenge.

The work that NSPCC practitioners did with children or young people varied in type and in the time taken to deliver it. Approaches included socio-educative work, goal-based work, modelling a caring relationship, providing practical support, advocacy and helping children and young people manage moments of crisis. Work could last between 6 weeks and two and a half years.

NSPCC practitioners explained that a key challenge in the work was establishing a working relationship with the child or young person. Strategies which helped included listening to the child or young person about what mattered to them, seeing them at times and places that were convenient to them and supporting them on their priorities. Perseverance was needed as it could take six months for a child or young person to get to the point of being able to meet with an NSPCC practitioner on a regular basis.

There was a significant amount of service attrition. Work could be stopped prior to the assessment starting and during the assessment period. Only 200 children and young people completed the planned intervention work.

There was also a significant amount of evaluation attrition. In only 47 cases had NSPCC practitioners provided a rating of the risk of child sexual exploitation posed to the child or young person, at the beginning and at the end of the work.

Chapter 3: Impact on risk

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore whether and how the range of activities carried out during the one-to-one work made a difference to the risk of exploitation posed to children and young people. This chapter draws mostly on perspectives provided by NSPCC staff, including from interviews and their case notes. It also draws on the perspectives provided by children and young people during their interviews. This chapter does not seek to describe all the possible outcomes experienced by children and young people. In particular, it does not seek to describe whether and how children and young people were enabled to recover from exploitation. Nor does it seek to describe and explain how outcomes were brought about for carers. Finally, it should be pointed out that to the extent that this report looks at impact, it does so drawing on the information fed back from participants in the evaluation interviews. The findings on impact are not based on an analysis of quantitative data.

NSPCC practitioners acknowledged that often they could not accurately judge the overall level of risk of exploitation posed to a child or young person. This made it difficult to know if the work had made a difference to the level of risk. In some cases children and young people had experienced positive change in some areas of their life, but negative change in others, e.g.:

- A continuation of adverse relationships with family members, together with an increase in understanding of exploitation or a new determination to ensure they entered into relationships where they would be respected.
- Put into a foster care placement with improved care but traumatised at having been forcibly removed or socialising with a person who was felt to heighten the risk of exploitation.
- Better able to say no to a boyfriend's demands for sex but drinking heavily, self-harming, using cannabis and skipping therapy sessions.

In certain cases where practitioners felt able to identify indicators of change:

- Risk was perceived to fluctuate in line with the different people and situations children and young people encountered, and in line with events within the family home.
- Being known to multi-agency groups focused on tackling sexual exploitation was felt to indicate young people continuing to be at risk:

“The multi-agency group have started compiling a list of children and young people who they feel are at risk. Quite a lot of the children and young people on the list are people who have previously been through the Protect & Respect service.”

Team manager

- The risk of exploitation in the short-term could be minimised whilst the risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term remained:

“Most of my children and young people, you close them, you send them back off and you don’t feel confident that actually, you know, what they’ve experienced has really been addressed so they are vulnerable.”

NSPCC practitioner

- Risk was felt to have increased when the level of neglect or abuse increased for the child or young person. This included abuse experienced at home, family disputes, being expelled from school and being bullied:

“Apparently sexually assaulted at school this week by a student... This is among other comments being made to the siblings. This has been a persistent issue for a number of months with the school making repeated unsuccessful attempts to manage it.”

Case note written by an NSPCC practitioner

- During the course of the work, a child or young person could experience deterioration across several aspects of their life, which could serve to increase the risk of exploitation:

“Things seemed to deteriorate in the autumn last year... There were concerns around home life; we weren’t convinced that mum was reporting her missing as often as needed... It was becoming more concerning and police were coming into contact with her quite regularly, whether that was being drunk and disorderly late at night or in the early hours and then assaulting police officers. Mum was becoming quite depressed and withdrawn... Dad wasn’t really on the scene... that had a significant impact on her... There’d been an argument with mum and mum threw her out... At this point she’d turned 16 and was out of education there’d been attempts to get her into a college course, but the attendance wasn’t very good as well there.”

NSPCC practitioner

In some cases, no change was taken to be an indicator of success in stopping the child or young person from continuing along a downward spiral. Some children and young people, it was felt, had been supported to avoid slipping into dependency on drugs and alcohol or becoming pregnant.

Factors which reduced risk

Lowering risk was felt to be dependent on adults providing care and minimizing perpetrators' ability to access the child or young person. NSPCC practitioners felt that improvement in the care received by young people reduced risk because it:

- Reduced the child or young person's dependency on alcohol and drugs, which reduced their motivation for entering into relationships that were exploitative but which had provided the child or young person with alcohol and drugs.
- Improved support with and the ability to cope with stress, which lessened the likelihood of entering into situations and relationships where the risk of exploitation was heightened.
- Meant the child or young person had less motivation to see people who posed a risk of exploitation:

“Children and young people often accept exploitation because they want the money or to feel love and affection. Practitioners can compensate for the lack of love during the work.”

NSPCC practitioner

Improving the care received by young people could be brought about via:

- Improvement in the support from carers.
- Improvement in the relationship with the carers.
- Involvement in education and youth clubs.
- Improved relationship with friends.
- The development of a therapeutic relationship with the NSPCC practitioner.

The inability of the NSPCC practitioner, Children's Services and professionals working with the child to provide the right type of nurturing environment was felt to be a factor for some children and young people remaining at risk of exploitation. In some cases, it was felt that children and young people had attachment disorders or trauma, which needed a nurturing therapeutic relationship.

Taking action to minimize the ability of perpetrators to access the child or young person included:

- Escorting children and young people to and from school, and thus protecting them from people who they could meet in between the home and school who posed a risk.
- Introducing children and young people to activities supervised by responsible adults. For example time spent in the youth club, under the supervision of responsible adults, was felt to mean less time spent on the streets, where they could meet people who would be interested in exploiting them.
- Removing the child or young person from their family home or accommodation (when they were already living in care). This could include moving them from one town to another:

“Being in a stable placement has really helped her. Before she was in a hostel and wasn’t ‘looked after’... a 16-year-old with no independent living skills, where there’s all sorts of people and where she ultimately was raped. She sees for herself that having good people around her, having the support, having somewhere safe for her to go back to so that she feels safe, has really helped her be able to develop and improve things in other parts of her life.”

NSPCC practitioner

Some NSPCC practitioners felt that risk could be lowered when the child or young person’s ability to take risk-avoidant action was improved, including:

- Reducing involvement in relationships and situations where there had been a heightened risk of exploitation, control or abuse. For example, one young person who smoked cannabis had stopped buying cannabis from sellers who were felt to pose a risk and instead got her sibling to buy the cannabis for her.
- Reducing their attempts to meet ‘new’ people.
- A reduction in the amount of personal information made available on social media accounts.
- Being assertive within relationships and when meeting new people for the first time:

“I don't go out on the street and look at everyone as a sex pest but if I go out on a night out and you get them idiot boys that come up to you and start flirting with you, I know when to say no. And I know how to be like 'Move!', do you know, like, 'Just get gone! I don't want to talk to you'. So there's loads of things that I look out for.”

