

# “If only someone had listened”

## Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups



### Background

In the past few years public awareness of child sexual exploitation has increased but too many children and young people are still victims. There is some good work happening but lots still needs to be done to protect children at risk of being exploited or those who are already victims.

In 2009 the Government put out [Working Together guidance](#) on how to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation. We found that only 6% of Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards, the committees which co-ordinate local services for children, were doing everything that the guidance said.

### Definitions

#### What is child sexual exploitation?

This happens when someone makes a child take part in sexual activities against their will or when they are too young or powerless to give proper consent. The person exploiting the child always gains power and control and may even make money out of forcing the child to have sex.



#### What is child sexual exploitation by a gang?

Gang members are usually aged between 13 and 25. They often commit crimes, are violent, have a name and are based in a particular post code. Children, especially girls, can be sexually exploited by gang members but this is not usually why the gang forms.



#### What is child sexual exploitation by a group?

This involves people who come together either in person or online, to sexually exploit children and young people.



## What is this report about?

In 2011 the Office of the Children's Commissioner decided to do a two year piece of work to find out about child sexual exploitation by gangs and groups. In total, six reports have been published.

### Year 1 (Nov 2011–2012)

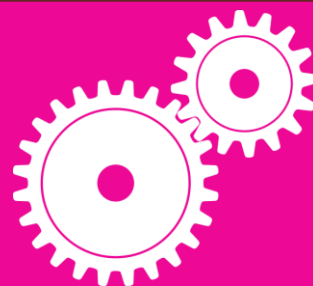
The first year collected evidence on child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups across England. Some of the main findings were:

- 2,409 children and young people are victims of sexual exploitation by groups and gangs
- 16,500 children and young people were at risk of sexual exploitation
- too many children and young people had been let down by services who should be protecting them.



### Year 2 (Nov 2012–2013)

The second year looked at examples of good and bad practice, which helped tell us what needs to be done to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation by groups and gangs. Using this we developed the **See Me, Hear Me** Framework.



## Where did we get our evidence?

For both phases of the inquiry, the findings and recommendations came from children and young people, carers, professionals, agencies, evaluations of places and responses from every Local Safeguarding Children Board and police force in England.

## What did we find out?

We spoke to children and young people who had been victims of children sexual exploitation about how they had been treated by services. Here are a few of the things they told us:

'They acted like they know everything about me, but they don't know me'

'They talked about me like I wasn't there. They were very harsh'

'[We] built a relationship and they got to know us and when we felt trust we told them what was going on'

'Sometimes you are feeling better and have built up your self-confidence. But then something happens and you feel afraid and feel down and are afraid to tell someone. That is why they should stick with you'

Putting this together with conversations we had with professionals and our ongoing research, we found that there are **nine things** that need to be done to help prevent child sexual exploitation by gangs and groups.

Some areas are doing some of the things well but we didn't find anywhere that was doing everything as well as they should have been.

**The nine things are:**

<b>1</b> Focus on the child, their individual needs and give them continued support	<b>2</b> Engage with children and build a relationship of trust	<b>3</b> Have good leadership that understands the number of children at risk and the money and resources needed to help stop child sexual exploitation
<b>4</b> Have specific plans in place to protect children from child sexual exploitation	<b>5</b> Understand child sexual exploitation and know how to spot the warning signs and who the victims might be	<b>6</b> Agencies such as children's social workers, doctors, the police and school should work together to share information, rather than working alone
<b>7</b> Always check if actions to tackle child sexual exploitation are working and make changes if necessary	<b>8</b> Realise child sexual exploitation is a problem, identify victims early and act quickly	<b>9</b> Everyone needs to be told about child sexual exploitation and how to look out for it, this includes professionals, families, communities and local businesses people

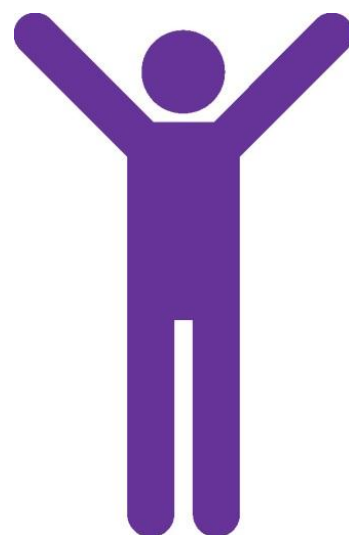
## See Me, Hear Me Framework

Using these findings, we decided that a national response is needed that makes sure every organisation works together to protect children and young people. So we developed the **See Me, Hear Me** Framework.

The **See Me, Hear Me** framework uses findings from the inquiry and was developed with the help of children and young people who have been victims of child sexual exploitation and people who are experts in the field.

Our big message is that the professionals whose job it is to keep children safe must always make sure that any child at risk of being hurt is their top priority at all times. Any decisions they make must be about doing the very best for the child.

