

SCOPE OF THIS PROTOCOL

This protocol describes how children and young people at risk of or suffering exploitation are screened and subsequently supported via their Early Help, child in need, child protection or their care plan with support from MACE (multi agency child exploitation) representatives in Croydon, in line with Pan London Child Exploitation Procedures. The aim of the protocol is to ensure social care, Police, education and health are aware of their responsibilities when they are concerned a child maybe vulnerable to, at risk of, or experiencing exploitation or serious youth violence in Croydon.

Child exploitation is defined as:

Child criminal exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Child sexual exploitation is 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. 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.

Serious youth violence There are several definitions that describe ‘serious youth violence’ but the one element that they all have in common is that they all focus on the age of the person involved in the incident and the gravity of the offence: The Home Office develops the notion of ‘serious youth violence’ being associated with children who are involved or at the periphery of ‘county lines’ and negative peer groups and concerning children involved in ‘county lines’ and other related activities as per the definition above. For the purposes of this strategy, in Croydon we are treating serious youth violence as any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime involving a young person under the age of 18 in an extra-familial setting. This may be in relation to county lines and/or criminal exploitation or in a separate contextual setting.

Version	Author	Name	Approved By	Name	Date	Review Date
1	Head of Service – Children’s Specialist Services	Leana Ebanks	Director, Children’s Social Care	Róisín Madden	July 2024	July 2026

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1. What is MACE?

The multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) approach to working together to identify, screen and ultimately reduce the risk of exploitation draws representatives from the Police and Children's Services/Youth Justice/education, health & voluntary sector organisation Redthread.

MACE representatives offer a range of support including investigation, disruption, expertise and consultation and where appropriate, direct work with young people and their families.

MACE representatives will always contribute to screening young people to understand risks relating to exploitation.

MACE representatives are not case accountable from a children's social care perspective. This responsibility remains with the case responsible Early Help or social work team. Other MACE representatives provide ongoing support as appropriate in respect of risk management planning, intervention, enforcement and disruption.

2. What are the indicators of child exploitation?

Absconding/missing episodes/missing from school/parent or carer failing to report child missing	Coercion or control by others (individuals/gangs, etc., unhealthy relationships)
Missing and found in another area	Other vulnerabilities (child looked after, victim of abuse, SEND) This is not an exhaustive list
Associating with others who are at risk of exploitation or present a risk	Frequenting risky environments – consider contextual safeguarding
Use of drugs and alcohol or possession of drugs	Lack of engagement with education and/or employment
Risky use of social media including arranging to meet or meeting in person people following online contact	Other risky online/telephone activity (sexualised conversations/sending or receiving indecent images)
Sexual activity with known or suspected perpetrators of exploitation	Accommodation and/or family relationship issues/cuckooing
Issues with emotional and/or physical health	Offending/weapons/criminal activity/perpetrator serious violence
Community and social isolation factors	Evidence/intelligence to indicate County Lines involvement
Concern for exploitation and/or human trafficking	Unexplained income/possessions/mobile phones or lifestyle

Victim of or suspected of sexual crime or serious violence	Witness of sexual or serious violence
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3. Risk level descriptors

Risk level thresholds (decision making must be made on the balance of probability)

Non child criminal exploitation (CCE)/child sexual exploitation (CSE)/serious youth violence (SYV)	No evidence of exploitation or exposure to serious youth violence
Vulnerable to exploitation/SYV	<p>At this stage there is no evidence or reasonable cause to suspect that the child is exposed to exploitation or serious youth violence.</p> <p>However, there are concerns that without support the child could be exposed to exploitation or serious youth violence in the future due to the presence of identified vulnerability factors or warning signs.</p> <p>The child/young person requires support to increase resilience.</p>
Medium (at risk of exploitation/SYV)	<p>There is evidence or reasonable cause to suspect that the child is at risk of being targeted for exploitation or exposed to serious youth violence.</p> <p>The risk to the child is such that they would be unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development without the provision of support or that the child/young person's health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of support.</p>
High (experiencing exploitation/SYV)	<p>There is evidence or reasonable cause to suspect that the child is currently exposed to exploitation or serious youth violence.</p> <p>The risk to the child's safety is significant and immediate provision of support is needed to safeguard the child.</p>

