



Direct work with young people affected by sexual exploitation

Insights from current practice:
A working document. December insights will be coming.

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Introduction

Practitioners in Wigan and Rochdale local authorities are undertaking direct work with young people who are affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE). In this context groups of multi disciplinary practitioners from Wigan and Rochdale came together in two workshops to outline and discuss their current practice, share ideas, reflect and consider how to develop direct work in the future. The workshops were recorded and this document summarises the practice wisdom that emerged.

This is not a literature or evidence review¹. Nor is it based on a comprehensive review of all the direct work being undertaken in Wigan and Rochdale. It reflects some of the current thinking of the 12 workshop participants amongst whom there was considerable agreement about ways of working and what they believe is most effective in helping CSE affected young people escape and recover from exploitation at the time it was written.

¹ The research evidence base is extremely limited (as yet) regarding the impact of CSE direct work and what works.

Direct work is a journey

Practitioners often describe their work with young people as a journey. At the start it is often only the practitioner who has a vision of the road ahead. At times practitioners and young people see things very differently and practitioners can sometimes see real progress even when a young person is at their lowest ebb. It is part of the practitioner’s role to be optimistic about the possibilities life holds for the young person and to hold onto hope for their future.

The journey can be a long one involving steps backwards as well as forwards. It rarely goes in a straight line from A to B. There can be periods of stability and others of rapid change. Practitioners aim for clarity about what is going on in a young person’s life, but the picture may look increasingly “fuzzy” as they gain more understanding of all the “knots” that need to be untangled if they are to help them move forward.

Recovery from CSE can be an emotional roller coaster for practitioners as well as for exploited young people. Support through line management and supervision is essential to enable staff to reflect upon their practice and to look after their own well-being. Peer support and opportunities to discuss, challenge and share practice are equally important and this document is the direct outcome of workshops, which provided Wigan and Rochdale practitioners with one such opportunity.

Workshop participants:
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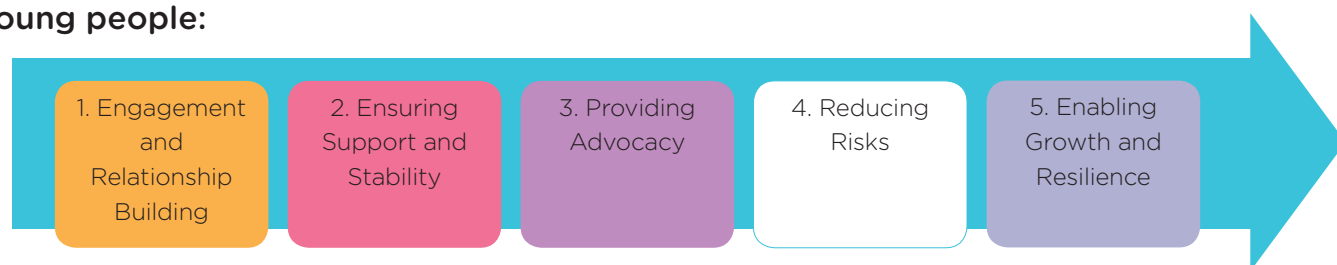
What is direct work?

'Direct work' usually refers to face-to-face interaction with young people over a period of time, but may increasingly include communication via new technologies in the future. It generally involves a practitioner building an ongoing relationship with a young person in order to support them on their journey towards a positive future.

A relationship based on trust, honesty and mutual respect is seen as the primary vehicle for the delivery of better outcomes. In the context of CSE, the desired outcomes are usually increased safety, reduced harm, improved awareness of risks and rights and increased well being.

Of course, considerable work is also conducted 'indirectly' with partners, parents and other stakeholders (behind the scenes), on behalf of young people contributing to safeguarding, promoting their well being and ultimately improving their outcomes.

Practitioners identified 5 elements of effective direct work with CSE affected young people:



Core elements of direct work undertaken with young people affected by CSE

The following section briefly explains what practitioners say the core elements of direct work are with CSE affected young people. Greater detail about effective ways of working with young people can be found in the next section.

