# Welcome to this Practice Week session

Please be considerate to others - we want this to be a safe, open and reflective space to learn and share thoughts and ideas.

You can turn on live captions on by clicking on the 3 dots at the top of your screen if you need this.

Please be aware that this session is being recorded. Your presenter will let you know at the start of the session. If you do not wish to appear on the recording, just keep your camera off.

Thank you!

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# Joining the dots:

## A multi-agency response to group-based exploitation

Norfolk County Council

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NORFOLK CONSTABULARY
Our Priority is You

NHS
East of England
Community Health and Care
NHS Trust

Improving lives together
Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care System

# A safe space for a difficult subject

**Pause • step out • seek support**

- The session is being recorded
- This session includes discussion of child exploitation, coercion, criminality and trafficking.
- Take care of yourself—pause, step out or seek support if you need to.
- All case studies are anonymised. Do not share details about children, families or live cases.
- Follow local information-sharing procedures after the session.
- Contact us on phoenix@norfolk.gov.uk if anything in this presentation resonates and you believe a child exploitation screening is needed.

**Safety applies to participants, children, families and live information.**

# Where is your confidence today?

**A Knowing the signs** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**B Supporting and sharing information** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Keep your number in mind, we will return to it later.**

# What do we mean by group-based exploitation?

A definition of exploitation:  An individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity.  This activity happens in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the facilitator.  Exploitation can occur even if the sexual activity appears consensual, and it may take place through physical contact or via technology.

A definition of group-based exploitation from the Casey report: "Group-based child sexual exploitation is where there is more than one perpetrator with some form of connection – relatives, work connections, or people who share an interest, including having a sexual interest in children."

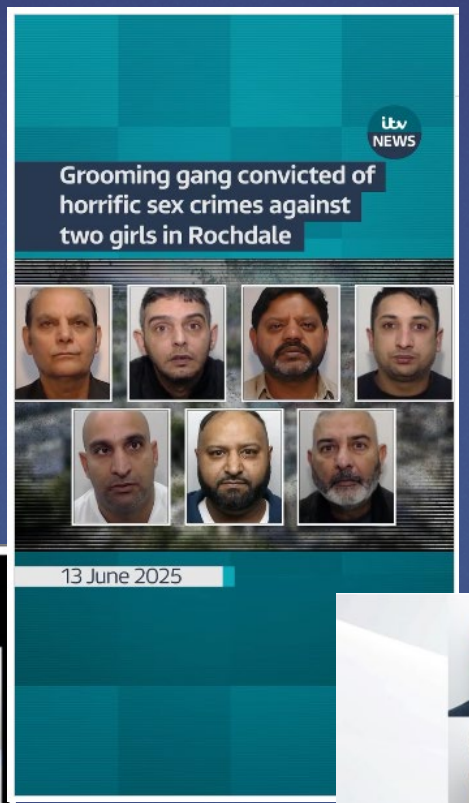
# What do we mean by group-based exploitation?

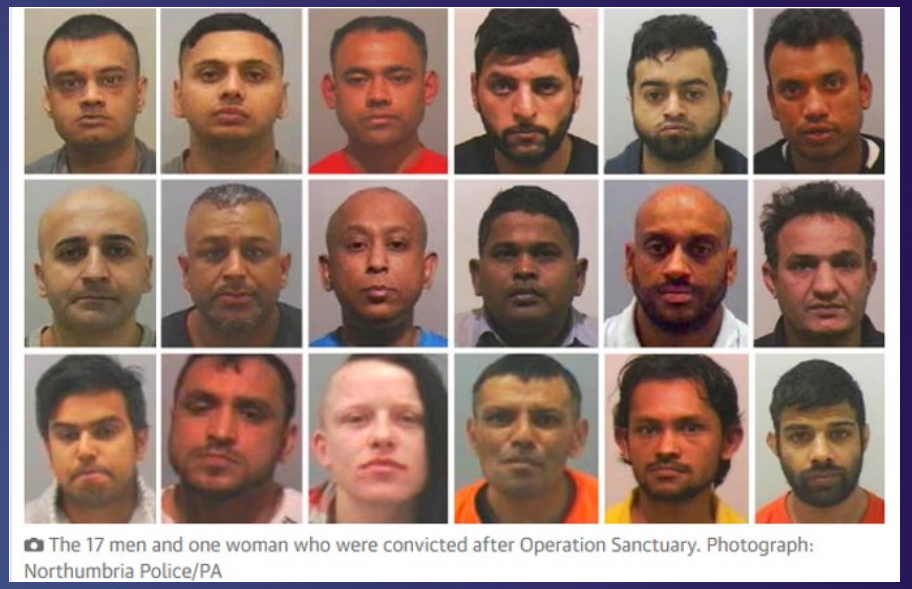
- More than one person causes, facilitates or benefits from exploitation.
- More than one child is connected through people, places or activity.
- It can involve sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and trafficking.
- It may happen online, offline—or through a blend of both.