4. Consent

If consent for screening is not obtained, the following should be considered to progress:

- 1) There would/should be reasonable grounds to suspect the child/young person is at risk of exploitation to require a screening in the first instance, and so at likely risk of harm.
- 2) 'Informed' consent of young person themselves is questionable, given likelihood they may be being exploited and groomed.
- 3) Either seeking their consent or that of a parent likely to be challenging i.e. avoidant/absent and may cause undue delay
- 4) As per Working Together (2023) if there is concern a child is at risk or in need, consent should not be an issue where it is difficult to foresee circumstances/risk without the sharing of information.

5. Requesting a CE screen – closed to social care

Professionals should request a CE screening by referring the exploitation/serious youth violence concerns to MASH via the online portal [Croydon MASH Online Portal](#) .

Screening will be undertaken in MASH by review and evaluation of multi-agency information provided by representatives including:

- Consultant social worker
- MASH Police
- Youth Justice Service (YJS)
- MASH health
- MASH education

Screening will be undertaken within **24 hrs** of a request to MASH.

6. Requesting a CE screen – already open to social care

Where exploitation/serious youth violence concerns are identified for a child already open to a Children's Social Care team, a service request is to be raised and completed via forms on the child's CRS record and re-assigned to the "Exploitation Screening Request" work tray on CRS.

A Young Croydon consultant practitioner will then make contact with the team, and support with completing the exploitation screening. This will be completed and available on CRS within 5 working days.

This screening does not replace, or direct what safeguarding action must be taken in the immediate circumstances exploitation/serious youth violence concerns are identified. Standard safeguarding processes and actions must be followed at the point exploitation concerns are identified, and action taken by the allocated social work team.

7. Requesting a CE screen – Family Solutions Service (Early Help) & Youth Justice Service.

When the Family Solutions Service are concerned that a child open to the service is presenting with exploitation/serious youth violence concerns and is currently not subject to MACE Protocol (vulnerable to exploitation), a referral should be made to the MASH via the portal for the child and any siblings/children within the household, as per the process above in Section 6.

8. Following screening

MACE representatives should share intelligence with the allocated social work team, and the Data and Intelligence Team so this can be collated via the Contextual Safeguarding Module (VOLT).

Consultant social worker (MASH) will update the child's record on CRS. All screening is recorded on the CRS system irrespective of what level of support the child is receiving from either Early Help/Child in Need/Child Protection/Child in Care.

Risk relating to exploitation and serious youth violence can quickly change and is often unpredictable. Some children and young people experience multiple risks that may emanate from both the home and extra familial contexts, it is therefore important to ensure a clear and current understanding of exploitation risk is maintained. Understanding a young person's history and trajectory in terms of exploitation risk is vital for planning and protection at an individual and strategic level.

Initial screening takes place within MASH for newly referred children and information is drawn from key professionals working with a child or young person including MASH Police, MASH consultant social worker, MASH health rep, MASH education rep, Young Croydon and Youth Justice.

Professionals need to make subsequent CE risk decisions consistently and regularly. Failure to do this means we lack the ability to report on trajectory and recorded risk levels are unreliable on the CRS record.

9. Exploitation strategy & complex strategy discussions

The purpose of a strategy discussion is to decide whether the threshold has been met for a single or joint agency (Children's Social Care & Police) Child Protection investigation, and to plan that investigation. They happen when it is believed a child **may have** suffered or is likely suffering significant harm.

When an exploitation screening identifies a child is "medium" or "high" risk, a strategy discussion must always take place. This strategy discussion is the arena to share information, assess risk, consider immediate safeguarding actions and plan the investigation.