Young person

Supporting young people across the four steps to risk avoidant action

Practitioners identified four steps that children and young people needed to be supported across to arrive at the point of being able to deploy risk avoidant actions, and things that could be done to help them to take these steps:

1. Increase understanding about key concepts around exploitation. The use of sexual exploitation films was felt to help children and young people understand the key concepts.
2. Accept the relevance of grooming and exploitation to their life experiences. In providing dramatised depictions of grooming and exploitation happening to people with whom the children and young people could identify, films could help children and young people appreciate how grooming and exploitation could happen to them.
3. Accurately assess the risks they face. Reflective discussion with the child or young person helped them apply the concepts to assess the risks experienced in his or her own life, and to think about possible steps that could be taken to lower those risks.
4. Have a belief that things could change for the better. Modelling a caring and nurturing relationship could help children and young people develop a belief that the types of relationship they could achieve could be improved.

The feedback provided by practitioners and children and young people suggested that children and young people could face challenges at each of these steps. The rest of this section looks at the challenges and at the attempts made to overcome those challenges.

Challenges to understanding

The understanding of children and young people was improved when practitioners spent time providing information about the key concepts:

“He just basically taught me how to take care of myself, if that makes sense, like when it comes to the outside world...Like, when people message me, if I don't know them, just don't really talk to them because even if they might say they're my age and he was telling me 'Even though the profile picture might look like a kid, that could be their son or grandson so you don't know who they are really'. And I was like 'That's true'. And he was there like 'If you're going to meet people you don't know to always bring somebody, and I was like 'Yeah'. And always tell my parents, like my mum, and always make sure she knows where I'm going all the time and always meet in public places because they could do anything.”

Young person

Where the work was concerned with understanding healthy relationships it was felt that the way the practitioner behaved towards the child or young person, gave the child or young person first-hand experience of what it meant to be in a healthy relationship.

Practitioners felt that films depicting or explaining sexual exploitation improved understanding and provoked discussion:

“We've got lots of links to videos and the kids love that stuff. They seem to just absorb that information so much more than sitting down with a practitioner. It's a natural way of communicating for them at the minute, and I think they find it safe and almost hypnotic. As soon as you press play they're hypnotised [Laughs] whereas you could deliver the same information yourself and they'd have intermittent concentration. I think it holds their attention in a way that humans don't seem to be able to do much anymore. I'm not saying I'm not good [laugh] but it's difficult to compete with a high-resolution device.”

NSPCC practitioner

Accepting and believing that grooming and exploitation are relevant

Some children and young people were able to understand how grooming and exploitation worked but did not accept that grooming and exploitation were things that could or did happen to them. Two key factors were felt to be important in influencing whether children and young people accepted the relevance of the concepts. One was access to a safe and nurturing relationship and the second was having a relevant experience:

“When you actually go through it and then someone actually talks to you about it you’re like, ‘Oh, yeah that’s why’, yeah it just makes more sense than, like, if your life is good then you don’t really go through stuff like that.”

Young person

Relevant experiences could include being exploited, assaulted or being required to hold drugs for someone. They could also include seeing how exploitation could happen to someone like them and in situations that resembled the situations they experienced. In one case, when a young person watched a dramatised account of exploitation of someone her age and gender, it was enough to make her realise that the information about exploitation was relevant to her:

“So, like, if you use somebody who they care about and, like, if you gave them a good example... when it’s actually visualised and you see it for yourself, you’re like, ‘Whoa’... It’s just because you can see it... it’s because it is not obvious the way they do it; that’s what got me. Because it’s not obvious that it’s going to happen, and it makes you realise how crazy people actually are and, like, when it happened to the person, you can see that... you can... it’s weird because you can see that’s you if that makes sense. Like I could see that was me...”

Young person

Assessing personal risks

Once a child or young person had accepted that grooming and exploitation were relevant to their lives the next step was to understand the personal risks they faced. Practitioners identified two situations in which such understanding could be developed. The first occurred as a result of a considered process of reflection and planning, which the child or young person did in partnership with an adult, the NSPCC practitioner or a carer. The second was when the child or young person made on-the-spot decisions in particular situations and circumstances that they faced alone.

Children and young people, with the support of the NSPCC practitioner, could apply the key concepts to reach the conclusion that:

- They had been the victim of exploitation, assault or rape.
- They were being controlled or disrespected by a romantic partner.
- The relationships they were involved with were, on balance, not good for them.

They also used the assessment process to draw conclusions on what kind of strategies they could take to withdraw from relationships:

“The work we did, I would say, enabled her to seek out healthier relationships in the future, and she demonstrated that through being in a relationship. It wasn't making her happy, and reaching the decision, on her own, but talking it through with me and also with her mum about that relationship. So she was able to think about that and use the work we'd done together on healthy and unhealthy relationships, to recognise it wasn't making her happy and to end it.”

NSPCC practitioner

As assessments were sometimes conducted with an adult, this could mean that the child or young person's judgement was influenced by a pressure to conform to the expectation of the adult. The following commentary provided by a young person indicated that her decision to withdraw from a relationship with an older male had been influenced by several points impressed upon her by her practitioner:

“I was kind of upset because I was going out with this guy... he was turning 18... and [my practitioner] was talking to me and I was like, 'Well we haven't done nothing, so really it's not that bad'... I liked [the guy] and [what the practitioner said] really pissed me off... [The practitioner] was like, 'You need to be careful, because of his age you don't really want to get him in trouble because if anybody finds out... if you two really care about each other and really want to be together then, waiting a year or two isn't that bad'... He was saying... 'There's still risks',

because he showed me a film clip that I was far too young to have a boyfriend who was [his age]. He showed me a film clip, yeah, of how basically it could be your own partner who could be like the bad guy... And my mum's gone with that as well and so... but I don't go out with him anymore, we're just friends."

Young person

However, not all children and young people who recognised the applicability of the key concepts felt able to draw on this to inform an assessment of their own situation:

"I suppose what I found with her is that she's able to understand and recognise that she's a victim of abuse and the grooming process. But then she would then come and tell us stuff that had happened in her life and she'd not necessarily used those skills that she'd gained, to apply them... [She and her mum] have recently become friends with a neighbour, who's a lot older than [her] and they didn't really know much about him. Now I don't know if this person's a risky person or if he's just completely appropriate, but we'd done the significant people in her life and she'd put him on there, after only knowing him for a very short time. I then went back and talked about, 'if I'd given you this scenario', if I'd given it to her as a case study, she could see the risks. But if it's somebody in her own life, she struggles to see them."