1. Engagement and relationship building

- The concept of engagement runs throughout direct work with young people affected by CSE.

Here it means:

- a) Young people's connection with the practitioner (and direct work) that is sustained.
 - b) Young people's sustained connection or re-connection with services, parents and carers and positive social networks.
- The first line of engagement is established with the practitioner and finding ways to engage young people underpins the relationship. It is an approach that requires consistent attention and evolves over time.
 - Involving young people in decision-making and problem solving helps to build engagement.
 - Helping young people to engage or re-engage in key elements of their lives is crucially important. Building more positive relationships with parents and carers is vital.
 - In particular, continuing engagement or re-engagement in education is widely understood to be a key outcome and protective factor.

- Establishing a trusting relationship is critically important when working with young people who are affected by sexual exploitation.
- This is the foundation upon which direct work and intervention can be built.
- Establishing a trusting relationship takes time and is underpinned by establishing clear boundaries and confidentiality (including their limits).
- Young people are unlikely to disclose exploitation unless they trust the practitioner.

2. Ensuring support and stability

- Young people affected by CSE need ongoing support. This may seem so obvious, that it is often overlooked. Practitioners need to be resilient to support when young people who may behave as if they don't need or want it.
- The first step in providing support is by understanding young people and what they need, which means listening. Young people affected by CSE often have multiple vulnerabilities and unmet needs. CSE may be one of the many factors in young people's lives.
- Providing support to young people involves demonstrating you believe in them, giving encouragement and also challenging appropriately. Feeling understood and supported is likely to be highly valued by young people themselves.
- A key element of direct work involves working with young people to maintain stability in accommodation that meets their needs.

4. Reducing risks

- Reducing the risks associated with CSE is a key element of direct work with young people. It is now commonly understood that risks may increase and decrease during the journey with young people, but the overall goal is risk reduction.
- Young people affected by CSE may struggle to identify behaviour and relationships as abusive and exploitative. This is one of the 10 elements identified in The Greater Manchester Phoenix CSE risk measurement tool currently used in Wigan and Rochdale to risk assess young people.
- A key element of direct work includes working with young people so that they understand healthy and unhealthy relationships and are able to identify exploitative and abusive behaviour. This also involves work around understanding sexual consent, grooming and online safety.
- Direct work with young people also includes sexual health strategies and reduction in substance misuse/alcohol.
- Reducing episodes of missing and associating with risky peers and adults are goals for direct work with young people affected by CSE.

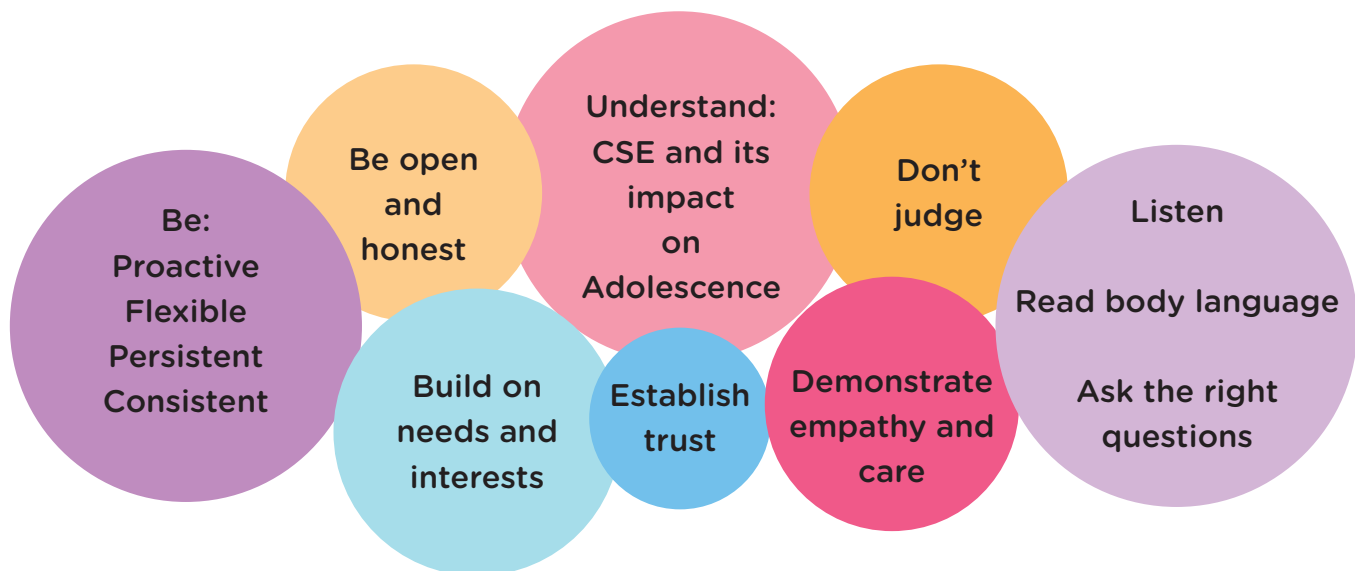
5. Enabling resilience, growth and recovery

