

Children, Young People and Modern Slavery

A guide for professionals

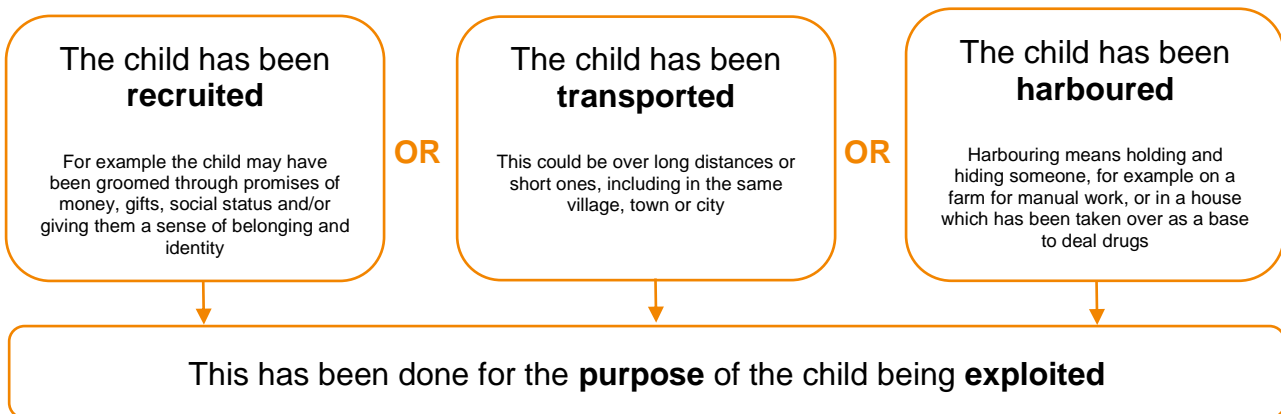
June 2021

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Understanding Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Modern Slavery – If a child is treated as if they are ‘owned’ (like a piece of property) by someone or if they are made to work somewhere and are unable to leave then this is called Modern Slavery.

Human Trafficking – A child should be recognised as a trafficking victim if the following two things have taken place:



Trafficking and Modern Slavery are forms of child abuse and are a serious violation of human rights. This abuse can happen anywhere and the number of victims identified in the UK has grown each year since 2015.

As with all forms of child exploitation, it involves an imbalance of power between the young person and those who are controlling them (for example because of age or status).

International trafficking - Some children and young people are trafficked internationally into the UK from other countries. These children have often experienced exploitation and abuse in their own country, on the journey and when they arrive into the UK. They are commonly deceived about life in the UK through promises of safety, education and well paid work only to instead experience horrific abuse.

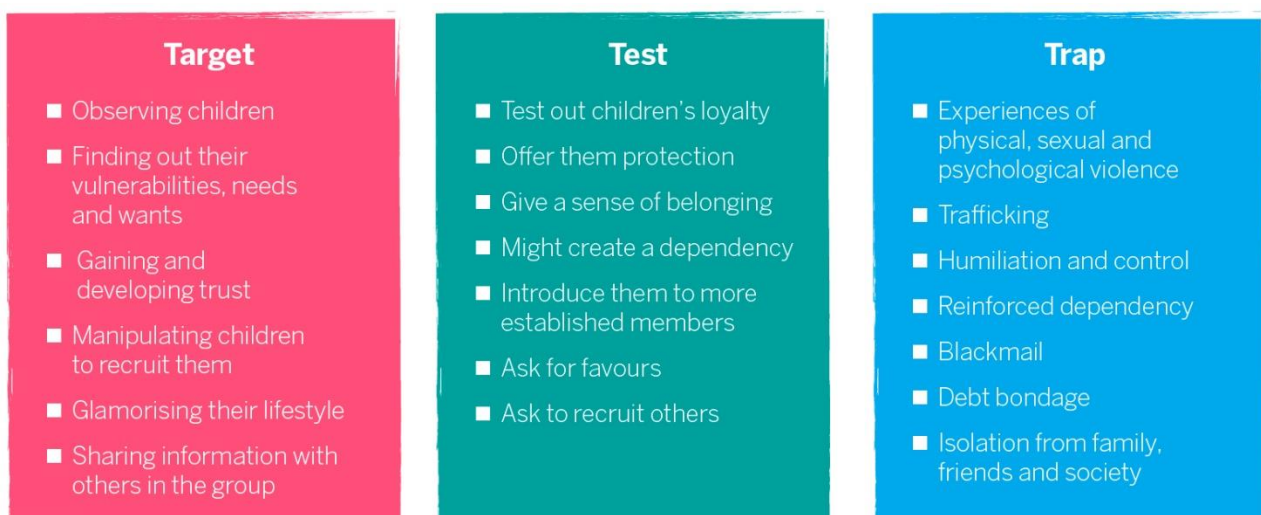
Many young people’s identity documents are created and controlled by their traffickers and they are told that they have debts incurred from bringing them into the country which they need to work to repay. As a result of arriving into a new country, facing language barriers and having little or no support network the young people are often totally reliant on their traffickers.