NSPCC practitioner

In considering how to use their new insights, children and young people could take a limited view and only apply them when they came face-to-face with new people:

"I've never really put it to the test yet... I'm going on holiday next week with my mum... There's loads of people there, so you're obviously going to meet a lot of people, so it will probably work down there."

Young person

A belief that things could change for the better

Where children and young people judged that the state of their relationships should be better, they could demonstrate a belief and a new determination to form and develop more respectful relationships:

“She was in a relationship with someone recently and said to me the other week, ‘I’ve ended it with him’ and I said ‘Why was that?’ and she said ‘Because I realised he was a younger version of...’ and named the guy who we would call the perpetrator of when she was groomed, so she recognised the controlling behaviour, the potential for her to be groomed and exploited again and said no... she was able to recognise some of the indicators of it and had the confidence to try and get herself out of it and did get herself out of it.”

NSPCC practitioner

However, despite acknowledging that they were being exploited, some children and young people were not motivated to change. NSPCC practitioners felt that this was because some children and young people did not believe that things could change for the better:

“Lots of children and young people say to me, ‘I’m not stupid. I know that... you know, I know that doing this isn’t a good idea. I know about having protected sex. I know about all this stuff. I just don’t care. I don’t care about myself. I don’t care about my wellbeing.’”

NSPCC practitioner

NSPCC staff felt that ensuring the young person had a relationship with an adult who cared for them could serve to help the young person believe that it was possible for them to enter into a relationship where they would be cared for.

Teaching risk avoidant actions was better suited to prevention

Doubts were raised about the effectiveness of teaching risk avoidant action in lowering risk when the risk was already heightened:

“Children and young people can recite it all back to you, tell you everything, what you should or should not be doing, [but] whether it’s through threats or coercion at parties they can’t make those choices.”

Team manager

Young people described how the impact of risk-avoidant action was mitigated by the determination, skills and power of people posing the risk. Two children and young people talked about how, having been intimidated, they felt a level of fear that compelled them to do as the aggressor had instructed. One, who had been intimidated into giving naked images of herself, said that while she had understood the things she could do to stop people from identifying her online, she doubted whether she could stand up to such intimidation if she was to experience it again. Children and young people could be blackmailed into exploitation or sexual assault. One young person explained how she had been threatened with violence or the possibility of naked images being shown to family members. In these cases, the fear of being attacked provided a set of choices for the child or young person, which meant they did not feel free to take risk-avoidant action.

NSPCC staff suggested that their experiences of teaching risk avoidant action had led them to conclude that it was better used as a preventative technique rather than one to lower the risk of exploitation in the short-term. They explained that children and young people who experienced mental distress caused by familial conflict, bullying, abuse and exploitation did not have the mental and emotional resources required to process and comprehend information about key concepts. Furthermore, where a child or young person was experiencing a range of adversities, with no access to a safe and supportive relationship, it was felt that they could not accept the personal relevance of the concept. Children and young people who experienced chronic levels of danger could not handle facing up to the fear of the dangers posed and could not handle feelings of shame connected to not being care for. They switched off their feelings. Consequently it was explained that attempts to persuade them to apply the key concepts to their personal lives, experienced as an invitation to turn their feelings back on, were shunned:

“Because what we’re asking of children and young people, and we see all the indicators there, and we’re wanting to get to the bottom of what’s happening, often we never get to the bottom of it because it’s got real life and death consequences for children and young people. They don’t want to come to that realisation... I think we’re asking too much of children and young people to realise what they’re in when we haven’t got anything better for them to go to because often they’re being pulled into those situations because of vulnerability factors... and what we’re

saying to them is to ditch it, to go back to something which is rubbish... you get to a point where they probably know deep down that it's too dangerous for them to admit it because they feel trapped and there's no way out and the consequences are worse for them, if they admit to what's going on."

NSPCC practitioner

Furthermore some children and young people, whose lives were characterised by chronic abuse and exploitation, were felt not to have believed that things could change and were therefore not motivated to take risk-avoidant actions. Where the risks of exploitation were rooted in the experience of life at home family conflict could compel the child or young person to take actions, which, in the opinion of the practitioner, effectively raised the risk of exploitation happening:

"If the home life isn't addressed, then they can have all the knowledge in the world of CSE, but it's not going to stop them storming out of the house."

Service centre manager

NSPCC practitioners explained how they had learned that ensuring that the young person had a relationship with an adult who cared for them and who could minimize the ability of perpetrators to access the young person were preconditions for the young person being able to take the steps towards risk-avoidant action. It meant:

- They had less time to be stressed about the adversities and abuse and so had more energy to concentrate and understand the key concepts.
- They felt safe enough to acknowledge the dangers that they had faced in the past, and where a relationship had been modelled for them.
- They had a model of care that they could aspire to when evaluating and developing relationships.

In one case, the young person had no trouble understanding the concepts of child sexual exploitation and risk but had initially refused to accept that they applied to her life. Work done to move the young person out of the town she lived in allowed her to accept the personal relevance of the concepts. The following quote outlines the journey the young person had, both physically and emotionally:

“There was a point at the start of the first bit of work that I did with her, where she was in complete denial that there was a risk for her. She just thought all of us were over-reacting, ‘there was no risk to her’, that ‘her lifestyle was normal’. She’d say things to me like, ‘But that’s just what life is like, that’s just normal, there’s not a risk to it, that’s just what teenage life is like in this area’. Then in the next chunk of work, she got to a point where she realised that there was a risk to her. But I think she needed to be out of the area to then allow those thoughts to come in because, on reflection, she would say when she was in it; it was too dangerous for her to think about. Then I’d say now, we’re at a different point in the work, she’s gone from not recognising anything to recognising it, to then now being able to respond to potential exploitative situations when she sees it, so asserting her rights on how she should be treated. She’s done amazingly well in that journey, but it needed her to be out of the area to then be able to engage properly in the work with me because she didn’t have the pull of the people in her local area... I’ve spoken to her recently about her and she’s said, ‘I just couldn’t hear what you were saying, I knew deep, deep down, it resonated but it was too dangerous for me to believe it’. Because she was still in it, because then if she did accept it, it’s going to be a more traumatic experience for her because she realises what’s happening to her and can’t get out of it.”

NSPCC practitioner

Teaching risk avoidant action was felt to be something that could be done with children and young people who had been groomed or exploited online, but who had nurturing carers and few problems at school:

“Some of them are in education, doing well, able to concentrate, good family support, and they come regularly to their appointments, they’re able to learn and share, and they get something from coming, and they become better educated in CSE and how to keep themselves safe.”

Team manager

Practitioners did not consider that all children and young people had to be completely safe to be able to comprehend messages about exploitation and realise that they applied to them personally. In one case, a practitioner felt that the young person with whom they were working, who remained at risk of being exploited throughout her

work, was able to use a video of consent to accept that she had been abused in the past. Although this could be evidence to suggest that the young person did not need to be safe to accept the relevance of the information, it could be that the relationship with the practitioner meant that the young person felt safe enough to draw the comparison. This raises the question of how safe and care for a child or young person needs to be or feel to be able to take the steps to risk-avoidant actions.