Exploitation can involve complex and organised abuse, and this is defined as abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children. In these circumstances, a complex strategy discussion must be convened and chaired by a senior manager.

Where an incident of serious youth violence takes place within Croydon, and it is suspected this involved a number of children, but those children have not yet been identified, a complex strategy meeting will take place to consider all information available to agencies, to ensure timely identification of those children, and ensure appropriate distribution of support/services in the area the incident occurred.

When Children's Social Care request a strategy, a 87a must be submitted to the Police via PublicProtectionReferrals@met.police.uk. The safeguarding section must always be completed with sufficient details and dates, and reasons why a strategy is required. In doing so this will prevent delay for the child, and ensure Police are fully informed prior to the strategy meeting taking place.

In the event the Police identify exploitation concerns, they will submit the concerns to Croydon MASH, who will share with the relevant team for screening & strategy/complete a screening within the MASH if the case is closed to Children's Social Care. In the event the Police are requesting a strategy discussion, this is to be clearly recorded on the referral.

Any disputes concerning whether a strategy meeting should take place must be escalated immediately via the CSCP Escalation Policy.

10. Exploitation strategy discussions & role of Adolescent Support Team

The Adolescent Support Team manager/senior practitioner and the linked consultant practitioner must always be invited to exploitation strategy discussions.

The purpose is to offer support, guidance and resource via the adolescent workers, and consider capacity to allocate newly referred children within the Adolescent Support Team where capacity allows.

In the circumstances that the exploitation and/or serious youth violence is considered to be complex and/or organised the Young Croydon service manager supported by the Adolescent Support team manager will lead the complex strategy meeting.

11. Assessment of siblings/other children in the household

Any child or young person may be at risk of exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances. For some, their homes will be a place of safety and security; for others this will not be the case. Whatever the child's home circumstances, the risks from exploitation spread beyond risks to the child. Their families or siblings may also be threatened or be highly vulnerable to violence from the perpetrators of exploitation.

On this basis, when an initial screen identifies a child as 'medium risk' or 'high risk', and there are other children living in the home those children must be subject to the same assessment of need (Section 17 / Section 47) as the screened child. This will ensure the wider safeguarding of those children are also understood and risk management plans/strategies can be considered for all the children within the household.

12. High risk – immediate significant harm/experiencing exploitation

For all immediate significant risk of harm cases a **strategy discussion** under section 47 of the Children Act will take place as per current child protection and safeguarding processes.

Strategy discussions should be chaired by the relevant social work team manager. CME Police will participate in the strategy discussion and should include as well as other relevant professionals. Strategy meetings must always take place where children are identified as 'medium' and 'high' risk, and the strategy meeting will ratify this screening level.

A hazard should be added to the child's record on CRS, where they are screened as medium or high risk to exploitation/serious youth violence.

Where a young person screened at high risk is not currently active to a social worker, a social work assessment should be undertaken. Assessments must include clear consideration and response to contextual factors.

For active cases the social work assessment should be updated.

For high-risk cases a contextual safeguarding (I)CP conference should be considered.

Where a child is looked after, the consultant practitioner for 0-16 & 16+ Service are to support the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with quality assuring and ensuring the team are proactively supporting the young person, and managing risk effectively to reduce concerns.

Note: Social workers should contact CP chairs/IRO ahead of conference to ensure all relevant invites are discussed and agreed.

Family Network Meeting/Family Group Conference should be considered.

Consideration for appropriateness of application to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) should be given for all cases where evidence/information suggests a young person is being exploited (see guidance at the end of this document)

The professional network should review the exploitation risk and level at least once every two weeks.

The team manager and social worker must attend the review, where Police or other professionals are unable to attend updates are to be provided in respect of new intel/concerns and progress of an investigation. Any other key professional including YJS, education, health or support services including voluntary sector should attend where relevant and possible. Children and family should be given the opportunity to attend.