- Once a relationship has been established with a young person and they have some stability and increased safety, direct work can then focus upon growth, including identifying strengths, building confidence, resilience and working towards goals and dreams. A key to this is 'enabling' young people to move on themselves.
- Enabling young people to move on may include elements of direct work that is therapeutic. This means that young people feel able to express their feelings and work through their issues. It also means improvement in mental health and wellbeing.
- Direct work provides opportunities for new experiences, positive relationships and personal development.



Effective ways of working with young people

Practitioners summarised the following key factors for effective direct working with CSE affected young people:



Work in spaces chosen by young people Know their learning styles Build in space for reflection and feedback

Effective ways of working with young people

This section contains further reflections from practitioners about effective ways of working with young people.

Understand CSE (and its impact) and adolescence

- Practitioners highlighted the need to understanding CSE and its impact and the nature of adolescence, in order to undertake direct work effectively. CSE relates to the wider body of evidence developed in response to child sexual abuse and domestic abuse, and their impact upon young people. Practitioners highlighted the need to understand the grooming process and how perpetrators exert mental and physical control over their victims, involving coercion and deception, encouraging dependence, isolating the young person from positive support and destroying their self-belief.
- Practitioners need to know how we grow into and through adolescence in order to better understand and relate to the young people they work with as they negotiate complex developmental process.
- Practitioners increasingly understand how trauma and multiple vulnerabilities impact upon young people affected by CSE and how their ways of coping are adapted as a result of such experiences. Although some agencies understand this, and therefore the need to be adaptive themselves, not all do, and this is work in progress.

Establishing trust from the outset

- “Whether working with young people or colleagues, trust is vital.” Establishing trust is crucial to engaging young people and is the foundation on which a relationship can be built. The first meeting establishes the beginning of the trusted relationship. “It’s very important to get this right.”

Being honest and open

- “Trust is exemplified by confidentiality – needs to be highlighted from first meeting.” Practitioners are clear about the limits of their role with young people, are respectful of the information shared and establish what cannot be kept confidential (and why). Leaving confidentiality statements with the young person helps.
- ‘Contracting’ involves exploring roles and responsibilities with the young person and clarifying clear boundaries and expectations.
- Being honest, open and transparent is effective when working with young people. “Don’t promise the earth.”
- “Be real – the young person will know if you are fake.” It’s important to building relationships that practitioners are “real human beings with feelings.”

Don’t judge

- “Young people carry so much blame and guilt.” Practitioners were very clear that they try to ensure that young people don’t feel judged when they are working with them directly. This is an important principle throughout the journey with a young person.



Build on needs and interests

- “Engage in their interests.” Building rapport is also achieved through finding out what the young person’s interests are and relating to them. “You need to be on the same page.” Getting to know them over time and establishing the relationship with the young person on “a needs basis” is seen to be effective.

Listen

- “Someone listening to their needs and an opportunity to speak.” Practitioners are evolving creative forms of communication with young people affected by CSE in order to improve their practice. There is some indication that practitioners believe “some skills can be learnt, but some come from the heart.”
- The importance of active listening is a key skill in direct work with young people affected by CSE. “Young people want is someone that will listen and don’t necessarily give feedback immediately. Don’t always want your opinion, so wait and build the relationship; go back at a later stage.”

