Disruption activity is designed to reduce risks posed to young people under the age of 18 who are being sexually or criminally exploited. Perpetrators patterns of behaviour include coercion, violence, intimidation and the power imbalance inherent in them. To manage these risks, different approaches are needed that consider young people's circumstances: such as the age of victims; the context in which offences occur; and the risk they pose. Disruption requires a range of different tools, deployed tactically by different agencies working together to disrupt the risks posed to them.

Target audience

This guide is aimed at front line practitioners who are supporting young people at risk of exploitation, including the police and other law enforcement agencies, social care, housing, education, the voluntary sector and related partner organisations. It is designed to help practitioners consider legislative and non-legislative disruption activity and empathises that disruption activity is the responsibility of all agencies.

Disruption activity

Reducing the risks of exploitation is a priority for the PSCP, further information can be found here.

While criminal prosecution of child abuse perpetrators may represent the most desired outcome of law enforcement activity, it is not appropriate to leave the protection of vulnerable children and young people to the criminal justice process alone. This OMG considers disruption options legislative and non-legislative options.

Legislative disruption options

The Home Office have produced a child exploitation disruption toolkit to help all safeguarding partners to understand and access existing legislative opportunities at their disposal and to target specific risks, ranging from warning notices to offence charges and care orders.

The toolkit is split into six areas of law enforcement and other agency activity; these are abduction and trafficking, sexual offences, victim care, behaviour, location and other options. It emphasises that effective multi-agency collaboration to disrupt child exploitation is likely to involve the use of tools from more than one area. Each area explains: legislation, when and how can it be used, impact, case study (where appropriate). In addition to the six areas, the disruption toolkit includes best practice guidance in three areas; information sharing and multi-agency working, intelligence and evidence and further links.

The Home Office National Enforcement Powers guide aims to help facilitate a faster tactical multi-agency response and to use the appropriate legislation available to gain entry into commercial and residential premises, where intelligence has indicated that there could be a potential case of exploitation or modern slavery. The guide aims at assisting practitioners to navigate the often complex process of knowing which agencies are able to intervene in operational activity and police investigations and includes a comprehensive overview of each agency's remit, their enforcement powers and details on how they can support multi-agency activity.

For any disruption activity in relation to a child who is looked after, agreement is needed from the Deputy Director of Children Social Care.

Non-legislative options

Enforcement action is sometimes not an option requiring alternative disruption interventions being considered and requires practitioners to consider different approaches. This could be a Contextual Safeguarding approach whereby practitioners develop an understanding, and response to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families or could require practitioners to undertake more robust engagement and diversionary strategies to influence change.

It is imperative practitioners fully understand:

- The risk and protective factors for the individual young person, or the group. For individual young person these need to be bespoke to and take a holistic view of their individual circumstances; every young person is different and
- Who is the young person's most trusted adult. Who will they confide in and is best placed to understand their situation?

The Home Office has recently published a [toolkit](#) to help practitioners deliver interventions to young people who are involved in, or at risk of involvement in, Serious and Organised Crime (SOC). This identifies the need for practitioners to:

- Be persistent - It's very likely that the people who you will have identified will have chaotic lives with limited (if any) regular structure. As such, basic tasks like getting up on time and keeping appointments will be a significant challenge for them. How does the workforce identify who has capacity to commit to the young person to show they care. Examples of this includes needing to; be a pest and keep texting/contacting them including outside normal office hours, undertake frequent visits either planned or unplanned and be prepared to talk to them or their peer group every time you see them, consider undertaking a peer assessment, be prepared to be flexible and offer practical support to be there to demonstrate you're there for them as opposed to meeting your duty as a practitioner, consider the young person's choice of language and don't get distracted by this (e.g. if a young person swears is this the right time to challenge that) and if a young person has been missing prioritise seeing them the same day of their return.
- Use small opportunities to influence change - young person will present differently at different times either emotionally (e.g. how they're feeling at that time or having recently experienced a traumatic incident) or practically (e.g. attending ED, not being with their peer group or having just been arrested); these "teachable and reachable moments" provide an unplanned opportunity to demonstrate you genuinely care for the young person, you accept them for who they are and are empathetic.
- Involve young person and their parents/carers - don't make assumptions about the risks to young person and ask them to describe these and shape the disruption activity around these. This could include giving them options when they feel risks are increasing, using code words to support them to leave a situation and thinking of safety areas where risks might be (e.g. going to a local shop). Support parents and carers by giving them knowledge of the risks to the young person and sharing the child's plan with them. This mustn't scare them but is designed to empower them to explain what they see and understand what's going on so parents can disrupt (e.g. check bank accounts / changes in bedroom / siblings keeping an eye) and share information (e.g. give them a police contact to report car license plate numbers).
- Use the professional network - there is a high likelihood the young person you are concerned about is known to other professionals and young person and these people can provide both a good source of information as well as a protective factor. Encourage the young person to use this network and keep strong communication within the network (e.g. youth workers involvement in areas where young person go or involving the peer group to create a protective factor) and identify who the young person can contact when their trusted adult is not available and/or in an emergency. This includes supporting young person to access constructive activities such as education, apprenticeships, work experience, youth groups etc.