



Practice Guidance: risk management and extra familial abuse

1. Introduction

Children can face a range of safeguarding issues, in particular related to criminality and exploitation including (but not limited to) child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, County Lines, Modern Slavery including Trafficking and gang related violence.

This guidance is intended as an aid for social workers working with children in care who may be at risk of significant harm from extra-familial factors.

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent/carer-child relationships.

Working Together 2018 and a range of statutory guidance sets out the expectation that social workers coordinate a multi-agency plan to safeguard children affected by extra-familial abuse. Some of the actions agreed in these plans may take a contextual approach for example disrupting perpetrators of exploitation or making changes to locations where abuse is occurring.

This practice guidance references **Bristol's multi-agency procedures, protocols and guidance** that should be used when working with children in care at risk of extra-familial harm or abuse.

Practitioners must ensure that they are familiar with the following:

- Guidance for management of strategy discussions
<https://bristolsafeguarding.org/media/1185/strategy-discussions-2017.pdf>
- Child Sexual Exploitation
https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/bristol/p_ch_sexual_exploit.html

<https://bristolsafeguarding.org/children-home/professionals-and-people-who-work-with-children-young-adults/policies/#ChildSexualExploitation>

- Criminal Exploitation
<https://bristolsafeguarding.org/media/31968/ce-briefing.pdf>
- Children Missing from Care, Home and Education
<https://bristolsafeguarding.org/policies-and-guidance/missing-children/>
- Safeguarding children and young people against radicalization and violent extremism
https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/bristol/p_sg_ch_extremism.html
- Organised and Complex Abuse Procedures
https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/bristol/p_org_complex_abuse.html

2. Individual versus Contextual Risk Management Approaches

In line with national guidance and legislation we expect all children open to Children and Families Services at risk from, or experiencing, Extra-Familial harm to have their assessment and support planning managed through an individual multi-agency assessment and planning process lead by Lead Professional.

This process will differ depending on the legal status of services involvement with children. When there is current evidence of exploitation meeting frequency may need to be increased to weekly, bi-weekly or monthly depending on assessment of harm and agreement of need for multi-agency coordination. A child should not be subject to more than one individual support and planning process at any time.

Child's status	Lead Professional	Assessment	Meetings
Not open to social care but some early emerging concerns	Agency other than Bristol City Council Children and Families Services as defined through the Lead Professional Protocol	Signs of Safety mapping through Team around the child	Team around the Child multi-agency meetings. Where LP is YOT these will be YOT Risk Management Meetings.
Child in Need	Area/DCSS/PDT Social Worker	Child and Family Assessment	Child in Need meetings a minimum of 6-8 weekly
Child	Area/DCSS Social	Joint S47 and	Child Protection

Protection	Worker	Child and Family Assessment	Conference and Core Group meetings minimum within 6 weeks of ICPC and 8 weeks of RCPC
Child in Care	Area/DCSS/Through Care Social Worker	1. Care Plan 2. Joint S47 and Child and Family Assessment	1. Child in Care Reviews 2. Risk Management Meetings minimum 6 weekly

Individual support planning should run in parallel to contextual risk management approaches which focus on identifying and responding to places, people, and peer groups experiencing harm and preventing others experiencing harm in these contexts. In Bristol there are two multi-agency contextual management and planning processes. Assessments we can support these processes are currently being trialed and include Neighbourhood/Place Assessments and Peer Group Assessments.

Assessment of risk from/for Peer Group, Place, Person(s) of Concern	Meeting type	Lead	Frequency
Preventative, emerging and "in need"	Safer Options Meeting	Area Deputy Service Manager and FIF Area Manager	Weekly in each locality
Significant harm/organised abuse	Complex Abuse Strategy	Deputy Service Manager/Service Manager	Minimum 6-weekly

3. Strategy meetings

Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that any child (including a child in care) is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm a child protection strategy meeting¹ must involve local authority children's social care,

¹ <https://bristolsafeguarding.org/media/1185/strategy-discussions-2017.pdf>

the police and health as a minimum and should include other bodies such as the referring agency. For children in care consideration should be given for involvement of carers' Supervising Social Worker and/or residential care home manager.

