

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE)

Portfolio Toolkit

HYDRANT
PROGRAMME

Child Sexual
Exploitation
Taskforce

TACKLING ORGANISED
EXPLOITATION
PROGRAMME



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Who we are

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation sits within the National Police Chief's Council Child Protection and Abuse and Investigation Portfolio. It is guided by Acting Chief Constable Becky Riggs and supported by:



The Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Taskforce was established in 2023 to enhance the policing response to groupbased child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Hydrant Programme leads the CSE Taskforce and is supported by two other national policing programmes, the Tackling Organised Exploitation (TOEX) Programme and the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP). All are uniquely placed to offer support, advice and guidance to police forces, partners and stakeholders working in child protection and abuse investigation.



The Hydrant Programme is a national policing programme supporting the work of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Child Protection and Abuse Investigation Working Group.

Hydrant develops policy and strategy on behalf of the NPCC. It develops and delivers best practice advice, including a learning, review and improvement function. It also provides strategic analysis capabilities and partnership engagement with key stakeholders and partners.



The Tackling Organised Exploitation (TOEX) Programme is Home Officefunded and provides dedicated intelligence, analytical, and technical expertise in support of forces undertaking complex organised exploitation investigations.

There are 11 TOEX teams in total, with one embedded in each of the Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU), as well as a dedicated team covering London and a national team providing coordination and support. The programme offers both operational expertise, in the form of experienced intelligence professionals, and technical support, giving forces access to analytical capabilities and data tools to assist investigators with their complex cases.

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Strategic objectives

Vision

We envision a future where all children are safe from harm, and survivors are empowered to thrive in a society that values and respects their experiences.

- This means creating systems that hold abusers accountable while prioritising survivor wellbeing.
- This includes robust prevention strategies, such as equipping families and communities with the knowledge and understanding to recognise and disrupt grooming behaviours, as well as prioritising survivor-centred justice pathways.
- To achieve this, we need to dismantle barriers to disclosure, challenge societal taboos and ensure survivors are supported at every stage.
- In this future, the cycle of harm is broken through coordinated, evidence-based responses that prioritise child protection and survivor wellbeing. Agencies and organisations will work collaboratively, informed by a comprehensive understanding of the complex threats children face, ensuring no survivor is overlooked and unsupported.



Mission

Our shared goal is to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people.

To achieve this, we must take a proactive approach to addressing the root causes of abuse, empower communities with preventive knowledge, and ensure survivors have access to tailored support.

- By working closely with survivors, families, government bodies and law enforcement, we will implement innovative strategies that respond to emerging threats.
- This mission reflects a shared responsibility where safeguarding is a societal priority, and no child is left unprotected.
- A key part of this mission is actively listening to survivors and using their insights to shape practical policies and frontline practices.



The challenges we face

Tackling child abuse and exploitation is becoming increasingly complex.

The stakes are high, but the opportunity to build a safer, more supportive society for children and survivors is within reach.

To overcome these challenges, we need a coordinated, proactive approach.

Collaboration across sectors must drive innovation to identify risks early and act decisively.

Survivor-led insights must shape practical strategies that respond to realworld needs, while inclusive practices ensure no one is left behind.

By embracing new technologies, improving communication, and dismantling barriers, we can create a system that is capable of adapting to the ever-changing landscape of threats that children face.



Messaging considerations

In order to create a survivor-centric narrative around CSAE, the following must be considered.

1 Transparency and accountability

We must be transparent with the public. Provide information about how CSAE investigations are carried out, what has been achieved, and the challenges faced. Reflecting on progress is crucial.

2 Use data as our evidence base

We must continue to use our insight and position to influence government, local authorities, the public and the technology sector to improve safeguarding for children on and offline.

3 Countering misinformation and disinformation

We need to directly address the misinformation and stereotypes, particularly the notion that certain communities or ethnic groups are disproportionately involved.

4 An inclusive and balanced approach

Our approach must, ensure fair and impartial treatment of all individuals involved. Preventing the reinforcement of stereotypes that could undermine social cohesion.

5 Promote a holistic system

Policing has a central role. But education, social services, community engagement and support for victims and survivors must come from more than just policing.

6 Public education

Increase public awareness of the signs of CSAE and the steps individuals can take to protect children and young people.