To ensure consistent sharing of information, the Croydon Police Exploitation Team will share relevant information to inform review screening once per week. Croydon Children's Social Care will share the names of those children who require a review screen one week in advance to ensure effective time for this information sharing activity.

All initial and review screening meetings should be recorded on the **EXPLOITATION SCREENING TOOL** form, which can be found CRS.

The team manager should add a management oversight following every meeting to show that a meeting has taken place and record SMART actions including when the next meeting will take place.

A hazard will be created on CRS that reflects the date the first MACE decision was made, and where the key information can be located on CRS.

13. Medium risk – at risk of experiencing exploitation

Any case where a child or young person is deemed at medium risk will be considered (on a case by case basis) either for a ICPC or Child in Need meeting under S.17 of the Children Act.

A hazard should be added to the child's record.

Where a young person screened at medium risk is not currently active to a social worker, a social work assessment should be undertaken. Assessments should include clear consideration of contextual factors.

Child in Need (CIN) meetings for children and young people deemed at medium risk should take place within **10 working days** of screening. This includes children and young people who are looked after by the local authority. In this instance the meeting will be a child planning meeting.

Team managers are expected to chair the **initial meeting and every other meeting** for all children/young people deemed medium risk.

Family Network Meeting/Family Group Conference should be considered.

The consultant practitioner for 0-16 & 16+ service is available to support IRO service in ensuring care planning takes account of exploitation/extra familial risk.

The risk and level should be reviewed at least every 6 weeks in line with timescales for review of the child's plan. (For children in care this will mean scheduling additional review meetings every 6 weeks. Care plan reviews should be brought forward where risk requires a change to the care plan.)

To ensure consistent sharing of information, the Croydon Police Exploitation Team will share relevant information to inform review screening once per week. Croydon Children's Social Care will share the names of those children who require a review screen one week in advance to ensure effective time for this information sharing activity.

Following each review ...

An **EXPLOITATION SCREENING TOOL** form, which can be found on CRS should also be completed.

Where a child is **CIN**, and the level has been raised to high, a strategy discussion should be recorded and a Child Protection Conference considered / Looked After Review booked.

A hazard will be created on CRS that reflects the date the first MACE decision was made, and where the key information can be located on CRS.

14. Vulnerable to exploitation

Cases where a child or young person is deemed at vulnerable to exploitation should be allocated to the relevant Family Solutions Service team (Early Help) unless there are other indicators of concern at Level 3 or 4 of the CSCP Threshold Criteria. This includes step down of cases from social care.

A family support assessment should be undertaken and must include clear consideration of contextual factors.

All professionals involved with the family should be invited by the allocated practitioner to support safety planning via consultation and attendance at planning meetings (only where required and agreed via consultation). Consultant practitioners can provide advice and guidance to help consider extra-familial factors related to a child's safety.

If concerns arise for a child who is looked after by Croydon –the consultant practitioner for 0-16 & 16+ service is available to support IRO in ensuring care planning takes account of exploitation/extra familial risk.

The risk and level should be reviewed at least every 6 weeks in line with timescales for review of the child's plan. For child looked after cases this will mean scheduling additional child planning meetings every 6 weeks. Care plan reviews should be brought forward where risk requires a change to the care plan.

To ensure consistent sharing of information, the Croydon Police Exploitation Team will share relevant information to inform review screening once per week. Croydon Children's Social Care will share the names of those children who require a review screen one week in advance to ensure effective time for this information sharing activity.

Following each review ...

A review **EXPLOITATION SCREENING TOOL** form, which can be found on CRS should also be completed.

A Hazard will be created on CRS that reflects the date the first MACE decision was made, and where the key information can be located on CRS.

Note: Family Solutions Service (Early Help) children who are identified as vulnerable to exploitation, will be reviewed every 6 weeks by the Young Croydon consultant practitioner alongside the Early Help team around the family. Where a review screen identifies, risk has escalated to medium/high the 'Step Up' Process should be followed.