When taking a contextual approach representation from offender managers, anti-social behaviour teams or housing providers may also be required who will have expertise and provision to intervene in the place, space or with the perpetrator.

Depending on the nature of concerns and urgency of the situation the strategy meeting might take the form of a multi-agency meeting, either face-to-face or by conference call, or as a series of phone calls. Strategy discussions by phone with other agencies are usually adequate to plan a straightforward single agency enquiry. Meetings should be held for complex cases and/or to plan joint investigations. Strategy meetings should be held within 24 hours of identifying a strategy meeting is required. More than one Strategy Discussion may be required to share information and plan any further enquiries required.

The Local Authority Practice Lead/Consultant Social Worker must chair the strategy meeting. These meetings cannot be chaired by social workers although it is good practice for the allocated social worker to be involved. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including during an ongoing assessment or care plan. A strategy should be held

The strategy meeting should be used to:

- Share available information in respect of the risk of significant harm;
- Where the concerns relate to extra-familial risks a contextual safeguarding approach should be used, looking at the interplay between the child, carer, family, peers, school, and neighbourhood; and the 'weight of influence' presented by the attitude of their peers.
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation;
- Agree actions required to immediately safeguard the child.

Decisions of the Strategy meeting may be one or more of the following:

- Commence Section 47 enquiries to identify whether the child is at risk of significant harm;
- Arrange for a police investigation including agreeing social worker's role in undertaking joint interviews;
- Inform the local authority designated officer (if the alleged perpetrator is a professional working with or has access to children while working);
- Conduct a medical assessment of the child;
- Make applications for civil orders or take steps to disrupt abusers relevant to the nature of the abuse
- For a child in care where the concerns relate to extra familial abuse but a decision can be made to progress to a Risk Management

process:

- Undertake section 47 enquiries and Risk Management Assessment where there is believed to be a risk of significant harm identifying the contextual risks (peers, places etc.) and intervening and disrupting
- Undertake a Risk Management Assessment and no section 47 enquiries in circumstances where there is not significant harm but there is ongoing risk and need outside the child's care planning that requires a multi-agency response

- For children in care in Bristol we do not use Child Protection Conferences when children in care are at risk of significant harm however the strategy may agree to manage the risk through regular Risk Management Meetings informed by the outcome of the Risk Management Assessment and/or outcome of the section 47 enquiries (**see below**)

4. Complex strategy meetings²

Some children may become victims of **complex and organised abuse** involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children. The adults concerned may be coordinating their actions to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse. Such abuse can occur both as part of a network of abuse across a family or community and within institutions such as residential settings, boarding schools, in day care and in other provisions such as youth services, sports clubs, faith groups and voluntary groups. There will also be cases of children being abused via the use of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, computers, games consoles etcetera which all access the Internet.

Where complex or organised abuse is suspected a **Complex Strategy Meeting** should be held to agree the immediate action required to safeguard the child, the investigation/disruption approach and the response to the abuse. **Complex Strategy Meetings must be chaired by a Service Manager or Deputy Service Manager.**

The Service Manager (chair) and the police (Detective Inspector or above, or equivalent Police staff member) should attend the meeting. The meeting will involve senior staff from health, education and other agencies as required and, where necessary, must ensure coordination across local authority boundaries.