Explaining cases where there was an improvement to the risk of exploitation in the short-term

In some cases, it was felt that while the risk of being exploited in the short-term had been reduced, the risk of being exploited in the medium to long-term remained. This was for two reasons:

- While there had been a reduction of involvement in situations and relationships which heightened the risk of exploitation in the short-term, factors that were likely to push or pull the child or young person back into those relationships and situations at a later date had not been resolved:

“We’ve had children and young people who we’ve... you know, we’ve been involved with, and we still think that they’re vulnerable. You know? We close a case, knowing that they’re still vulnerable to sexual exploitation. But that we’ve done everything that we can. You know? To kind of divert them from that. But we’re not confident and feel that with, you know, sort of a new set of circumstances, they could still be drawn back into that.”

NSPCC service centre manager

Factors that remained present in the child or young person’s life and that had not been addressed by the end of the work included: neglect in the family home; the relationship between the carer and the child or young person; the impact of neglect on attachment; the traumatising of the child or young person caused by sexual abuse; mental health issues; and living in an area where there were a number of individuals who were active in abusing and exploiting children and young people.

- While a reduction in risk of exploitation was made possible as a result of the child or young person’s carers receiving support, long-term support could not be provided to the carer. When cases were closed with no guarantee of future support, practitioners could be concerned that there would be deterioration in the care provided

by the carer. This could in turn trigger a child or young person to seek support from others outside of the family home.

The inability of the professional system working with some children and young people to provide the right type of nurturing environment was felt to be a factor in their remaining at risk of exploitation. Practitioners considered that children and young people who had problematic attachment resulting from neglect, or trauma resulting from previous abuse and adverse experiences, needed a nurturing therapeutic relationship. It was recognised, however, that NSPCC practitioners did not provide an intervention to address these issues as part of the Protect & Respect work, and in the absence of these issues being addressed by other professionals, the child or young person remained at risk of exploitation in the medium to long-term.

Discussion

This is a report on the findings from an evaluation of a set of one-to-one services delivered to children and young people affected by sexual exploitation. It forms one of three reports that have been published together, which are focused on the NSPCC's Protect & Respect programme of services designed to support children affected by sexual exploitation. This report serves as a detailed companion report to the discussion report, providing more detail on the implementation of the one-to-one service. A full discussion of the implications of the findings of this report, together with the findings from the evaluation of the group work service, can be found in the report discussing the key findings from the Protect & Respect programme (Williams, 2019a).

Key Findings on impact on risk

This report looked at impact by drawing on the information fed back and views from participants in the evaluation interviews. The findings on impact are not based on an analysis of quantitative data.

Positive changes were more likely when work was done to ensure the child or young person had a relationship with an adult who cared for them, and when perpetrators' ability to access the child or young person was minimised.

Risk was also felt to have been lowered when children and young people were supported to take risk avoidant actions. Having said this teaching risk avoidant action was felt to have been more effective as a preventative measure rather than in reducing high levels of risk. Furthermore the effectiveness of risk-avoidant action was felt by NSPCC staff to be dependent, in part, on the determination, skills and power of people who posed the risk.

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4 This report is available by request to: researchadvice@nspcc.org.uk

Appendix A: the outcome measurement tool

The Outcome Measurement Tool consisted of 17 areas relating to the life of the child or young person. The child or young person was expected to rate the risks posed to them in each of the 17 areas. Risk was rated from 1 to 5. Once the child or young person had rated themselves, the professional was then expected to rate them, using the same rating scale.

The 17 areas covered by the Outcome Measurement Tool were:

1. Education.
2. Parent Carer Relationship.
3. Accommodation.
4. Wellbeing.
5. Social networks/phone usage.
6. Alcohol use.
7. Drug use.
8. Sexual health.
9. Missing.
10. Rights, risk awareness and assertion.
11. Risk to others.
12. Engagement.
13. Ability to identify abusive/exploitative behaviour.
14. Association with risky peers/adults.
15. Sexual exploitation.
16. Immigration status.
17. Trafficking

Appendix B: Session plans included in the Protect & Respect guidance

Socio-educative Session Plans

Socio educative sessions are designed to provide information about how abusers use techniques to manipulate and groom young people in order to sexually exploit them.

Session Title	Purpose	Resources
Quiz	This can be used as both an activity with a young person as well as an assessment tool for the professional. You could use it at the start of your work with a young person and then again, later on, to assess levels of understanding / any knowledge increase.	Quiz sheet
Let's talk about sex	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk about sex in a non-threatening way, where they can acknowledge any embarrassment and apprehension they may have about engaging in this work.	'Let's talk about sex' worksheet
Why do young people have sex?	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about sex in an open and safe environment.	
The Truth about Sexual Exploitation	This activity aims to give young people information regarding sexual exploitation whilst being able to define the issues using their own terms.	Sexual Exploitation Grooming
Grooming	To explore the concept of grooming and its stages.	
Types and tricks of abusers (Suitable 13+)	To help a young person to understand different types of abusers – people who sexually exploit young people – and the tricks they use	

Socio Educative Resources

External resources that may be useful in socio educative work

The Protect and Respect DVD and session plans can be used alongside this manual and are available in hard copy or on You Tube via the links below:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XasNkfQ5AVM&feature=player_embedded

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=rnqcc3WQ14

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zuzi2fqcf4

My Dangerous Lover Boy - DVD and resource pack

BeWise2 Sexual Exploitation Resource Pack

It's Someone Taking a Part of You

Out of the Box - stories by young people

In a New Light - stories by young people

Pieces of Me - stories by young people

Be(longing) a DVD by young people

Beyond Barbie

Building Resilience Session Plans

Resilience sessions are designed to identify and build upon the factors that can positively influence a young person's coping strategies.

Session Title	Purpose	Resources
How am I coping?	This is an activity that can be used when you want to gauge progress or assess how the young person attributes blame	
Self-Image	This activity aims to explore the young person's sense of self and identity.	
My self-portrait	For the young person to start exploring themselves in a creative way, taking into consideration how they think and look and expressing their personal likes and dislikes. This may be their favourite colour, clothes, music, interests/hobbies etc.	
The most confident person	The aim is for the young person to identify the different elements that enhance an individual's sense of confidence and to explore whether they have any of these in their lives.	
The best things about me (Suitable for any age group)	The aim is for the young person to identify positive aspects about themselves.	

Creative Therapy Approaches

These sessions are designed to use the arts, play, movement and action of the body in addition to, or instead of, speech to help young people explore how they are feeling and what they have experienced.