When cases close

When a case closes to Children's Social Services, or the risk is reduced to none the CE episode should be ended.

The hazard created at the start of the episode must also be ended on CRS.

15. Screening/risk level disputes

Where there is a disagreement regarding the screening level for a child, escalation should follow the [CSCP Escalation Protocol](#) .

16. Information Sharing

It is important to share as much information as possible in order to enable families and professionals to keep children and young people safe. In some circumstances the sharing of police intelligence or other 'soft' intelligence from practitioners may put at risk other children and vulnerable people or significantly hinder police operations. Police have a duty of care to protect life and limb and act upon information that presents a risk of serious harm to any member of the public, including workers.

Where possible CME police should be represented at meetings for children where risk is deemed medium and high. Meeting conveners should allow additional time prior to young people and family members joining meetings to enable **appropriate** sharing of intelligence or information about risk and or planned disruption with social care practitioners.

Police should be aware that intelligence they share may be used by social care practitioners to make decisions about case work.

Intelligence should only be acted upon in terms of the context within which it was shared i.e. provenance, corroboration and reliability.

Intelligence recorded on CRS should always be clearly marked as '**Intelligence**' and where it cannot be shared with families and or others. this should be clearly marked as '**Intelligence not to be shared**'.

Note: There may be some cases where police have information or intelligence that suggests a child should be managed at a higher risk level. However, because of associated risks, either to police tactics, individuals or a wider police investigation, this information cannot be shared via the forums described above. In these cases, the senior police manager or senior investigating officer (SIO) must consider sharing information with the relevant head of service within Children's Social Care. The head of service may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and will be advised of the restrictions around the information disclosed. This should include agreement that the head of service is able to share with their senior manager/director. The SIO should record rationale for the decision to share information or not to share information under these circumstances.

Briefing relevant partners on police disruption activity

For any planned disruption or enforcement on known perpetrators of child exploitation, the senior police manager or SIO must consider how and when Children's Social Care can be briefed. The police must consider how enforcement against perpetrators allows opportunities for engagement with children in order to support them away from possible harm.

Submitting intelligence to police

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 states '*The police will hold important information about children who may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, as well as those who*

cause such harm. They should always share this information with other organisations and agencies where this is necessary to protect children. Similarly, they can expect other organisations and agencies to share information to enable the police to carry out their duties.

What is intelligence?

Information can come from many different sources – such as people, phone work, financial data or ANPR analysis to name just a few.

Intelligence is information that has been subject to a risk assessment and grading process. Police collect intelligence to:-

- Protect life and property
- Preserve order
- Prevent the commission of offences
- Bring offenders to justice
- Any duty of responsibility arising from common or statute law

In order for the police to risk assess intelligence, the provenance of the information is important:

- Who else knows the information – circle of knowledge?
- How do they know the information?
- When did they first know the information to be true?
- When did they last know the information to be true?

Intelligence relating to the safeguarding of children at risk of exploitation can be shared by professionals to the police in 3 ways:

- Via PublicProtectionReferrals@met.police.uk
- Or by sharing it with a police MACE member of staff. Whoever is providing the information should be ready to answer the questions on the form below.
- If the information relates to an imminent threat or immediate emergency, then calling 999 would be appropriate. This would most likely be in really exceptional circumstances only.

The submission of intelligence relating to the safeguarding of children at risk of exploitation should be shared with Police in a timely manner and not delayed awaiting a next formal meeting.

The professional submitting intelligence should also retain their own durable and retrievable notes of the intelligence shared including time/date given and source of intelligence with consideration to information security procedures.

Children moving out of Croydon

For children who are open to the Croydon Police CME team but are moving out of Croydon, the worker responsible for the child should make reasonable efforts to facilitate contact between the relevant constabulary and allocated social worker. Every effort should be made to facilitate a virtual conference call so there is an effective handover for the child. Other constabularies may operate in a different way to Croydon and this needs to be recognised by the partnership.