The Strategy discussion/meeting must carefully consider:

- An assessment of the information known to date:
- The children named;

² <https://bristolsafeguarding.org/media/1185/strategy-discussions-2017.pdf>

- The children who may be in current contact with possible abusers;
- Children who were, but no longer are, in contact with possible abusers;
- Possible victims who are now adults.
- Decide what further information is required at this stage and arrange for the information to be gathered;
- Establish if and to what extent complex abuse has been uncovered;
- Undertake an initial mapping exercise to determine the scale of the investigation and possible individuals implicated as well as prepare:
- Consider which witnesses to be interviewed prior to any interviews of children;
- Whether the child is suspected to be a victim of trafficking and a National Referral Mechanism referral to UKHTC is required;
- Multiple and simultaneous interviews.
- Consider a plan including resource implications, for investigation to be presented to the management and resources strategy group;
- Consider any immediate protective action required.

Senior managers from the involved agencies will need to make a strategic decision as to whether the social work input into the enquiries/investigation can be managed in the conventional way or whether a specialist approach is required for example from a dedicated team outside the service. This will usually depend on the number, geographical spread and age range of potential interviewees, as well as whether those implicated are foster carers or employees of any member agency.

Where the Strategy Discussion confirms that the investigation will relate to complex and organised abuse, it will appoint a Multi-Agency Strategic Management Group to oversee the process.

5. Assessment

A Section 47 enquiry means that children social care must carry out an investigation when they have 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm'. Extra-familial abuse can cause significant harm to children in care. For Bristol children living out of area the child protection strategy meeting should be chaired by the area hosting the child. This meeting should agree who will lead on the section 47 enquiry. In nearly all cases it will be most appropriate for this to be the child's allocated Bristol social worker who knows them best.

In Bristol we use a proportionate Child Assessment (mapping) to inform our section 47 outcome. This is the same assessment template that should be used when the threshold for section 47 enquiries is not met but the child in care remains at risk of harm in the community.

The Child Assessment should be used to assess risk and develop safety plans to address risk. The Child Assessment uses Signs of Safety approaches to collate and analysis multi-agency information, and

contributions from the child and their family about the risk to the child of extra-familial harm. When responding to extra-familial harm assessments should include information about the risks posed by known or suspected perpetrators, locations and domains in which the abuse is happening.

If it is decided not to proceed with a Section 47 Enquiry, consideration should be given to any need to specify further action being taken:

- Further assessments e.g. continuing/completing the Child Assessment;
- Circumstances in which a review of the child's Care Plan might be needed;
- Any services to be provided by agencies;
- Whether ongoing multi-agency Risk Management Meetings are required.

6. Risk management process for children in care

The Risk Management process will be triggered when:

- section 47 enquiry for a child in care concludes they are experiencing significant harm;
- a child protection strategy meeting decides it is the most appropriate way to manage extra-familial risk for a child in care or;
- where a child in care is going missing repeatedly (3 or more times in a month) and/or for prolonged periods (more than 48 hours).

Strategy meetings and Complex Strategy meetings supersede the risk management process and must take place at any time where there is a high risk incident, concerns escalate or new information comes to light that there may be complex or organised abuse.

6.1 Risk Management Meetings

The purpose of the Risk Management Meeting is to assess, agree and manage the risk. It provides an opportunity for agencies to share information to understand the context of the going missing including who else is involved with the child, their peers, where they go, the significant influences on them at that time with the aim of developing a plan to intervene and disrupt.

Risk Management meetings must be chaired by the Practice Lead and be held at a minimum of 6 weekly but usually more frequently than this depending on the degree and nature of the risk at any one time.

Who to invite:

- The child's social worker
- Police Missing Person's coordinator (if the child is going missing)
- Operation Topaz (if the child is a victim of exploitation)
- The child's carer

- Placement provider
- Supervising social worker
- Reducing Offending Practitioner
- The child's school, college or other education provider;
- Health professional e.g. Children Looked After Nurse
- The Independent Reviewing Officer
- Other organisations involved with the child e.g. Barnados BASE, Thinking Allowed, ROUTES, Off the Record etc.

Where appropriate the child and their parent should be involved in all or part of risk management meetings.