Demonstrate empathy and care

- “You shouldn’t purely focus on goals - establishing a relationship and being somebody that children can talk to is very important in itself.” Focusing on problems and problem solving is an important feature of direct work. However, demonstrating empathy and care for the young person aside from professional goals is known to be effective and an important feature of supporting a young person. If young people can talk to you, know that you care about them and “feel the freedom to say what they want” they are more likely to disclose harm. “It took her two years to disclose.” Some young people may never disclose and practitioners have to live with this fact. It is important to be seen to move away from ‘the problem/problems’ in order that the relationship is simply not characterised by CSE and nothing else.
- Young people being themselves and being free to talk about what is important to them is a key indicator of trust, believing that what they have to say is important and being able to express themselves. “Engaging in normal everyday conversations” with a trusted adult, should be a normal feature of adolescence, but it often isn’t.



Be proactive, flexible, persistent and consistent

- Practitioners reach out to young people in their own settings and this proactivity is seen to be crucial.
- Establishing consistency “not letting them down” in interactions and meetings with young people also “shows you care” and proves you can be relied upon.
- “What time next week then?” Direct work can take place in blocks of weeks (6, 12 or 24) and tends to be characterised by regular contact and meetings, almost daily in some instances. Repetition of “same time, same place” works in some cases, though being flexible. Some relationships continue for much longer and may involve long term consistency.
- The young person is often encouraged to make the appointment, “so that they feel more in control.” (One practitioner allows a young woman to write the appointment in her practitioner diary.) Young people have to feel they can contact you.
- Persistence is characterised by “not giving up” and is a key feature of working with young people affected by CSE. Practitioners experience a range of resistance: “door slamming”, “running away”, “jumping out of cars”, “go away” and varying degrees of denial and verbal abuse. Practitioners keep going, “chipping away” and this persistence usually pays off in the end.

Read body language and ask the right questions

- Practitioners read the body language used by young people, which can indicate how they are feeling, including eye contact. Avoiding continuous eye contact is highlighted as a useful technique. Sometimes young people are more likely to engage and talk if they don't have to make direct eye contact.
- Another key skill is being able to ask open questions. Open questions with words like: “Tell” “Explain” “Describe” “Where” “When” “Why” For example: “Tell me how that made you feel.” “Explain how that happened.” “Describe what they looked like.” Avoid closed questions, for example: “Has your day been ok?” Instead: “Tell me how your day has been.” Open questions mean that practitioners gain more detailed and meaningful insights from young people. Continually asking open questions can be time consuming and repetitive for the young person. Tick box and other simple techniques can also be effective sometimes. For example: “On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you....”



Reducing risks

- Knowing young people's learning styles is key, whereby the practitioner finds out how the young person learns and responds best. Practitioners try to find balance between talking and 'doing' activities with young people. "There is no one size fits all" but practitioners are keen to learn more from research and evaluation about whether some approaches work better than others and more precisely what works in improving young people's outcomes.
- Practitioners conduct 'sessions' with young people, usually informally, which are designed to reduce risks associated with CSE. Topics include a core set of issues focused upon: keeping safe, understanding consent, identifying abusive behaviour, online safety and healthy relationships.
- Work around the above topics draws upon handouts from published materials like Barnardo's Love Rocks and their B Wise 2 Exploitation Manual. Activities around consent and healthy relationships can include 'true' or 'false' quizzes and case studies. CEOP DVDs around grooming are well recommended and can be stopped and started for discussion. More generally, 'real life' stimulus materials work well, including newspaper stories of what happened to young people, current exploitation storylines from TV and problem page type scenarios, where young people can give advice and suggestions to other young people. Some practitioners use arts based activities for elements described above. One example is creating consent shapes, where the young person draws/builds who they give consent to. Another example is making jewellery with a young person and talking about safety strategies, like bead rings, that can be left behind as evidence if they find themselves in an unsafe situation.
- Young people are encouraged to develop safety plans and tactics through direct work with practitioners.
- Practitioners need to understand more about young person's substance misuse to signpost or refer to a specialist drug and alcohol service. They ensure a young person has information about ways to reduce the risk around drugs and alcohol. They ask the right questions. Are they provided with alcohol and drugs? Or are drugs and alcohol a factor (do they use before they go out) Do they know what they are taking? Using question prompts:
 - How much?
 - Who with?
 - Where?
 - When?
 - How funded/provided?