7 Behaviour and language

Language must be clear and appropriate. We must reflect the seriousness of these crimes and speak in a way that is accurate and understood by all. It must not be jargon and must be trauma informed.

Creating a survivor centered narrative

Victims should be assured that when they take the hugely difficult decision to disclose their abuse to police and/or any support organisation, they will be believed and treated with empathy and respect.

If they have reported to the police, an impartial and proportionate investigation will follow.



Emotional challenges

Survivors face immense emotional challenges in coming forward; their courage must be met with empathy, respect and professionalism.



Every survivor's journey is unique

Understand that healing can take years or decades and justice may not always mean a court outcome.



Underreporting and fear

Recognise that many victims remain silent due to fear of disbelief. Showcasing consistent survivor-centric narratives is critical to improving this.



Inclusive and survivor-led

Investigations must prioritise survivor experiences and reflect the diversity of offenders without bias.



Lifelong impact

CSAE has a lifelong impact on survivors. Know that media coverage - while important for broader awareness - has the potential to retraumatise those affected, especially if the narratives are reported inaccurately,



Victim-centred approach

Know that every statistic represents a real person. Survivors' voices must continue to shape not just out policies, but our response, our investigations and future reforms



It is never the victim's fault

Building trust and validating their experiences is essential to recovery and justice.



Reporting abuse is never easy

Survivors must be assured they will be listened to, believed, supported and treated with care.

Our four pillars:

Belief

Collaboration

Language

Justice



These are our four guiding pillars, and together, they represent a unified approach to tackling abuse.

Belief

Belief means committing to a culture where survivors feel validated and supported when they disclose abuse. This is not blind belief but belief followed by a thorough and impartial investigation.

Collaboration

Collaboration involves dismantling silos across agencies and building seamless support systems that will create efficiency and drive cohesion.

Language

By prioritising precise and empowering language, we can challenge harmful narratives, while promoting belief, validation and dignity.

Justice

Justice is more than just legal processes; it should include survivors' self-defined positive outcomes as they rebuild their lives.

Belief

Belief is the cornerstone of trust, protection, and effective safeguarding.

But it must not depend solely on survivors disclosing their experiences.

Survivors often face immense barriers to disclosure, be it fear of disbelief, judgment, blame and shame. Research from NAPAC (National Association for People Abused in Childhood) shows it takes an average of 22 years for a survivor to share their experience. This highlights the importance of a process of proactive, informed belief.

Therefore, action must be rooted in the understanding and recognition of the signs and behaviours that survivors present when coming forward in search of help.

Fostering a Culture of Belief

To foster a culture of belief, we must recognise how trauma manifests.

Whether that is through various behaviours, emotions and fragmented accounts, we must adopt trauma-informed practices. Empathy and awareness of how trauma impacts memory must be front and centre.

Rather than waiting for explicit disclosures, we must focus on responding to the immediate needs of the survivor, ensuring they feel safe and supported.

Belief also means adapting to the changing nature of abuse. All experiences should be acknowledged and validated. By committing to a proactive and informed culture of belief, we can better create an environment where survivors can access the support and intervention they need.

Collaboration

Collaboration is the bedrock of policing's response to protection and prevention.

By building relationships inside and outside of policing bodies – such as charities, community groups, NGOs, educational and sporting bodies and faith groups – we can broaden our scope of collaboration.

Because no single organisation can tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation alone.

We are united by our shared mission.

True collaboration ensures that survivors are supported at every stage. It fosters innovation, accountability and a collective responsibility to protect children and hold perpetrators accountable.

The question is not just about what we do together, but how we move forward, together, towards a society that prioritises safeguarding above all.

Fostering transparency, trust and collaboration

Tackling CSAE requires a holistic approach.

Strong partnerships with community organisations enhance intelligence gathering and reinforce safeguarding efforts. While policing has improved, challenges remain; efforts continue to ensure responses are inclusive and effective across all communities.