Domestic trafficking – British children and young people are also targeted for grooming and exploitation and are trafficked all around the UK. Young people internationally trafficked into the UK can also be re-trafficked within the UK.

Grooming

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of abuse or exploitation. Children can be targeted by perpetrators in person or online including through social media and gaming platforms. All children are susceptible to grooming due to the innate vulnerability of being a child.

Perpetrators use a range of strategies to build connections and trust with a child and often seek out unmet needs and vulnerabilities to exploit. Perpetrators use power imbalances and a range of techniques to exert control over children including threats, coercion and deception to trap them into exploitation.



Due to the grooming, manipulation and coercion, children who are being exploited or abused may not understand or recognise they are being exploited. As a result, it can be difficult for a child to talk about what might be happening to them. Children may feel scared about what might happen next and they may distrust the police and other adults in authority. Perpetrators actively foster and encourage this fear and distrust to their benefit.

Forms of child exploitation

Modern slavery of children and young people in the UK takes a variety of forms including but not limited to:

Sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group forces, manipulates or deceives a child or young person into any sexual activity for their own benefit. It can include the young person being forced or coerced to engage in direct sexual contact or to send indecent photographs or videos.

Example: Ali is 16 years old and believes she is in loving relationship with Morgan who is 24. Morgan is controlling and threatening towards Ali, and uses emotional abuse to manipulate her. Morgan is involved in arranging parties where sexual exploitation takes place. Morgan regularly transports Ali to these parties and provides her with alcohol while there. One day Ali finds out that Morgan has taken several videos and photographs of her being sexually assaulted at the parties. Morgan threatens to post the photos and videos online if Ali doesn't introduce more young people to him and bring them along to the next party.

Criminal exploitation

Child criminal exploitation is when children and young people are forced or manipulated to commit crimes for the benefit of their exploiter(s). This can include the young person being coerced or forced into drug trafficking and cultivation, forced begging, money laundering, ATM/credit card theft, pickpocketing, vehicle theft and carrying out robberies or acts of violence.

Example: Charlie is 15 years old and is being exploited by an organised crime group to distribute drugs. The group have been using Charlie to move drugs around the local area for several months now. Charlie originally saw those controlling him as friends but has begun receiving threats of violence. Charlie has been provided with a train ticket and told to travel to an address in another area as he will 'earn more money'. When stopped by the police, Charlie is aggressive and attempts to run. Charlie is fearful of further violence from the perpetrators now the drugs and money have been seized.

Financial exploitation

Perpetrators of exploitation may also financially exploit children and young people, for example by blackmailing them for money. In addition, children and young people can be groomed to hold, store, move or transfer money on behalf of an Organised Crime Group.

Example: Sam is 17 years old and was groomed online via a social media platform. Sam was initially asked to hold money in their bank account which they did not realise was obtained from criminal activity. The perpetrator went on to blackmail Sam with details of the crime they had committed by holding this money. Sam was then coerced into grooming other children to share their bank details and made to send indecent imagery of themselves to the perpetrator.

Forced labour

Forced labour is when a child or young person is forced to work under the menace of any penalty for little or no money. They may be forced to work in environments such as farms, building sites, hair salons, nail bars, car washes or takeaways.

Example: Vu is 14 years old and originally from Vietnam. Vu is currently living with a Vietnamese couple they say took them in when they arrived alone in the UK. Vu regularly appears tired and anxious, struggles to concentrate in school and rarely completes homework. Vu has disclosed working in a nail bar since entering the UK but says they are 'only training' despite working in the nail salon most days and for long hours at weekends.

Domestic servitude

Domestic servitude is when a child is confined to a home to do housework such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare.

Example: When 16 year old Elvira arrived in the UK, she thought she had escaped the abuse she'd faced as a domestic worker in Qatar. However Elvira was taken to a luxury flat in London, where her abuser, the sister of her "madam" in Qatar, made her work 20 hours a day and allowed her only left over food and no wages. Elvira is trapped in a life of servitude, while metres away central London bustled with shoppers.

Forced or child marriage

Forced/child marriage when a child or young person is forced to marry against their will. They are viewed as something to be traded and used for sexual activity and housework.