**Different types of exploitation can be intertwined.**

# Groups networks and associations; high profile UK grooming gangs

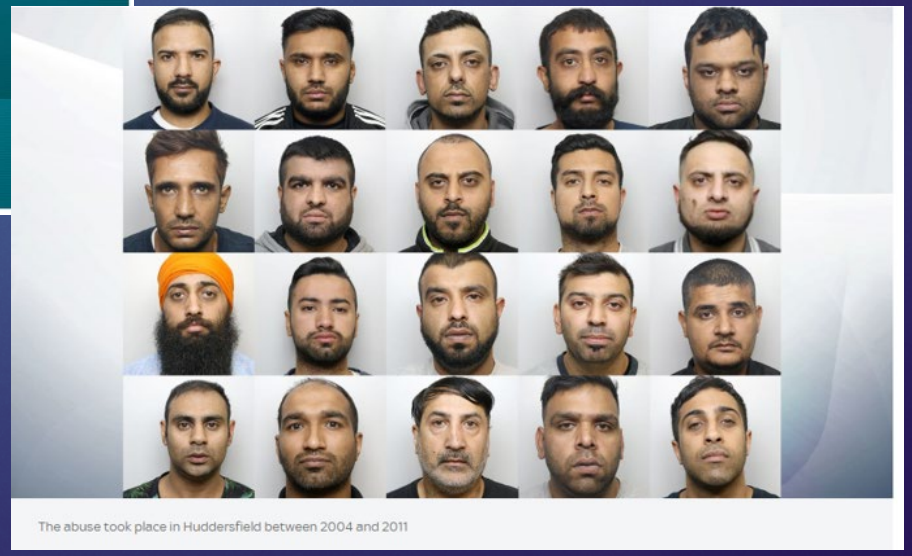








# Groups networks and associations; what are we looking for?

- Adults may be connected through ethnicity, business, accommodation or social spaces.
- They may not be adults, the exploitation might be from peers
- They could be any ethnicity
- Peer exploitation can involve a child who is both victim and exploiter
- Online “Com” group activity can connect people and harm across locations

**Group exploitation is not necessarily organised.**

# Com groups

- Com groups use grooming and blackmail to control people and gain status.
- Victims and offenders are mainly under 18. Both may need protection.
- Groups operate across borders on messaging and gaming platforms.
- Assess patterns and sudden changes. No single sign proves involvement.
- Report to police, quoting Com activity.  Preserve evidence.  Call 999 for immediate danger.
- Coordinate safeguarding and wellbeing support for every child involved.
- Professional guidance only. Teach protective on-line skills using age-appropriate resources.

**Victims and offenders may not recognise themselves as such**

# When behaviour might indicate harm

**The indicators are the same as for individual exploitation: look for pattern, context and change.**

- Missing episodes
- Staying with unsafe people or in unsafe locations
- Absent from education
- Substance misuse with no means to pay
- Hostility towards practitioners or family
- Offending behaviour
- Unexplained money or gifts
- Obsession with new online friends

**Difficult-to-manage behaviour and non-engagement do not mean an absence of need or risk.**

# What might group-based exploitation look like?

**01**

**LOW-LEVEL EVENTS**

Repeated concerns over time

**02**

**PEOPLE**

Children found together; names recur

**03**

**PLACES**

Local hot spots and unsafe addresses

**04**

**ACTIVITY**

Crime, drugs, transport, money or online groups

**05**

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The combined picture changes the risk

**The network may exist without being visible to any one agency.**

# Case study – Amy



## TASK

Using the information from the presentation so far, review the case study and identify what forms of exploitation Amy might be experiencing. How might we use our professional curiosity to understand whether this is group-based exploitation?

## SATURDAY — THE HAYMARKET

Amy is 15 years old. One Saturday Amy and her friend Mia, 16 years old, met four lads at the Haymarket who had some vodka. They all shared it and got talking.  They were a good laugh to hang out with. One of them said they had a flat they could all go back to and carry on drinking, just outside the city centre. One of them had a car too. The lads had balaclavas, and when Amy and Mia got in the car, they also had machetes. They were all laughing, posing, wearing the balaclavas and holding the machetes up, posting stuff on social media. It felt a bit weird; a bit dangerous but it was ok, the lads seemed fun and they were only a little bit older than Amy and Mia.