Session Title	Purpose	Resources
Narrative approaches, letter writing and poetry	Gives young people the option to explore things from a distance, or using other voices/perspectives	
Writing lyrics and performing	Helps young people to express their feelings and talk about their experiences but also raises confidence and self-esteem with their performance and the finished product.	
Music	For those young people who are not confident in making music, creating a playlist to express feelings can be helpful. Encourage them to choose their 'top ten' playlist choices and then explore what they represent for them. can be very effective and often young people will refer to a song to express their thoughts and feelings	
Maps, journeys, a time line or a river	Explore the young person's life story – either looking backwards or forwards.	
Art work – drawings, Graffiti art, collages, paintings to	Explore identity issues that young people want to explore but don't feel able to put into words.	
Mood Boards	Using collages using various media such as magazines, craft materials etc. to convey how they feel generally or about a particular subject or person	
Drama	- sometimes creating a play about a subject to inform others can give them a chance to express their own feelings	
Creating masks	Ask young people to create their 'everyday' mask that they show the world and their 'inner' mask that represents them	
Photographs	- young people can take photographs of places / objects that represent how they feel and you can discuss these. There is also an organisation called Photo Voice which helps young people tell their stories through photography	

Cognitive Behavioural Session Plans

CBT sessions are designed to explore how the way we think about things affects us emotionally and in turn how this affects how we behave. These sessions ask young people to begin to reflect on their own views, beliefs and feelings, and examine how these link to their own experiences.

Session Title	Purpose	Resources
Why do young people become sexually exploited?	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about why young people become sexually exploited.	
Making informed choices	This activity aims to help young people begin to think about how they make decisions and to explore whether they have considered some key issues they may face.	
Why do some young people go missing?	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about some of the reasons why young people go missing or run away from home, school or care and explore why they do (if this is relevant to them).	
Who do you have relationships with?	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about relationships and their role in them.	
Down the Line	This activity aims to support young people in considering the different ways that domestic abuse can occur in relationships.	
Relationships - what's good for me?	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about intimate relationships and begin to look at the advantages of being single and being in a relationship.	
The things that my boy/girlfriend does to hurt me	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about intimate relationships and begin to look at the ways they may have been hurt by their boyfriend or girlfriend.	
The things that my boy/girlfriend does that feel good	This activity aims to help young people begin to talk and think about intimate relationships and begin to look at positive relationships. It builds on the previous session – 'The things that my boyfriend/girlfriend does to hurt me'.	
The cycle of self-esteem and sexual exploitation	Purpose: The aim is for the young person to understand that low self-esteem is a 'push' factor in sexual exploitation.	'The cycle of self-esteem and sexual exploitation'
Things I would like to change about myself and my sexual exploitation	For the young person to reflect on what they would like to change about themselves and the circumstances in their life.	
The size you feel (Suitable for ages 13+)	The exercise is designed to increase awareness of how the young person feels in relation to other people (the young person may choose to focus on the perpetrator of the exploitation or other significant people to them).	
Different sides of the coin	The aim is for the young person to be able to understand that we all have good and bad sides, there will be things that we love and hate and that it is natural and okay to be like this. We don't have to be perfect all the time.	

Trauma

Trauma sessions are designed to explore gradual exposure in order to desensitise the young person to the trauma content and to enable them to gain mastery over their experience. These sessions should be planned to address:

- Safety and stabilisation
- Education
- Overcoming 'phobias'
- Deepening the therapeutic relationship
- Integration

Session Title	Purpose	Resources
Gradual exposure to the trauma and gaining mastery	To help the young person gradually expose themselves to the trauma content and gain mastery. A word of caution: the timing of this intervention is crucial – to use this intervention too early in the work or before the young person is ready could be re-traumatising.	
The Creep and Creepy Crawly Activity	This intervention is for a young person who is avoiding the trauma and this is resulting in a continuation of their symptoms.	
My Life Story	The aim is for the young person to explore their life and different experiences and events, linking these to their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.	
Writing a no-post letter to the abuser	To help the young person formulate their own thoughts and feelings about sexual exploitation and direct responsibility for it towards the perpetrator.	Activity Sheet – 'No- post letter' to the abuser
My personal 'demo' (Suitable 13+)	To help the young person reclaim a sense of power and control over their lives by designing a poster for a pretend demonstration by young people who have been sexually exploited.	
The Island Game	To help those who may have experienced trafficking + sexual exploitation.	

Appendix C: Completion rates of outcome measures

Table 1 details the completion rates of the outcome measures used in the one-to-one work. It compares the number of measures that could have been completed with the number of measures that were completed. The table shows the number of cases where enough data was collected to allow for a measure of change.

Table 1: Completion of Outcome Rating Scale, Child Report of Traumatic Symptoms and the Outcome Measurement Tool for the Protect & Respect one-to-one work

	ORS			CROPS			OMT YP			OMT PROF		
	M	YP	P	M	YP	P	M	YP	P	M	YP	P
T1	170	244	70%	126	262	48%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
T2	101	244	50%	92	262	35%	51	262	20%	120	262	46%
T3	94	208	45%	59	208	28%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
T4	93	208	45%	69	223	31%	20	223	9%	54	223	24%
T1&2/3	94	244	39%	81	262	31%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
T1&4	88	208	42%	52	223	23%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
T2/3&4	85	208	41%	52	223	23%	12	223	5%	47	223	21%

Key

ORS	Outcome Rating Scale
CROPS	Child Report of Post-Traumatic Symptoms
OMT YP	Young person's rating for the Outcome Measurement Tool
OMT PROF	Professional rating for the Outcome Measurement Tool
M	Number of measures that were completed
YP	Number of measures that could have been completed
P	Proportion of measures that could have been completed that were completed
T1	Beginning of assessment
T2	End of assessment
T3	Beginning of intervention
T4	End of intervention
T1 & 2	Beginning of assessment and end of assessment or beginning of intervention.
T1 & 4	Beginning of assessment and end of intervention.

Appendix D: Intervention Planning

At the end of the assessment process, NSPCC practitioners were expected to create an intervention work plan, based on the information and judgements reached during the assessment. In some cases, NSPCC practitioners, as instructed by the model guide, focused their work around the factors in the Outcome Measurement Tool, which had been scored as high-risk by the NSPCC practitioner. Table 2 details the range of activity types that practitioners did with children and young people during the course of the work, and the types of outcome that the work was intended to achieve. Please note that:

- While the activities presented in the table give the impression of practitioners doing distinct activities with the child or young person, in practice activities were sometimes interwoven. For example, modelling a relationship and doing socio-educative work were not done apart from each other. Practitioners modelled a relationship in everything that they did with children and young people, including during the time that they provided socio-educative work. Furthermore, some of the activities that practitioners did could be said to be an amalgam of several of the interventions listed. Elements of socio-educative work, for example, were therapeutic in their nature. Situational risk management could be considered a form of socio-educative work.
- While practitioners engaged with the requirement to create an intervention work plan, in practice, the work they did could change over time. This depended on the events children and young people were affected by, the circumstances that children and young people could find themselves in and on the needs of children and young people, which could change or become more apparent, as time progressed.
- The intervention types were not done in all cases, or equally across all cases. Table 2 describes the variability of the types of work done but it does not describe their frequency or distribution across the 15 participating service centres.
- While Table 2 links the interventions that were used with the outcomes that they were used to achieve, these links should not be taken as evidence that the interventions did achieve the outcomes. Evidence for the effectiveness of particular approaches in helping to reduce the risk of exploitation is the subject of Chapter 3 of this report on 'Impact on risk'.