Example: During the school holidays, 16 year old Jamelah travelled to Somalia with her family. It soon became apparent to Jamelah that the purpose of the trip was for her to meet her new husband. Jamelah was told that if she did not marry the 34 year old man, she would bring shame to her family. Jamelah no longer had access to her passport and was not allowed back to the UK until she was married. Soon after they married, Jamelah was subjected to sexual abuse and rape.

Signs and indicators

Children and young people who are being exploited may not always appear vulnerable. Changes in young people's behaviour could indicate exploitation. Look for things that don't seem right and listen to your instincts, **if something doesn't feel right, it may not be.**

Some signs that you might notice could include the child or young person:

Physical

- Having unexplained or untreated injuries
- Giving varying accounts for injuries or accounts that do not reflect the injury
- Appearing malnourished, unkempt or dishevelled
- Experiencing sexually transmitted infections or unwanted pregnancies
- Standing out from other family or household members in terms of their presentation and quality of clothing
- Having poor living conditions and staying in environments that are cramped or overcrowded

Travel and movement

- Staying out late or going missing, even for short periods of time
- Being found in areas far from their home
- Being transported to or from the scene of a crime
- Possessing train tickets or other travel documents to areas they have no connection to
- Being found repeatedly 'fare-dodging' outside of their local area
- Travelling in private cars or taxis at unusual times for no known reason
- Being unable to leave the house on their own or having their movements monitored
- Being locked in a room or otherwise having their movement restricted

Behaviour and emotional wellbeing

- Appearing angry, fearful, anxious, withdrawn or confused
- Expressing anger, aggression and overconfidence or not caring what happens to them

- Displaying increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour, this could be a sign of trauma
- Experiencing significant changes in their emotional wellbeing
- Becoming secretive about their whereabouts and activities
- Appearing under the control or influence of others

Gifts and unexplained items

- Talking about gifts or money they have received
- Having a new phone or possessing more than one phone
- Having unexplained or out of character acquisition of money, clothes, accessories, credit, jewellery and other items or gifts
- Carrying lots of cash

Education

- Not attending education
- Going missing from their education setting
- Arriving late to school/college or having unexplained absences
- Struggling to concentrate and not completing homework

Communication

- Appearing worried about being away from their phone or controlled by their phone
- Receiving a large number of calls or messages
- Appearing anxious to immediately respond to texts, messages or phone calls
- Using sexual, drug related or violent language that you wouldn't expect them to know
- Avoiding eye contact and letting others talk for them, even when addressed directly
- Giving accounts which seem coached or rehearsed

Other

- Not having access to their identity documents
- Being reluctant or unable to give details of accommodation or other personal details
- Having large, unexplained gaps in their personal history
- Expressing excessive concern about their family (in the UK or their country of origin)
- Unusual sleeping patterns
- Being found begging, in a cannabis factory or cuckooed property.

Please note, this is not an exhaustive list.

Responding to concerns

If you suspect that a child or young person may be a victim of modern slavery:

- Follow your organisations safeguarding policy as **Modern Slavery is a form of abuse**.
- Seek support and talk through your worries. Some organisations that can provide advice are listed at the end of this document.
- Children need to feel safe and heard. Remember the child is not to blame. Anyone can be targeted for grooming and exploitation and perpetrators will use a variety of tactics to manipulate, coerce and control victims.
- Think about how to discuss your concerns with the young person – where would be most appropriate for this conversation to take place and who is best placed to initiate the conversation?
- Report your concerns to your **Local Authority Safeguarding Hub** alongside any evidence or intelligence.

Reporting concerns to the Local Authority Safeguarding Hub:

- If you suspect that a child may be a victim of modern slavery, make a **safeguarding referral** to the Local Authority Safeguarding Hub for an assessment to take place.
- You can find contact details for your local council's children's social care department via <https://www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse>.
- As part of the Local Authority assessment, an NRM referral should be submitted once all information sharing has taken place.

Reporting concerns to the police:

- If you suspect modern slavery, report to the police on **101**. In an emergency always contact **999**.
- If you would rather remain anonymous, you can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers online via www.crimestoppers-uk.org or call **0800 555 111**.

In some areas of the UK, children can access the support of the **Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) Service**. If the child you are concerned about lives or has links to Wales / Cymru, East Midlands, West Midlands Combined Authorities, Bedfordshire, Gloucestershire (including Bristol), Warwickshire, all London Boroughs, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Kent, Surrey, Essex, Greater Manchester, North & West Yorkshire, Lancashire or Merseyside, submit an online ICTG trafficking **referral form**.

The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline is a free, independent and confidential service available 24/7. The helpline provides information and advice about any modern slavery issue to potential victims, businesses, the public and statutory agencies. Call the helpline on **0800 012 1700**.