# Amy – her story continued

## AT THE FLAT

When they got to the flat, Amy remembers they carried on drinking and she passed out at some point. When she came to, her knickers and her skirt were messed up and she felt sick, but she was ok. Her head was spinning but she was sure she saw one of the boys get off Mia and another one get on top of her. Amy didn't remember their names, but she thought she heard one being called "Kai". The address was either 3 or 5 Sycamore Close; she wasn't sure which. When Mia woke up it was late, but they left together and managed to walk home. Mia said they shouldn't say anything because her dad wouldn't let her go out to the Haymarket ever again if he knew.

**Notice the people, place, transport, substances, weapons, possible sexual harm and barriers to disclosure.**

# Amy - reflection

## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Amy felt weird about it all the next day. She told her mum about what had happened. Mum said she didn't know what to do. Later in the day, mum told Amy's aunt about what had happened, and her aunt reported it to Police. It came through to CADS as intel. There is a Kai well known to TYSS, CADS and Phoenix and the addresses in Sycamore Close were both found to be semi-independent accommodation. The young people living in those addresses are Looked After by the Local Authority, but none of them is called Kai.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- What kind of exploitation do you see in the case study?
- What indicators of group-based exploitation might you see?
- What information might you want to seek from other agencies?
- What barriers might there be to seeing the full picture about Amy, Mia, Kai and the lads at Sycamore Close?

# The national picture

**122,768**

police-recorded CSAE offences in 2024

**+6%**

change from 2023

**42%**

had an online footprint

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**3.6%** of recorded CSAE crimes were classified as group-based offending.

**Treat recorded data as a floor, not the full picture: under-reporting, changing definitions and fragmented recording systems limit confidence in prevalence.**

Sources: Hydrant Programme, 2024 police-recorded CSAE analysis (published 2025); HMICFRS inspections, 2023 and 2025.

# Casey report

**12** **recommendations accepted by government in January 2026**

- National Criminal Operation
- Independent National Inquiry
- Mandatory Rape Charges for Under-16s
- Mandatory Ethnicity and Nationality Data
- Disregarding Unjust Criminal Convictions
- Mandatory Information Sharing
- Unique Child Reference Numbers
- Taxi Licensing Reform
- National Operating Model for Police
- Child Protection Data Review & Research
- Police System Upgrades
- Multi-Year Resource Commitment & Tracking

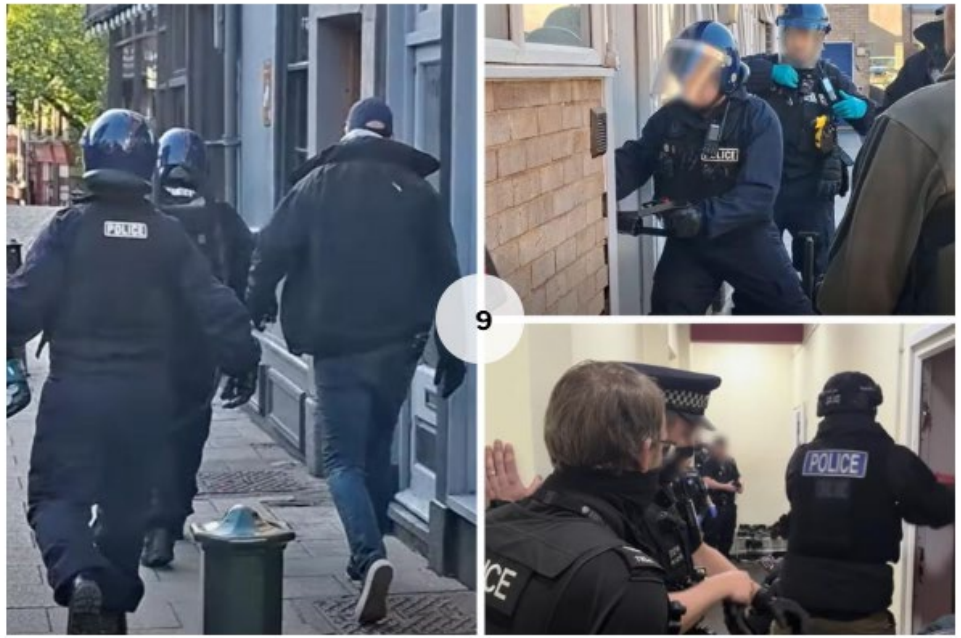
Operation Beaconport

**The audit turns “joining the dots” into a national accountability requirement.**

# Our experience in Norfolk

22nd May Crime Norwich

## Seven charged in Norwich grooming gang investigation






By Ben Fieldhouse
Live Reporter

## Seven men charged with rape and child sexual abuse offences in Norwich

**Afghan nationals accused of being part of grooming gang, as part of investigation into group-based child exploitation**




The Afghan men appeared before Norwich magistrates court and were remanded in custody until a plea hearing at Norwich crown court on 19 June. Photograph: Robert Evans/Alamy

Seven men have been accused of being part of a grooming gang and charged with rape and child sexual abuse offences, police said.