Policing alone isn't enough. Education, social services and community engagement are all vital. Moving forward, we must all strive to communicate:

- **Robust data-driven protection:** ensure we display accurate data on offenders and victims, which helps tailor responses and allocate resources effectively.
- **Non police resources:** we must create clear pathways to disclosure via nonpolicing resources. This could be through education, social services or other community groups, but it should be made apparent that disclosure does not have to start with the police.
- **Strong partnerships:** a great deal of progress has been made in recent years with cross-team collaborations and multi-agency partnerships. But we can always do better. Across all fronts, we must engender a mindset of continued improvement in how we engage with partner forces and external agencies.
- **Coherency:** sharing data and information between agencies is one thing. But we must also strive to be coherent in our joint narratives.
- **Transparency and accountability:** public trust depends on openness - where legally possible - about the investigative processes, achievements, and ongoing challenges.
- **Unified goals:** the focus must always remain on protecting children, achieving justice, whatever this may look like and fostering community unity without reinforcing harmful stereotypes. This is always at the heart of the narrative.
- **Public education on grooming:** Our narrative and language must seek to raise awareness of grooming signs and prevention strategies is key to early intervention.

Language

Language has the power to either empower or alienate survivors.

Survivor-centric language acknowledges the individual experiences, while being careful not to make abuse the defining factor. But communication is not always verbal.

Survivors can often convey their experiences through actions, emotions, or creative forms of expression rather than direct and explicit disclosures. Therefore, we must account for cultural contexts, behaviours and non-verbal expressions when recognising and responding to survivors.

We work with expert partners, including victim and survivor groups, to develop language guides and training that reflect evolving cultural and linguistic understandings.

This includes regular training on recognising the voice of the child and the voice of the victim in all forms, not solely through spoken words.

Reshaping language for more positive outcomes

By adopting thoughtful, inclusive, and culturally sensitive language, we can create a space where survivors feel seen, respected and supported. No matter how they choose to communicate their experiences.

Instead of focusing on linear or traditional forms of expression, we can learn to interpret stories, metaphors, or behaviours that survivors may use to articulate their experiences. We can also avoid terms that perpetuate stigma or minimise harm and replace them with more appropriate terms to reflect the severity of the crime.

The following is a list of 'inappropriate terms' which should be avoided across all communications:



For further information on these terms, as well as further guidance on more suitable alternatives, we have created an additional language guide resource, which you can find [here](#).

Justice

Justice is not a single outcome. It's a journey, shaped by the needs of each survivor.

Justice begins with being heard, believed and supported. In this sense, justice is measured in a survivor's ability to heal, recover and reclaim their lives on their own terms. True justice is not solely defined by legal outcomes.

This may involve pursuing legal resolutions, accessing emotional support, or finding ways to rebuild trust and security in their lives.

Justice must be survivor-centred, offering flexible and meaningful options tailored to specific personal circumstances. Our approach must acknowledge that justice is about more than convictions.

The pathways to disclosure and beyond must be made clear. Some may wish to pursue restorative justice or civil remedies rather than criminal proceedings. By empowering survivors to make informed choices, we ensure that justice systems respect their autonomy while addressing the harm they have experienced.

Justice also requires systemic accountability. Ensuring institutions, from police forces to courts, work together to prioritise survivors' needs. This includes proactive communication, timely updates and access to long-term support.

By continually learning from survivors and adapting to their feedback, we can transform justice systems to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Reframing and redefining 'justice'

Justice is about being seen and heard. It isn't just about a criminal conviction.

Belief is the first step to justice. Empowered with the confidence they will be heard, victims will come forward and trust in the process. But communicating a sense of justice is complex, because the term 'justice' can be relative to the survivors experiences.

No single victim or survivor will share in the same experience. So, the support we give and the stories we tell must be unique. To achieve this, we must:

- Accept that each victim and survivor will have specific needs, including those relevant to their age, experiences, and circumstances. Offers of support and information should be repeated, open and made available directly to the survivor
- Recognise that abuse, exploitation and trauma have long-term impacts and healing and recovery take time. It can be lifelong. It should be made plain that support will be available to all survivors throughout their lives.
- Understand that policing needs to be adaptable to meet the needs of individual victims and survivors, and to keep pace with new best practices, like the Victim's Code of Practice. We can learn from existing practice and from victims and survivors and keep having conversations.
- Continue to show support for survivors as well as continue to listen, learn and improve in the ways we can help survivors seek their justice.