The NSPCC helpline is staffed by trained professionals who can provide expert advice and support relating to any concern regarding a child. Call their helpline on **0808 800 5000**, email help@nspcc.org.uk or use their [online reporting tool](#).

National Referral Mechanism

The **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)** is the process used to identify and support victims of trafficking in the UK. The NRM is also a useful tool for disrupting perpetrators of exploitation. To be referred to the NRM the young person first needs to be referred to an organisation with 'first responder' status, for example police, children's social care and some charities.

Statutory agencies (including police and local authorities) have a duty to report suspected trafficking cases under Section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

A child does not have to provide their consent to be referred into the NRM. This means if an agency is dealing with a potential child victim of Modern Slavery or Human Trafficking they **must** refer them. It is crucial to remember that you only need to think a child **may be** experiencing this form of abuse. You do not need to know for sure.

The referral form can be accessed via this link: <https://www.modernslavery.gov.uk/start>

The importance of multi-agency working

It is important to remember that the NRM is an **evidence gathering process**. A nominated lead agency should make the referral, ensuring that they receive input from all other relevant agencies who have information regarding the child's experiences as a victim. This will often include statutory agencies but it is also vital to include relevant information from third sector partners. Providing more detailed information will help improve decision making and outcomes within the NRM. It also helps to avoid multiple NRM applications being made for the same individual, which can contribute to delays in the system.

Submitting information to the NRM should be an ongoing process. Following completion of the initial referral, any professional working with the child can submit additional information or evidence that would be helpful in making a decision about whether the child is a victim of modern slavery. This could include further indicators that have been observed, disclosures or incidents which have happened since the initial referral. New information should be sent to nationalreferralmechanism@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Please note, at the time of writing this document some local authority areas are taking part in a pilot whereby NRM decisions are instead overseen by the local authority, rather than the Single Competent Authority at the Home Office. This is only taking place in some areas and approaches may vary where this 'devolved decision making' approach is being piloted. The local authority areas who are not taking part in this pilot should continue to follow the existing

decision making process through the Single Competent Authority. You can find further details including information on which locations are taking part in this pilot [here](#).

What does the NRM decision mean?

The decision making process has two steps:

1. A **Reasonable Grounds decision** should be made within five days.

This means '**I suspect but cannot prove**', they are a victim.

2. Following this, a final **Conclusive Grounds decision** should be made.

This means '**It is more likely than not**' they are a victim.

Support for young people

If a child receives a positive Conclusive Grounds decision from the Home Office then they should be provided with access to support to help them recover from their experiences, such as therapy. This support should be provided by social services and the NRM decision should be part of safeguarding decision making.

Criminal decision making

A positive conclusive grounds decision in the NRM is a crucial piece of evidence to guide criminal decision making.

If a person is identified as a victim of trafficking, this should affect the way they are treated if they are arrested or facing charges for a crime committed in connection with their exploitation. In this situation, trafficking victims also have the right to use the Section 45 defence as set out in the **Modern Slavery Act 2015**. It is the responsibility of professionals to identify situations where the Section 45 defence may be relevant as children cannot be expected to understand or recognise that they have been trafficked.

There are some crimes which fall outside of the scope of the Modern Slavery Defence as set out in Schedule 4 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. However, the young person's trafficking status should still be considered as a possible mitigating factor in sentencing decisions.

Reconsideration requests

A negative NRM decision does not mean the child or young person is not a victim of trafficking, it means that on the information available at the time, a balance of probability is not in the favour of them being a victim. First responders are provided with a detailed 'decision-minute' which explains the reasons for the negative decision. The decision can then be challenged

via a **reconsideration request**. The Childrens Society have created a reconsideration request template which can be accessed via our resources page [here](#).

The reconsideration request should:

- Provide details of any relevant events which have occurred since the initial referral
- Point out any inappropriate application of guidance or misunderstanding of grooming and exploitation in the decision minutes
- Include any additional trafficking indicators
- Include any views of the young person they want to be taken into account

As a professional, you should also explain to children and their families, (where relevant and appropriate), that they also have the right to legal advice where they are unhappy with a decision. This area of law is overseen by Public Law solicitors. Legal aid may be available for this depending on their circumstances. A directory of reputable Public Law solicitors can be found [here](#).

Note: a child does not have to consent to be referred into the NRM, but once they turn 18, they can withdraw the referral.

Advice and further information

Useful organisations and websites:

- [The Children's Society](#)
- [Modern Slavery Helpline](#)
- [Barnardos Counter Trafficking Service](#)
- [ECPAT](#)
- [Unseen](#)
- [Stop the Traffik](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [Hestia](#)
- [Anti-Slavery International](#)
- [BAWSO \(Wales only\)](#)