The Afghan nationals were charged as part of an investigation into group-based child sexual exploitation in Norwich, Norfolk police said. The men are accused of sexual offences committed between August 2023 and May 2025.

# Learning from our experiences in Norfolk

| | |
|---|---|
| **LISTEN** | to one another's gut instinct |
| **RECOGNISE** | the situation and safeguard collectively as well as individually |
| **SHARE EARLY** | combine safeguarding and investigative perspectives |
| **STAY ALONGSIDE** | maintain support for victims before and during any enforcement activity |

**If agencies had shared information earlier, the pattern might have been seen sooner.**

# Professional curiosity: map the context, not just the incident

## PEOPLE

- Who is connected?
- Who introduced whom?
- Whose name or account recurs?

## PLACES

- Where do they meet?
- Which routes or addresses recur?
- What makes the location unsafe?

## ACTIVITY

- Who provides transport, money, substances or tech?
- How are online and offline links connected?

**We cannot assume that the exploitation we see is an isolated incident.**

# From information to intelligence

**1**

## SHARE

Factual observations
from every agency

**2**

## MAP

People, places,
activity
and online links

**3**

## ROUTE

Use the right
safeguarding
and police channels

**4**

## RETURN

Bring proportionate
insight
back to the network

**Information becomes intelligence when it changes safeguarding action.**

**No one agency can see the full picture.**

# Relationships before disclosure

**“Disclosure is not the price a child has to pay before receiving help.”**

| | |
|---|---|
| **TRUSTED PRACTITIONER** | Reliable and consistent, without repeated investigative questioning. |
| **PERSISTENT, NOT PUNITIVE** | Do not make missed appointments a reason to withdraw support. |
| **TRANSPARENT** | Explain consent, confidentiality and when information must be shared. |
| **BUILD SAFETY AT THEIR PACE** | Respond to harm while helping disclosure become safer. |

**A lack of disclosure is not the same as a lack of harm.**

# Parents and carers: partners, not sole protectors

## WHAT FAMILIES MAY BE CARRYING

- Fear, exhaustion and loss of control
- Threats or violence affecting the household
- Damage to the parent-child relationship
- Blame for harm occurring outside the home

## WHAT THE NETWORK MUST DO

- Ask what the family has already tried
- Separate parental capacity from external control
- Build realistic plans with the family
- Consider siblings, connected children and perpetrator disruption

**Reframe the question: not “Why can’t the parent stop this?” but “What requires agency action?”**

**Families are essential safeguarding partners, but external harm cannot always be managed by families alone.**

# Protect the child. Disrupt the context.

## PROTECT

- Immediate safety and contingency planning
- Trusted adults who remain alongside
- Support that rebuilds family and peer relationships
- Safe transport, contact and return-home arrangements

## CHANGE THE CONTEXT

- Assess recurring locations, routes and online spaces
- Increase guardianship and work with responsible adults
- Engage schools, housing, businesses and transport providers
- Use disruption and legal powers where necessary and proportionate

**THE STAIRWELL TEST** **Do we repeatedly restrict children, or assess and change the place that enables the harm?**

**Protection should not all be about restricting young people's movement.**

# Challenges in working with group based exploitation

## WHAT MAKES IT HARD

- Hidden networks and online activity
- Fragmented information across agencies
- Multiple local authorities or areas
- Limited disclosure and professional uncertainty
- Compliance that does not always mean safety

## WHAT HELPS

- Use shared definitions and curious questions
- Share information—not assumptions
- Map across boundaries and online spaces
- Maintain support despite uncertainty
- Share responsibility for protection and disruption

**We can overcome these challenges when we share information and responsibility.**

# Where is your confidence now?

**A Knowing the signs** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**B Supporting and sharing information** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**What will you take forward into your practice with children abused through exploitation?**

Answer in the chat

Phoenix Project

# Key Takeaways

**NOTICE**

patterns and connections

**SHARE**

Contribute information and intelligence

**ACT TOGETHER**

Protect children, disrupt networks and support recovery

**No single professional sees the whole picture.**
**Together we do.**

Please provide some feedback, it only takes a minute

# Links

CEOP information for professionals about on-line harm groups or Com groups: online-harm-groups_professionals.pdf

Government needs to act faster on grooming gang inquiry, says survivor - BBC News

Experienced abuse or exploitation as a child? | When You Are Ready

National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (accessible) - GOV.UK
commonly called the Casey report