The risk management meeting will consider the Child Assessment including:

- The individual child's safety, needs and vulnerabilities
- What is known about the child's network of friends, the places they frequent and any other wider environmental factors that have an impact on the child's safety and well being
- Who is building the best relationship with the child and is best placed to support them
- Who is the named Police officer for a coordinated response
- Therapeutic or recovery resources for the child
- How intelligence will be shared
- The 'push and pull factors' for the child which may be influencing their going missing
- Whether there is a pattern or significance to the missing episodes
- What the child has shared in their Return Home Interviews
- The police's Missing Trigger Plan
- Identify any strengths and safety factors in the child's life

The **Risk Management Plan** could include:

- Intelligence sharing approach
- A reporting strategy for when a child goes missing for example when to report them as absent and when to report them as missing
- The minimum enquiries to be conducted by the care providers before the child is reported as missing
- The minimum enquiries to be conducted by the police when a child is reported as missing
- A strategy to reduce the risks of the child going missing
- Interventions to create safety in relation to places the child is frequenting or the child's peer group
- What support carers and family need to help them support the child and understand the issues the child is facing
- Agree who will develop a Child Safety Plan with the child and their carers
- Agree whether there is a risk of complex abuse requiring an Organised and Complex Abuse strategy meeting

- Frequency of risk management meetings *not less than 6 weekly) and who should attend

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be informed of the Risk Management Meeting and the Risk Management Plan, the information must inform the child's Care/Pathway plan and be considered at each child in care review.

6.2 Child Safety Plan

A Child Safety Plan should be developed concurrently with the Risk Management Plan with the child to set out what measures will be taken to reduce the risk. In simple language (or even visually) it will set out the expectations for the child, their carer, the social worker, family and any other relevant professionals involved in the child's life. The safety plan will include details relevant to the child for example use of their mobile phone, who they will keep in touch with, what makes them feel safe, what others will do to help keep them safe etc. The child's safety plan should be reviewed very regularly as it is a dynamic plan relating to the child's day to day life at that point in time and the risks and safety measures are likely to be constantly changing.

6.3 Children in care who go missing³

Children in care who are experiencing or at risk of extra-familial abuse and exploitation often have a pattern of going missing from home or care sometimes for prolonged periods of time. Social workers should have discussions with the police every 72 hours (at a minimum) reviewing the current joint assessment of risk and the action plan to respond to them. This should occur even if the child has been spoken to by phone.

Where a pattern of going missing is established consideration should be given as to whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest the child may be a victim of extra-familial abuse and a strategy meeting is needed to be convened. If it is concluded that the child is not a victim of extra-familial harm but that the child regularly is not where professionals know, in parallel to the child's care planning a Child Assessment and Risk Management Meeting should be initiated to analyse what is known about the child's missing episodes through police protection interviews and Return Home Interviews.

The Missing Trigger Plan – held by the police – should be developed and reviewed through this process to ensure there is a clear response by the police if a child is reported missing. The Missing Trigger Plan should be reviewed as planning for any placement move.

The Risk Management Plan should inform the child's care plan and placement plan. This may trigger an increased frequency of children in care reviews will regularly review the suitability of the plan and the level of risk.

³ https://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/bristol/p_ch_miss_care_home_ed.html

7. Child Sexual Exploitation checklist

When there are concerns that a child may be at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation the social worker must complete a CSE Checklist using the form on LCS. The checklist will help the social worker to consider the risk factors and to clarify the concerns in relation to CSE. The CSE checklist is **NOT** an assessment.

When a social worker decides that a child is at risk of or is experiencing sexual exploitation a CSE flag must be placed on the child's LCS record by imputing CSE as a case status on the DCS tab on the child's record. The CSE checklist must be reviewed every six months or if there is a significant change for the child.