The next part of this section provides a summary of the intervention types that practitioners used in their work, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Intervention types used in one-to-one work and the outcomes that practitioners wanted to achieve by using them

	Understanding risk	Understanding personal risk	Lowering personal risk	Self-esteem	Improving emotional wellbeing	Aspirations	Improving family relationships	Improving housing	Improving finances	Improving health	Bullying	Accepting victimhood	Having story listened to	Trauma	Bringing perpetrators to justice	Improving support received by young person from services
Socio-educative work	✓	✓	✓									✓		✓	✓	
Place-based situational risk management		✓												✓		
Goal-based work						✓										
Model a relationship		✓				✓										
Building a therapeutic relationship						✓							✓			
Crisis support					✓											
Narrative-based identity work						✓					✓					
Storytelling													✓			
Recognising fear and emotions		✓														
Socio-educative with carers			✓													
Work with carers and children and young people			✓													
Advocacy work with carers	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓									
Therapeutic recovery work			✓	✓			✓						✓			
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy			✓	✓			✓									
Practical support in moving house								✓								
Support with administration and form-filling									✓						✓	
Taking children and young people to appointments										✓						
Court work																
Advocacy work with professionals		✓	✓	✓			✓									✓
Out of hours work			✓					✓							✓	

Intervention types

Socio-educative work

Socio-educative approaches involved the use of written material and videos to help children and young people understand the concepts of grooming, exploitation, vulnerability to exploitation and the impact of exploitation. In some cases, NSPCC practitioners used the socio-educative approach to improve the child or young person's ability to take action to avoid situations and relationships where the risk of exploitation was heightened. In particular, the work aimed to:

- Improve understanding of grooming and exploitation.
- Increase sensitivity to emotional feelings and reactions, and in particular to feelings of anxiety and fear.
- Improve confidence.
- Improve expectations from relationships.
- Increase the likelihood that meeting a new person would trigger a discussion with a trusted adult.

One young person described how they revisited the concepts with their practitioner, and how it had taken a period of weeks to go through all the necessary material.

"I think the whole thing about doing the CSE was to understand where something like that's in front of you, what are you going to do. It's just kind of teaching you how to be safe that not everyone's going to keep you safe...and, like, understanding what CSE means, understanding the groom line. There was loads of different things that you'd have to do on, like, a three-week basis just to understand... because it was very deep into situations, it wasn't just like a ten-minute thing you could learn, it was something we'd have to keep going back, back, back on."

Young person

Socio-educative work was also used in a therapeutic way to help children and young people process and make sense of past experiences. Part of this involved an exploration of how anger and shame could be a consequence of the experience of being exploited, and how anger and shame could be lowered through the development of a therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, information about grooming, exploitation and assault were designed to help the child or young person make sense of their own experience.

“The incident, we called that ‘rape’ and we talked about how, especially the grooming, that he knew exactly that she didn’t want to. Because it wasn’t forceful and violent it doesn’t mean that it wasn’t rape. So helping her understand all around that, and the complexities of consent and having a respectful relationship.”

NSPCC practitioner

In some cases, socio-educative work was used to help make sense of how past experiences of abuse and neglect had impacted on the child or young person’s sense of safety, and how this in turn impacted on their behaviour and ability to make relationships. Finally, socio-educative work, in one case, was used to help a young person set boundaries in relationships, and included the young person testing out new boundaries and then reflecting on it with the practitioner.

Place-based situational risk management

In some cases, practitioners aimed to work with children and young people to manage and lower the ‘situational’ risks they faced in their life. The idea of situational risk comes from situational risk theory, which posits that modifying the situations experienced by children, through situational crime prevention strategies, could lower the likelihood of abuse (Smallbone et al, 2008, p155). Situational risk reduction interventions, sometimes referred to as ‘safety planning’, varied and included:

- Helping children and young people understand and plan what needed to be done to avoid situations and events that increased the risk of exploitation, generally.
- Helping children and young people recognise the risk in situations that they had already been involved in, and which they may not have previously recognised.
- Helping children and young people recognise the risk in relationships and situations that they were currently involved in. This could involve questioning the motives and behaviours of the people the children and young people were friends with. One young person described the experience of being challenged by her practitioner to recognise the risks.

“And she challenged me all the time. All the time she used to challenge me. If I say I’m going to meet someone, she’s like, ‘How old?’, she was just dead motherly and I loved it...and I told her about I was going to [town name] to meet him and she was like, CSE, CSE, CSE.”

Young person

- Helping children and young people think through what they could do to extricate themselves from situations that they had been involved with in the past and might be involved with in the future.
- Recommending to a social worker that a child or young person be removed from a school, where they were being harassed, bullied and sexually assaulted.
- Recommending the removal of a child or young person from their home, either because of the risks posed within the family home or because of the risks posed in the area where the home was located.

Goal-based work

Some practitioners took a goal-based approach to the work with the child or young person, allowing them to set the goals for the work. In some cases, practitioners would ask children and young people to set goals for themselves, and they would discuss what needed to happen to get to that point and how that could be done. Children and young people would then be asked to periodically review where they had gotten to in relation to those aspirations. Topics focused on in goal-based work included drugs and alcohol, having safe sex, improving physical looks and getting fit. Goal-based work was felt to be a key strategy in engaging children and young people in a therapeutic relationship. It was also felt that goal-based work was a good way of modelling a relationship with a child or young person, because it required the practitioner to go at the child or young person's pace.

"It's important because we're trying to spread this message to children and young people about being careful about who they trust and who they confide in, and that they need to think about who it is they do this with, and it's important that you don't try and push a young person or otherwise you're acting contrary to the protective message you're trying to give them."

NSPCC practitioner

Modelling a relationship

Some practitioners considered a key part of their work to be 'modelling a relationship' with the child or young person.

Practitioners identified the following behaviours as helping to model a relationship:

- Listening to the child or young person.
- Giving the child or young person choices and respecting when they did not want to do something.
- Accepting the child or young person's experience without being judgemental.

- Being consistent in their own behaviour.
- Being true to their word.
- Taking responsibility when their behaviour was 'wrong'.

It was felt that modelling helped put the socio-educative concepts around healthy relationships into reality. Modelling a relationship was felt to be particularly important for those children and young people who had never had an experience of a positive caring adult or person in their life. It was felt that modelling behaviour could help set a standard by which the child or young person could judge, choose and develop relationships.