Themed messaging and statistics

In this section, you'll find key communications messages for:



**Child protection
and abuse
investigation**



**Child exploitation
and child sexual
exploitation**



**Online
and AI**



**Financially
motivated
sextortion**

Child protection and abuse investigation



Child protection and abuse investigation

- 115,489 CSAE offences were recorded by police in 2023, reflecting the long-term trend of increased reporting
- However, evidence from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse indicates that an estimated 500,000 children are sexually abused every year.
- Contact abuse against children remains consistently high, accounting for 68% (n = 78,224) of CSAE offences in 2023.
- Sexual assault on a child (29%, n = 33,310) was the most common crime type recorded for CSAE offences, followed by indecent imagery of children (IIOC; 27%, n = 31,134) and rape of a child (18%, n = 20,702).
- Policing received the lowest number of reports of CSAE offences during school holidays.



Victim and perpetrator profiles

- CSAE remains a heavily gendered crime. Where the sex was recorded, 79% of CSAE victims were female, while 82% of perpetrators were male.
- Females account for 37% of suspects in IIOC offences. Likely a result of self-generated indecent imagery (SGII) being created and shared.
- In 44% of all CSAE offences, a relationship was recorded between the victim and perpetrator. Of those, 80% of victims knew their abuser.
- Where the victim's age was recorded the most common age group of victims was 14 to 15 years old (77%).
- 19% of victims were under 10 years old.



Group-based CSAE

- 4.6% of CSAE offences were groupbased CSAE.
- Of all CSAE offences, 3.7% were group-based contact offences.
- Almost 1% were group-based noncontact offences.
- Group-based CSAE ranges from unorganised peer group sharing of imagery to more organised, complex, high-harm cases with high community impact.



Children offending against other children

- Perpetrator age was recorded for 63% of perpetrator records.
- 52% involved reports of children aged 10 to 17 offending against other children.
- 86% of CSAE offences by children, where both the victim and perpetrator ages were recorded, the perpetrator was within three years of the victim.
- Where the relationship was recorded for CSAE committed by children, the victim and perpetrator were acquaintances in 40% of offences.
- 41% of offences committed by children were IIOC offences.
- Further analysis of SGII offences involving multiple children found that 62% had aggravating factors, such as the subsequent sharing of images on social media or blackmail.



CSAE in the family environment

- 31% of reported CSAE offences, where a relationship was recorded, occurred in the family environment
- Of those, 93% were contact abuse.
- Almost half of the victims, for whom age was recorded, were under 10 years of age.



CSAE online

- At least 35% of police-recorded CSAE has an online element.
- 76% relate to IIOC offences. While 15% relate to sexual communication with a child offence.
- The online space is known to facilitate the contact abuse of children, but only 5% of contact offences were manually flagged as having an online element.
- Sexual extortion of children is a rapidly emerging threat.

Child exploitation and child sexual exploitation

We have made significant improvements in how we respond to child sexual exploitation in the past decade. The Government's formation of the CSE Taskforce in May 2023 helps enhance our action against offenders acting in groups and protect children from these appalling crimes.

Education can be key in empowering and protecting young people from abuse. Support young people to identify signs of exploitation or abuse in online and offline contexts.

- Child abuse happens in all parts of society.
- Sadly, most abuse happens in the home.
- Police forces target all offenders, no matter who they are or where they come from.
- To victims of abuse, **please speak out when you feel ready.**
- Whether you speak to our dedicated and trained police specialists or brilliant support services, **you will be heard, believed and supported.**
- **CSAE** is deplorable and inflicts lifelong harm on vulnerable victims and their families.
- **Policing is committed to keeping children safe** and protecting them from abuse in all its forms
- **Policing is committed to bringing more offenders to justice,** whenever and wherever these abhorrent crimes were committed.
- Policing is committed to continual improvement and the public rightly should expect nothing less.
- Through our work, we will continue to **listen to victims** and use the learnings from their experiences to support our improvements with forces across the country.
- **Every child has the right to thrive in society,** protected from harm and abuse and we will continue to strengthen our work with partners and improve how we prevent offending - **giving confidence to victims to come forward** when they need us most.

Online harms, exploitations and the risks to children

Online:

- Children must be supported to spot signs of abuse, but the burden should not be on them to protect themselves from harm online.
- Tech companies must step up and actively tackle the threat on their platforms by putting safeguards in place and identifying dangerous behaviour.
- We would urge parents to talk to their children about their use of social media. Even sites that many assume to be safe may pose a risk.
- There is a pressing need to improve our technological solutions – we want to find out who is doing good work in this area and share best practice.
- The Online Safety Act is a critical opportunity to achieve this and make our society safer for children.