Enabling resilience, growth and recovery

- Sometimes young people affected by CSE have missed out on 'normal' teenage experiences. Doing ordinary, everyday things and other activities with young people can fill some of the gaps in their childhood and build self esteem, help them to feel better about themselves and support skills development. These can include: shopping, going to the cinema, eating out, lifts to appointments, horse riding and outdoor activities. These activities can be very important to the young person and provide support. Practitioners also advocate for young people by accompanying them to appointments, school, colleges, training providers and meetings with other agencies. This is important to young people.
- Growth and resilience work focuses upon strengths, self-esteem and confidence, dreams and aspirations. Some of this work is developed using solution-focused approaches whereby the young person identifies their strengths and assets, and what they feel they can do and achieve their goals. Techniques can focus upon activities like life ecomaps to plot what support young people have. Practitioners use strengths cards that young people can choose to identify what they can do.

- The broad definition of 'therapeutic' in the context of working with young people affected by CSE means contributing to a sense of well-being. The use of the concept of direct work as 'therapeutic' is mixed in current practice. Practitioners are clear that direct work should enable young people to work through their feelings at their own pace and when they are ready to do so. Using images on cards to identify how people are feeling is a safe technique for some young people. Some practitioners use arts approaches, for example, talking through photographs and representing feelings through drawing/collage. It is clear that the well-being of the young person is of central importance in direct work and the language permeates practice: "builds increased pride, self-esteem and confidence", "being heard", "feels supported", "learns new coping skills", "feel safe", "enjoyment", "sensory learning", "prevents harm", "listening to their needs", "feel cared for."
- There is growing evidence that specific forms of therapy may help young people and improve their outcomes. The Early Break drug and alcohol charity works closely with Rochdale's multi-disciplinary CSE team and offers alternative therapies to young people, including: aromatherapy, acupuncture/acupressure, Electro-Stimulation Therapy (EST) and Indian head massage, providing relaxation, stress relief and ways of easing emotional trauma.
- Wigan offers a Multi-Systemic Therapy Service (MST) for children and young people on the edge of care and their families. MST blends cognitive behavioral therapy, behavior management training, family therapies and community psychology.
- Practitioners suggest that young people affected by CSE may not be ready for specific forms of formal 'talk based' therapy with specialists, and this is something they may access when they are older and are in the right place to do so.

Future learning and development

This is a working document and will evolve. Future learning and development includes:

- Practitioners welcome the opportunity to discuss, challenge and share practice across local authorities and agencies, in order to improve direct work with young people affected by CSE and improve their outcomes.
- Practitioners will continue to reflect upon effective direct work with young people affected by CSE and incorporate evidence-based insights.
- Discussions are underway regarding how to share resources and ideas in the future.
- Practitioners are developing their direct work 'tool boxes'.
- Practitioners will gather information about the use of technology for direct work with young people, including apps, online interactive activities and opportunities for real time planning and assessment.
- More research and evaluation into the impact of direct work and its relationship to outcomes - clearer evidence about 'what works', for whom and why, would be welcomed, including any new insights into: young people with learning difficulties, specific therapies (including non-talk based) and therapeutic approaches that can be used by non-specialists².

²There is currently limited evaluation of direct work with young people affected by CSE. Barnardo's developed systematic programmes evaluated through their Families and Communities Against Sexual Exploitation (FCASE) projects in 3 regions. www.barnardos.org.uk/university_of_bedfordshire_FCASE_report.pdf

The ACT team will be producing an Insights document into their direct work with young people to add to the series of Insights from practitioners. This will be available later in 2016.



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