Sharing assessments with families

All social work/family support assessments must be shared with families.

Intelligence should not be included in assessments. Managers should add clear rationale as a manager oversight in case notes regarding reasons for information not included.

17. Resource

Language

Inappropriate use of language in case recordings can often misrepresent exploited children and young people.

The link will also take you to other useful resources regarding this issue, including guidance related to intelligence gathering. See link below:

- [Criminal exploitation and 'county lines' resources](#)
- [Child exploitation disruption toolkit](#)
- craigpinkney.com
- [Ending gang and youth violence: cross-government report](#)
- [Covid-19: the impact on girls](#)

18. Pre-MACE meeting

A Pre-MACE meeting will be convened once a month for 1.5 hours and will include a representative from the Data Analyst Team, MASH, Young Croydon service manager, Police, Redthread, education, health and a Young Croydon consultant practitioner. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure oversight and throughput of exploitation screening, address any challenges on an operational level and ensure any barriers to progressing children's plans are addressed in a timely manner.

The additional responsibility of the pre-MACE meeting will be to ensure the monthly MACE Panel are fully sighted on the context of exploitation in Croydon, and how we are actively working in partnership on an operational level to reduce risk of exploitation and serious youth violence.

The pre-MACE meeting is chaired by the service manager for Young Croydon.

19. MACE Panel

The Exploitation and Missing Data Analyst Team will provide a monthly report to the panel that details MACE activity for the previous month, that includes trends and patterns for particular groups of young people, places and spaces.

This report will support the MACE Panel to coordinate and lead the strategic response to context-based harm and retain oversight of those impacted. MACE takes place once per month for 2 hours to review data (de-escalation/escalation in risk, themes, hotspots, disruption and consider victims, offenders, locations and tracking (VOLT)) in accordance with the Pan-London MACE Protocol. The MACE will consider the agency responses to places and spaces, to effectively disrupt and reduce risk in known areas of concern, and consider the trends and actions taken to manage known offenders & locations of concern.

The MACE Panel is co-chaired by the Head of Specialist Services for Social Care, and the Detective Chief Inspector of Croydon Police.

20. The National Referral Mechanism

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.

Modern slavery is a complex crime and may involve multiple forms of exploitation. It encompasses:

- human trafficking
- slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour

An individual could have been a victim of human trafficking and/or slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour.

Victims may not be aware that they are being trafficked or exploited, and may have consented to elements of their exploitation, or accepted their situation. If you think that modern slavery has taken place, the case should be referred to the NRM so that the relevant competent authority can fully consider the case. You do not need to be certain that someone is a victim.

There are benefits for victims of modern slavery if they receive a conclusive grounds decision. One of the benefits is the additional support that can be provided to them.

Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs) are an independent source of advice for trafficked children, somebody who can speak up on their behalf. The service was formerly known as Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs), but this was amended following the recommendations of the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act.

From May 2021, ICTGs are available in two-thirds of local authorities in England and Wales. The locations of where the ICTG provision is currently available and corresponding guidance on the role of the ICTG can be found in the [interim guidance for ICTGs](#).

Where the ICTG service has been implemented, if the first responder considers a child to be a potential victim of modern slavery, they should refer them to the ICTG service by completing the [online referral form in English](#) or [in Welsh](#). This is in addition to following usual safeguarding routes and NRM referrals.