It has **seven main principles**:



Support should be given based on individual circumstances, such as who is hurting the child and what support is needed for the child's family. This support must be provided by the same person over time

The child's best interests are the top priority

There must be regular staff training and people always checking for best practice

Agencies should sign up to an agreement about what information needs to be shared and how to do this

The child sexual exploitation strategy must be checked regularly to see if it is working

Problems in a local area need to be checked regularly to understand the patterns of child sexual exploitation. Local agencies must share this information for their action plans

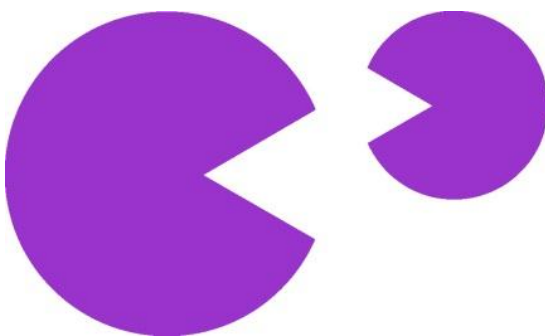
Agencies must include children in all decisions made about them

**Children and young people need to be involved in all of these processes.**

## What does the See Me, Hear Me Framework look like?

The Framework has been developed as a set of questions that fall into three categories:

- **Voice of the child**
- **Voice of the professional**
- **Protecting the child**



From our findings these are questions that victims of child sexual exploitation and the people working with them are likely to be thinking and seeking answers to. They are designed to make sure children are supported and protected in the best possible way.

The **See Me, Hear Me** Framework is on the next page. In the full report there is more explanation about how to use these questions.

## See Me, Hear Me

### A Framework for protecting children

Figure 10: Getting the focus right



Underpinned by: Children Act 1989, UNCRC Articles 3, 12, 19, 24, 34, 39.  
 Seven Principles: 1) The child's best interests must be the top priority. 2) Participation of children and young people. 3) Enduring relationships and support. 4) Comprehensive problem-profiling. 5) Effective information-sharing within and between agencies. 6) Supervision, support and training for staff. 7) Evaluation and review.

## What does all this work mean?

Based on this work we have made **eight recommendations** to the Government about what should be done to help stop CSE in the future:

The Department of Education should check whether the working together guidance on child sexual exploitation (2009) needs to be changed or updated

Local Safeguarding Children Boards should do what the working together guidance says

Local Safeguarding Children Boards need to look at their action plans on child sexual exploitation to check they are working and include things we have said, like the **See Me, Hear Me** framework

Local agencies must share information in an agreed way

Local authorities have a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment explaining health needs of people in that area. This must include evidence about child sexual exploitation

Relationships and sex education must be taught in every school and college across England by specially trained and skilled practitioners.

Agencies need to check their plans on how to stop child sexual exploitation and make sure these plans work with other agencies

Agencies need to look at things to help understand child sexual exploitation in their area, such as who the victims are, offenders, gangs, gang-associated girls and high risk neighbourhoods

## What happens now?

Several different things will now happen:



The Government will look at our eight recommendations. They may or may not do what we suggest but they must tell us what they are doing and if they don't agree with our recommendations, then why not



We will try out the **See Me, Hear Me** framework in at least three local areas to see how it works to help prevent child sexual exploitation



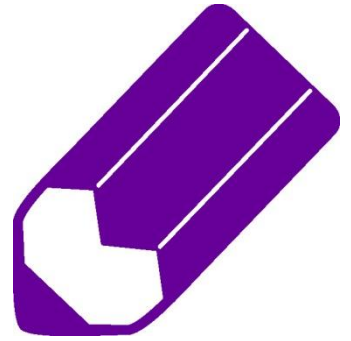
We are worried about children who are sexually abused by family members or family friends and will do a lot more work to find out about this and how best to keep children safe.

## Contact us

If you have any questions about anything you have read in this report please get in touch with us at [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk) or phone us on 020 7783 8330.

You can also visit our website: <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/> where you can view the other reports we have done.

To see the full version of this report please go to:  
[http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content\\_743](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_743)



## Help and Advice

If you are worried about yourself, your child, someone else or have any questions there are a number of people you can contact:

### **NSPCC ChildLine:**

For general information about help and advice you can visit the website:

<http://www.childline.org.uk/pages/home.aspx>

To speak to someone on the phone you can call:

**0800 1111**

**THIS NUMBER IS FREE FROM MOBILES, LANDLINES AND PAYPHONES**

If you would rather talk to someone online, ask a question or email you can go to:

<http://www.childline.org.uk/talk/Pages/Talk.aspx>

### **Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP):**

If you are a parent and want practical advice you can visit:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>

For practical advice for all ages you can visit the CEOP help page:

<http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

The CEOP help page has a link to the “thinkuknow” website. If you are a child, young person or adult you can visit this to learn how to be safe online. If you work with children and young people there is a section on the website for you:

<http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>