AI:

The policing system as we know it was built at a time before telephones, TV and most familiar technology. Since then, the world around us and the requirements of policing have changed beyond recognition, becoming increasingly digital – and as such, we must modernise.

Innovation is central to delivering the world-class police service our public expect and deserve. By improving the quality of our data, utilising new technology and harnessing the power of science, we can transform our police forces and the wider criminal justice system, making it more efficient and effective for officers, staff and the public.

- **Pioneering work is already happening in many forces**, including pilot schemes and trials of technologies such as Operator Initiated Facial Recognition, AI bots and assistants and data-driven tools to help drive efficiencies and better protect the public.
- We must recognise the contribution that our staff and officers are making in areas like developing automation, improving data. **These are driving real change in policing.**
- We know that technological developments will be the single biggest driver of reform in policing in the coming years and embedding new technologies, appropriately and proportionately, is the only way we can hope to continue delivering the service the public deserves and expects.
- There are huge benefits to using AI across the wider criminal justice system, not just in policing, and we should not shy away from it. **Technology is moving at such a fast pace**, which means we need to mobilise now and equip our workforce for the future. If we don't, we risk falling behind the criminals who are embracing and exploiting these tools.
- **AI offers huge opportunities for policing.** It can automate a range of administrative tasks such as closing call logs, redacting huge court bundles and translating documents.
- It can also help call handlers to prioritise those who need priority assistance and can even help identify patterns and trends in evidence. **These gains in productivity mean officers and staff will ultimately have more time to be back out in their community.**
- While all of this is exciting, the **responsible use of AI is paramount**. We must ensure we are delivering a service that is trusted by our communities.
- It must be made clear that **the motivation here is service improvement**, rather than simply reducing administrative burden.

Financially Motivated Sexual Extortion

Children can be deeply affected by a range of exploitation types, including criminal exploitation, sexually motivated exploitation, and financially or motivated sexual exploitation (FMSE).

These harms often occur in hidden or coercive contexts, where children may be manipulated, threatened, or groomed into silence. Criminal exploitation can involve children being forced or enticed into illegal activities such as drug trafficking or theft, often under the control of organised networks.

Sexually motivated exploitation may include grooming, online abuse, or physical sexual harm, leaving lasting emotional and psychological trauma.

Financially motivated sextortion is particularly complex; recognising the signs and understanding the varied ways exploitation manifests is essential to safeguarding children and ensuring they receive the protection and support they need.

More findings:

- 6% of teenage boys would share nude images of themselves with strangers, prompted by the normalisation of these interactions and their desire to reciprocate.
- Teenage boys found it difficult to imagine criminals' pressure tactics, with 1 in 4 (26%) unable to spontaneously cite a FMSE warning sign.
- The use of digitally manipulated and/or AI-generated imagery for this type of extortion has increased substantially within the past 3 years, meaning victims do not always send a coerced image before being blackmailed.

Child victims have reported being:

- Contacted by an online account that they do not know but appears to be another child or young person. They may also be contacted by a hacked account of a child or young person they do know, but the communication feels unfamiliar;
- Quickly engaged in sexually explicit communications, which may include the offender sharing an indecent image first;
- Manipulated or pressured into taking nude or semi-nude photos or videos;
- Told they have been hacked and the offender has access to their images, personal information and contacts (whether this is true or not);
- Blackmailed into sending money or meeting another financial demand (such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card) after sharing an image or video, or the offender sharing hacked or digitally manipulated/AI-generated images of their victim and making the threat of sharing them wider.

Com Networks

Com Networks are online collectives of individuals who work together, or compete, on chat platforms to cause harm and commit crimes.

They do this to make money, gain notoriety or to promote their ideologies.

- **These collectives** often adopt different self-imposed names and branding.
- **Extortion Com groups groom minors**, forcing them to produce and share indecent, sexually explicit and/or degrading images, commit extreme self-harm, and suicide.
- **Victims are** predominantly children under 18.
- **Offenders specifically target** vulnerabilities in people seeking help and advice on online forums.
- **Offenders then manipulate and coerce victims** - often under threat, blackmail or psychological pressure - into harming family members, including being forced to physically or sexually abuse siblings or other children, or to injure or kill pets.



Photo by Michael Burrows

Contact us at CPAI@npcc.police.uk

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