8. Children in care living outside of the local authority area

It is the responsibility of the local authority where a child in care is living to convene a strategy discussion if it is deemed necessary. If a Bristol social worker requires a strategy meeting to be held for a child in care placed in another local authority they should contact the 'front door' or duty team of that local authority. The child's social worker should cooperate fully and take part in the strategy meeting. **Any concerns that another local authority is not responding to concerns about a Bristol child in care should be raised with managers to resolve the issue.** Understanding, responding to and managing the risk posed to the child is the highest priority and this can best be done using a multi-agency safeguarding approach.

Before placing a child in care in another local authority social workers must:

- notify the local authority of the placement,
- conduct enquiries about the suitability of the area in which the child is being placed
- link in with the local area's exploitation teams (where relevant for the child); and
- agree who will undertake Return Home Interviews should the child go missing.

When there are concerns that a child in care placed outside Bristol is at risk as a result of frequent missing episodes the child's social worker should work with the local authority where the child is placed. It is important that the child's social worker is familiar with the Missing Children Protocols of the local authority where the child is placed. The aim will be to coordinate a Risk Management meeting and develop a risk management plan and a child's safety plan. Where available they should involve local specialist resources. Ultimately Bristol has responsibility for our children in care and social workers

should ensure that there is a responsive risk management process in place for each child.

9. Case examples

8.1 Strategy meetings

Shona is a 13 year old girl living in foster care. She has had a number of missing episodes where she returns late and refuses to say where she has been. There have been concerns over where she is going and that her boyfriend is older than her. This time she returns at 9 am on a Monday morning having been missing since leaving school on Friday afternoon. She is in a distressed state and has bruises on her face and arms. She says that she has been sexually assaulted by her boyfriend and held against her will over the weekend. The Practice Lead holds an urgent child protection **Strategy Meeting and section 47 enquiries are agreed.**

Harley is a 15 year old boy living in residential care. He has recently been missing frequently and when he returns appears to be under the influence of drugs. He has appeared dressed in expensive new trainers and clothes. He says that his friends have given him these items. His missing episodes have become longer with him being away from his placement for days at a time. The social worker is sometimes able to speak to him on the phone when he is missing but he will not say where he is or who he is with. On this occasion when he returns he tells his support worker that he feels out of his depth and scared but he can't stay away from the people he has been seeing because they have threatened him with violence and he owes them a lot of money. Staff have found a knife in his room and he says he has been carrying it for his own protection. The Practice Lead holds a child protection **Strategy Meeting and agree a section 47 enquiry.**

Ryan is 14 and has been in foster care outside of Bristol for 2 years, a Care Order is in place. Ryan has been involved in anti-social behaviour local to his foster home and is regularly drinking alcohol. Ryan has recently been excluded from school and his foster carers have said he needs to move. Ryan has returned to stay with his mum for the weekend and is now refusing to leave: Placement with Parents has not been approved. Whilst at home Ryan sent explicit images of himself to a previous foster carer, he is also sharing social media images of himself apparently at a party in North Wales with his mum with an adult man who he has implied he is in a relationship with. There have been previous concerns about sexual abuse in the family. Ryan is not in contact with the Local Authority and his mum's engagement is sporadic. No one has heard or seen Ryan for over a week. The Practice Lead chairs a **Strategy meeting** and invites the fostering service as well as the Police and health. Section 47 enquiries are not agreed but social care agree to apply for

a Recovery Order and ongoing multi-agency Risk Management Meetings are agreed.

8.2 Complex strategy meetings

Toby is 14. In the past 3 months he has started to go missing for prolonged periods (more than 2 days at a time). When he returns he refuses to say where he has been and staff have noticed that he often has new items of clothing and jewelry. He is known to associate with some members of a gang that Police have concerns about in terms of drug dealing and violence and say there is evidence of them being trafficked as part of a county line to Devon. A friend of Toby discloses that Toby has been dealing drugs and has been staying at the house of a known adult drug dealer. Several other children in care are known to be involved with this gang and are thought to have been going missing with Toby. One of them recently stabbed a young adult in a retribution attack. A **Complex Strategy meeting** is held to discuss all the young people.