[NRM Referral](#)

21. Child protection procedures

[Croydon Child Protection Procedures](#)

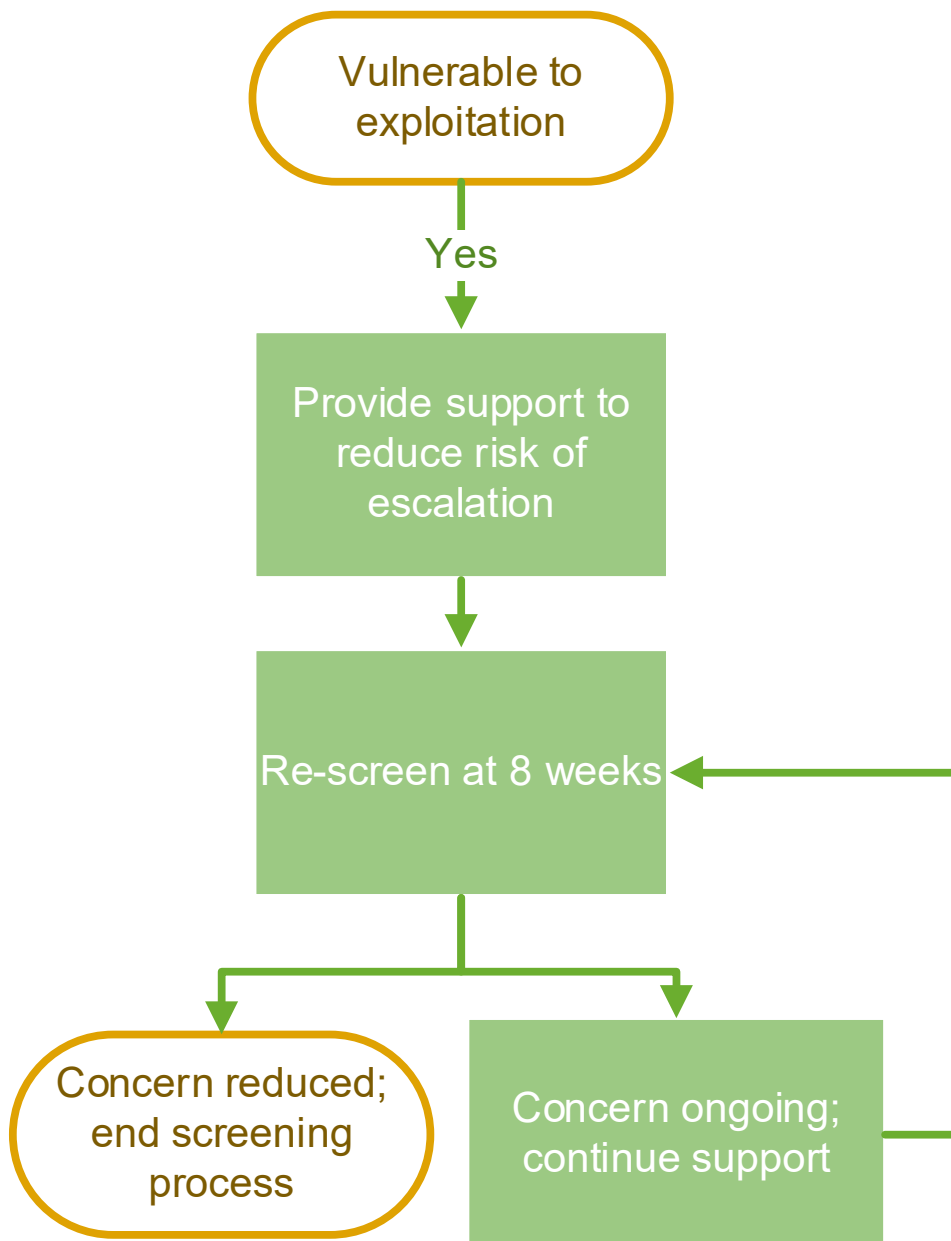
22. Language, disproportionality, and any other factors

[Safeguarding children who come from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities](#)

[Appropriate Language when Supporting Exploited Children](#)

[Intersectionality: race, gender and other aspects of identity in social work with young people](#)

23. Vulnerable to exploitation visual pathway



24. At risk of (medium) & experiencing (high) exploitation visual pathway

