Common Methods of Child Sexual Exploitation

Peer-on-Peer exploitation - This form of exploitation usually takes place within peer or friendship groups. For example, a young person being given alcohol or drugs in exchange for sex. Peer exploitation sometimes occurs concurrently with peer domestic abuse, although it can also be linked to gang involvement. Although the age of the perpetrator and victim might be the same or similar, there will inevitably be a form of power control, manipulation, or coercion.

Sexual Exploitation in gangs and groups - Gang exploitation is very broad in nature and used within an internal gang hierarchy and as a weapon of retribution against other gangs. The sexual exploitation of children is used in gangs to:

- Exert power and control over members;
- Initiate young people into the gang;
- Exchange sexual activity for status or protection;
- Entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women; and
- Inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

County Lines - typically involves inner city/ London criminal gangs travelling to smaller locations to sell drugs. The gangs tend to use a single property, generally belonging to a vulnerable person, as a base for their activities. This is often taken over by force or coercion.

Perpetrators employ various tactics to evade detection, including rotating gang members between locations so they are not identified by law enforcement or competitors, and using
women and children to transport drugs and money in the belief that they are less likely to be stopped and searched by police.

Young people involved in county lines activity are at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation. These situations will often become apparent to professionals when young people who have been missing are located outside of the London area and there is no apparent reason for them being there and they have no apparent means to have travelled to the location in which they are found. Children in such circumstances could have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation or both and she be referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for further investigation.

**Organised/ networked CSE and trafficking** - Young people (often connected) are passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities, where they may be forced or coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. This sexual activity may occur at “parties” or in brothels, and the young people involved may recruit others into the network.

Organised exploitation varies from spontaneous networking between groups of perpetrators to more serious organised crime where young people are effectively “bought and sold”. In such circumstances, children can be trafficked for sexual exploitation either within or across Local Authority boundaries, across counties and across international borders.

**Relationship model** - The perpetrator befriends and grooms a child into a ‘relationship’ whereby the child believes them to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. The child is likely to believe they are in a loving relationship initially. The perpetrator may then coerce or force them to have sex with friends or associates. The perpetrator may be significantly older than the victim, but not always.

**Online exploitation** - This model uses technology to target and exploit young people alongside grooming and exploitation through texts and picture messages. Perpetrators can use the internet to commit offences internationally, as young people can be accessed through apps, sites, and games. Anywhere a child could have contact with a risky adult is a location where they are at risk of CSE.

**Youth produced sexual imagery** - Images are sent from one person to another using channels such as email, instant messaging, and social networking sites. Once shared, these images remain in the public domain forever. Children are targeted by perpetrators and coerced to take pictures or videos of themselves, often with promises that the image won’t be shared and is part of developing a relationship. The images may be used for distribution or sale to other perpetrators and they may be used to blackmail the victim to do further sexual acts or to threaten the child to keep quiet or risk the images being distributed to friends, family, or the wider public.

**Opportunistic child sexual exploitation** - This may occur quickly and without any form of grooming. Typically, perpetrators identify vulnerable young people who may already have been groomed or sexually abused. The perpetrator will offer the child/ young person a “reward” or payment in exchange for sexual acts. The perpetrator may be linked with a network of abusive adults.

The commercial or ‘street based’ sexual exploitation of children was previously referred to as ‘child prostitution’ and still takes place on the street and in private and public places. A
young person exchanges sex for money or drugs – often a ‘transaction’ which does not involve being groomed by the abuser. A young person may become involved in commercial sexual exploitation because of ‘survival’ when they are homeless or because someone is controlling them – even when the young person feels they are doing it out of ‘choice’, it is only because of constrained choices and is still a form of exploitation.

**Familial child sexual exploitation** - Children can be sexually exploited by their parents and/or other family members, who may arrange the abuse of the child and/or control and facilitate the sexual exploitation. Where a child or young person is sexually exploited within their family network, their siblings and/or child relatives are at increased risk of also suffering sexual exploitation.