"I think modelling the relationship has been really important in that process, demonstrating to her that if I get something wrong, I'll come and talk to her about it, so there were a few sessions where I thought I did too much with her and I came back and said, 'I'm not sure how you found that'... so she is having a relationship that is demonstrating to her that I take responsibility for my behaviour and if I do something wrong, I'm going to say to her, 'I'm not sure if I got that right'."

NSPCC practitioner

Building a therapeutic relationship

For many practitioners, building a therapeutic relationship was felt to be the basis upon which work with children and young people needed to be built. In practice, building a therapeutic relationship involved a mixture of goal-based work, modelling a relationship, advocacy work and supporting the child or young person in a practical way. One practitioner said it involved:

- Holding the child or young person in positive regard no matter what they are doing, which they may not have experienced previously in their life.
- Giving empathy and space to allow the child or young person to process and get in touch with emotions and feelings connected to events that have happened to them.
- Giving the child or young person the opportunity to tell their story and feel listened to.

"It's not therapy, obviously, because I'm not a therapist, but what research tells us about therapy is that the key isn't the approach that's used but it's the therapeutic relationship between the client and the therapist. I would say that's very much the same with the work that we do, in that that working relationship is the most

important thing. A relationship where the young person can trust us and so will be open with us and we can then support them through their emotional journey...And how I did that with her?...I think putting her in control, being very open with her about any limitations, not making any promises I couldn't keep, not pushing her too hard. Reflecting back how I thought she was feeling, use of positive reinforcement, never saying anything that wasn't genuine, but being very clear with her how well she was doing. Being consistent, being there, communicating, giving them control, so she felt she could trust me."

NSPCC practitioner

Providing crisis support

Some of the children and young people that the NSPCC practitioners worked with experienced crises in their life. Where this happened, the NSPCC practitioner could, in the absence of support being provided by any other practitioner or agency, take on the role of providing support to the child or young person. Besides being emotionally and physically available for them, providing support at a point of crisis could include advocating for professional support:

"So she ended up at the town hall because she'd been picked up by the police and nan and dad were saying, 'We'll take her in' but she didn't want to go back to family and said she wanted to go into care. She went to an emergency foster placement that night. I actually spent that day that she was sitting in the local authority offices with her. She hadn't slept since the morning before and had been out all night with people and then was spending the day in local authority offices. She was exhausted, hungover and scared, quite tearful, didn't know what was happening. The thought of going into care, although she wanted it, was terrifying for her. But the next day I went to see her at that foster placement and she was saying, 'I don't want to be in care anymore'. There were issues with those foster carers, it had been quite a cold environment for her, and she was still in the same clothes she'd been in for the last two days. So there was issues we raised with Social Services, 'If we think it's safe for her to be out of home and in care then we need to be meeting her basic needs, not just a bed to sleep in but clean clothes as well'."

NSPCC practitioner

In another case, a practitioner made themselves available whenever the young person had a crisis, providing calming reassurance:

“And [the young person] always talks about she used to just get really angry and lose the plot and kick off, but the practitioner would be at the other end of the phone and she'd be like, 'Have you got a cup of tea? We're now going to have a talk'... In that early time she was calling her up at all sorts of times and the practitioner would leave the office and she'd spend, like, the entire afternoon with her and just being able to give her that sort of one-to-one attention, which she's not had from other people before.”

NSPCC practitioner

Narrative-based identity work

Narrative-based identity work was focused on helping children and young people think positively and make positive choices about the future. It was based on the child or young person talking through how they explained their past experiences and how their understanding of past experiences shaped how they saw themselves in the present and future. The work could involve:

- Establishing if the child or young person had felt responsible for the exploitation that had happened to them, and how that had impacted on their identity.
- Drawing out the strengths and positive attributes that the child or young person had shown despite having had a range of adverse experiences.
- Emphasising the importance of the child or young person holding onto the positive sense of identity that they had built a narrative around during the work.

Storytelling

Some practitioners provided the space for children and young people to tell the practitioner about their experiences, as part of recovery work. Techniques used to do this included sand tray activities and photography exercises.

Recognising fear and emotions

NSPCC practitioners did exercises with children and young people to help them recognise, articulate and respond to emotions. The aim of this work was to use children and young people's improved sensitivity to anxiety to help them make better judgements about the situations they were in so they could take action to extricate themselves from situations that felt dangerous. In one case, cards were used to help a

young person recognise emotions. This led to a discussion about how the young person felt about a difficult experience, which the NSPCC practitioner then validated. Sometimes, the work could involve challenging children and young people's assertion that involvement in events and relationships that heightened the risk of exploitation felt OK.

"Sometimes, children and young people do make poor decisions and you've got to help them think about that a bit and what's behind some of those decisions, what's behind being attracted to certain friendship groups, what's behind thinking it's great to have an older boyfriend or go missing, and help them to come round to thinking, 'Is that the best decision for you really?'. I always came back to 'But do you feel okay inside about that?' because I always said 'As a human being most of the time you should feel okay about things inside, and if you don't then something's not quite right'. So linking it back to that, like, 'Yeah you're saying all these things, but does that make you feel better inside?' ... Happy and okay people don't self-harm, happy and okay people don't use loads and loads of drugs to escape things'."

NSPCC practitioner

Socio-educative work with carers

Socio-educative work with carers, referred to as 'safe carer' work was sometimes provided. Some service centres offered the work as a programme of six-to-eight sessions. Where the child or young person was engaging with an NSPCC practitioner, some centres had a policy of the carer engaging with a different practitioner, to avoid a situation where the practitioner felt under pressure to betray the confidentiality of the child or young person to the carer. Socio-educative work with carers was focused on providing information to increase the carers' general level of understanding around exploitation, vulnerability and risk, and the impact of exploitation. Topics included:

- Social media applications.
- Grooming and exploitation.
- Traumatization and its links with aggressive behaviour, domestic conflict, going missing and exploitation.

In some cases, carers were encouraged to use the information to reassess their judgement about what had happened to their child, and in particular that:

- Their child had been a victim, rather than someone who had ‘consented to’ and was responsible for their exploitation.
- The child or young person’s challenging behaviours were the result of traumatisation.

In this way, the work was also designed to improve:

- Carers’ empathy for the challenges faced by the child or young person, where they were managing the symptoms of trauma.
- Carers’ understanding that hostile responses to children and young people’s behaviours could contribute to a sense of isolation, which in turn could motivate the child or young person to run away from home.
- Carers’ ability to engage in conversations about child sexual exploitation and improving their availability to talk to their children about new relationships that their children are forming.