A police raid on a known drug dealers' house finds three young teenage girls in the house with several adult men ranging from 19 to 25 years old. There are mattresses on the floor and evidence of alcohol use. One of the girls is Lily, a 14 year old child in care who has frequently been missing. One of the men has a flag as having been a person of interest to Operation Topaz. She says that one of the men is her boyfriend. A **Complex Strategy meeting** is held to discuss all the girls and possible perpetrators.

8.3 Risk management meetings

Sarah is 14 years old and has mild learning difficulties. She does not have many friends and spends a lot of time on her laptop. She tells her foster carer that she has a new boyfriend that she met online and she has arranged to meet him that evening in a local park. Her foster carer has been able to talk to Sarah about the risks but is unsure how much Sarah understood. The foster care saw pictures of the man and thought he looked like he was in his thirties. The Practice Lead holds a strategy discussion. They agree that section 47 inquiries are not needed but that the police will pursue an investigation into the man and the social worker will hold regular **Risk Management meetings** with Sarah, her foster carer, the school and any other agencies involved focused on reducing the risk of CSE. A Child Safety Plan is developed for Sarah that is regularly updated.

Lola is 17 years old and has recently left her foster placement and is living independently in supported accommodation. She has been sexually exploited in the past and has been known to use cocaine. Her boyfriend, who is 19 years old and a care leaver, was violent to her over a year ago. Lola and he remain in an intimate relationship. On two occasions she has gone missing from her accommodation for several days. The Practice Lead chairs regular

Risk management meetings with Lola and all the agencies involved with her. There is a Child Safety Plan in place that is regularly reviewed.

Summer is 14 years old and was a victim of sexually exploitation by organized group when she was 12. In the last year she has had some problems with alcohol use. Her parents have found it very difficult to keep her safe at home and she is now in care. Summer has had a number of foster placement disruptions and has moved to a residential out of county placement. Summer is thought to still be at risk of sexual exploitation although there is no evidence that she is currently being exploited. The Practice Lead chairs regular **Risk Management meetings** with Summer, the residential staff, her teacher and the police. There is a Safety Plan in place for Summer that is updated at each **Risk Management meeting**. The social worker is aware that if there are new concerns or new information about current harm to Summer then they will consider holding a strategy meeting.

Mohammed is 17 years old, he is living in post 16 accommodation with 24 hour support. There is a Care Order in place. Mohammed has had to move lots of times and sometimes at short notice, he has lived in lots of different areas. Mohammed is regularly missing and tends to sofa surf with his friends. He has told support workers that he is scared of being in particular areas of the city and there is intelligence that he has been involved in drug running cannabis for other peers in the accommodation. There are worries about Mohammed's mental health, he has self-harmed and had suicidal thoughts in the past, he struggles to talk about this and has a limited network. He has very little contact with his family. Most recently Mohammed has been missing for 5 days and although his social worker was able to contact him at times and Mohammed would say he was ok, he wouldn't say where he was. Social worker maintained regular contact with the police through this time. Mohammed has now arrived at The Station hungry and tired and is being found emergency accommodation. The Practice Lead ensures that regular **Risk Management Meetings** take place and there is a Child Safety Plan for Mohammed.

Children in care: risk management and extra familial abuse

Child protection Strategy meeting decides to: or Child in care repeatedly missing – Practice Lead and social worker decide to



Progress to Risk Management Process
- trigger on LCS



Social worker undertakes Child's Assessment/Section 47 enquiries



Practice Lead chairs Risk management Meetings (minimum 6 weekly)



Social worker develops Child Safety Plan with child
(Review minimum 6 weekly)



Risk Management Plan informs Childs Care Plan (overseen by IRO at Child's Reviews)



Safety plan is tested and risk is reduced. Multi-agency agree for meetings to end

Strategy meetings and Complex Strategy meetings supersede the Risk Management process and must take place at any time where there is a high risk incident, concerns escalate or new information comes to light that there may be complex or organised abuse.