Mediation and relationship work with carers and children and young people

Sometimes, NSPCC practitioners did work to help carers and children and young people talk through relationship problems. Some practitioners attempted solutions-focused work with family members. Here, family members were encouraged to talk about and focus on the positive things that family members contributed to family life. This was felt to be particularly useful in families where carers had gotten into the habit of focusing on negative aspects of their child’s behaviour. Mediation work could include an element of advocacy work with carers, which is discussed in the next section.

Advocacy with carers

Some NSPCC practitioners advocated for carers to respond differently to their children in the hope that this would improve their children’s wellbeing and decrease their risk. Practitioners encouraged carers to:

- File a report with the police when their child ran away from home. It was felt that filing a report would help children and young people feel that they were cared for.
- Report intelligence to the police that they had on where or who the child or young person went to when they ran away from home.
- Give children and young people more freedom to use computers, the internet, social media applications, mobile phone technology and to leave the house. Practitioners advocated for more freedom for children and young people when carers had responded to incidents of grooming and exploitation by forbidding them to leave the house and access social media and communications technology. It was felt that, while carers had implemented such measures to

lower the likelihood of children and young people being accessed by people who might exploit them, the isolation experienced by the child or young person as a result raised the risk of familial conflict and of them running away from home and damaged their wellbeing.

Socio-educative and advocacy work were sometimes blended with attempts to improve carers' ability and tendency to:

- Monitor and manage the child or young person's exposure to risk.
- Advise children and young people on how to manage risk in particular situations.
- Monitor, empathise and provide reassurance with behaviours resulting from traumatisation. It was explained that sometimes what drove a child or young person to run away from home were hostile relationships between them and their parents. Sometimes, this hostility could emerge as a result of the carers' reaction to the child or young person displaying aggressive behaviours, which emerged as the consequences of them being unable to deal with trauma caused by previous abuse.

Therapeutic recovery work

Therapeutic work was aimed at developing children and young people's understanding of the factors that increased the likelihood of involvement in situations and occasions where the risk of being exploited was heightened. This involved identifying the role played by emotional neglect and lack of a relationship with an adult who cared for the young person. Work was sometimes focused on understanding how life choices and experiences could impact on wellbeing.

"There was this period where I was quite worried about her going back [to the family home] but the response was 'she's an adult, can't do much about that', so I had conversations with her about, 'You need to think about what is protective for you and if going back there is causing you a lot of stress, you need to think about how frequently you're going there'. But she tends to, what she described was she goes back, she stays there but she doesn't really interact with her parents a great deal when she's there. That doesn't mean it's any less abusive for her... that was difficult, and I think it contributed to how she was feeling at times, definitely."

NSPCC practitioner

Sand tray play

In sand tray play, children and young people were presented with a tray of sand, in which there were a number of small plastic figurines depicting well-known characters or well-known roles. Sand tray play was used to enable children and young people to find a safe way of exploring past experiences. Children and young people were invited to create stories involving the characters. The idea was that by doing this, the child or young person, although appearing to be talking about fictional characters, was enabled to project their own experience of relationships on to the characters. Practitioners would work with children and young people to create fictitious scenarios about grooming or exploitation, done partially with the intention of triggering feelings of guilt and shame, which could then be explored with the child or young person.

Cognitive behavioural therapy

Some NSPCC practitioners delivered cognitive behavioural therapeutic interventions to help the young person understand how he or she could avoid or lower situational risks. Here, practitioners would talk through with children and young people what they would do, the steps they would take, if they were to find themselves in a situation where there was a high risk of being exploited. *Listen to Your Selfie*, an educative film about exploitation, based on a dramatisation of sexual exploitation, was used with one young person, with the intention of increasing his assertiveness in online interactions (NSPCC Childline, 2016a; 2016b). One practitioner used a cognitive behavioural therapy workbook to help a young person improve their self-esteem (Collins-Donnelly, 2014) as part of a strategy to help them develop expectations for healthy relationships and to evaluate potential relationships on that basis.

Practical support

NSPCC practitioners provided children and young people with practical support on the following issues:

- In some cases, NSPCC practitioners helped children and young people move home. In one case, donations of personal goods were made to the young person to help furnish their new accommodation.
- Helping children and young people with administrative activities that needed to be completed to trigger assessments and support being provided. Forms were completed to help children and young people get on the housing register, to set up a bank account and to make a referral to health services.
- Sometimes, practitioners would take children and young people to health appointments in their car.

Court work

Some of the work that NSPCC practitioners did was focused on supporting the child or young person to play their part in bringing about the conviction of a perpetrator. Practitioners helped children and young people prepare for police interviews and appearances at court and accompanied children and young people during police interviews or trips to the law court.

Advocacy work with professionals

Some NSPCC practitioners advocated for children and young people in meetings with professionals, to get the child or young person access to services and local authority support. Advocacy work involved:

- Sharing information with professionals and multi-agency groups of professionals.
- Challenging the attitude that improving the situation of the child or young person is their own responsibility:

“I think CSE is massively advocacy anyway because often you are helping people understand the child’s experience and people often get it wrong and make big judgements about children and young people, ‘Oh no they’re fine’, ‘They’re just being difficult’, ‘She’s just not attending school, she just needs to sort herself out’, rather than ‘Why is she not attending school? What is it that’s stopping her getting out of bed in the morning?’.”

NSPCC practitioner

- Persuading professionals to do what the practitioner felt was needed to meet the needs of the child or young person, which could include requesting:
 - A foster care placement.
 - The provision of the right type of supportive accommodation.
 - Accommodation when the child or young person was homeless.
- Priming social workers to provide support to children and young people who were in care but who were still seeing family members, and where seeing family members could lead to the child or young person feeling distressed.
- Getting a mental health service for the child or young person.

Advocacy work could take up a lot of a practitioner’s time where agencies were not seeking or providing the support that it was felt they should be:

“In terms of mental health, it was very difficult to pin down where she needed to be referred. Really we shouldn't have been leading that, that should have been the social care team. One of the things the social care team didn't understand is that she needed physically supporting to appointments. So a lot of my involvement was taking her to appointments initially. So we went to the GP and then she was referred to IAPS and then IAPS bounced her onto the mental health team and then the mental health team said she needed an assessment and they bounced her on. So I wrote them a letter and they sent her to the crisis team to be assessed and then the crisis team said, 'She needs longer term work so actually she's more suitable for the recovery team'. I think it was a really bad example of 'pillar to post'.”

NSPCC practitioner

One young person explained the persistence that a practitioner had showed to get her the service she needed:

“And if they, like, see something that's not being done by my social worker, [the NSPCC] are always on the phone to her. And my social worker always knew that the NSPCC practitioner had her on her feet because she always had something for her to pick up on. It was like having a PA sometimes honestly... She was just fighting for me to stay in this house. It was a fight. It was like... we were just running a marathon, that's all we was [sic] doing. That's all she said to me is that '... trying to get you to stay in this house is running a marathon'... This is a lot of money, this house, this is a lot, a lot, a lot of money. So it was just getting the funding.”

Young person

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