

# SET Partnership Child Exploitation Pathway

June 2026



**SOUTHEND**  
Safeguarding  
Children  
Partnership



**E S S E X**  
Safeguarding  
Children  
B O A R D

**THURROCK LOCAL**  
**SAFEGUARDING**  
**CHILDREN**  
**PARTNERSHIP**

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. SET Partnership CE Pathway Guidance.....	3
3. Definitions.....	5
4. SET Partnership CE Pathway.....	7
5. What actions should I take?.....	10
6. Southend CE Procedure.....	11
7. Essex CE Procedure.....	12
8. Thurrock CE Procedure.....	13

## SET Partnership CE Pathway Functionality

The SET Partnership CE pathway utilises an interactive PDF form which professionals can complete on their computer and other devices. It has been tested on various systems however, if you have any issues filling in the form it is recommended that you print out the pathway so that it can be completed by hand.



# 1. Introduction

In this document you will find the SET Partnership Child Exploitation (CE) pathway. It has been designed to help professional who works with children and their families in Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) to make decisions regarding referrals where CE is suspected.

The tool contained in this pathway indicator is designed to be a guide which can help you begin to make professional decisions related to the most appropriate course of action where concerns related to child exploitation are present.

## 2. SET Partnership CE Pathway Guidance

This pathway indicator is to be used by any professional working with children and young people if they suspect potential child exploitation.

There are many reasons why you might suspect potential child exploitation and the warning signs and symptoms will vary from child to child. There are various physical, emotional and/or behavioural issues that a child or young person may be exhibiting which suggest abuse and exploitation. SET guidance on identifying the signs of exploitation can be found [here](#) under chapters on Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation.

Nationally there are a lot of different child exploitation risk assessment tools available however research has demonstrated that there is little correlation between the risk factors highlighted on a risk assessment to the link of exploitation. We have therefore taken a slightly different approach by developing a tiered framework to guide practitioners by listing a number of factors that may indicate that a child is being exploited.

This pathway indicator does not contain an exhaustive list and practitioners will need to carefully consider the context behind any of the behaviours, as this has an important role in determination of the appropriate action you should take. Professionals should also use their experience and knowledge of safeguarding and associated risk factors to inform their decision-making process. Similarly if you are unsure about which action to take then it is important to use this pathway as a means for compiling as much information as possible before seeking support within your local authority.

The framework is designed to help different agencies to work to the same criteria when considering possible child exploitation. This pathway indicator can be used in two ways, either as a tick box screening tool which can be used to enable practitioners understand an individual's risk of exploitation or as supplementary guidance which allows practitioners to embed the learning into their existing assessments and plans.

The pathway indicator utilises a tiered framework for identifying potential child exploitation; indicators of vulnerability and in the **yellow section**, factors which are strongly linked to exploitation are in the **amber section** and indicators of harm which are present or/and strong evidence of the presence and contact with perpetrators are in the **red section**. In addition, where **black** is present in the tool this indicates that it is likely that the case will be known to the authorities.

Similarly, there are also distinctions within risk factors, such as '**suspected/reasonably believe**'. While they are important distinctions they are both significant in deciding whether an individual is at risk.

Specific questions should only be answered if you have a pre-existing relationship with that child or young person as they require an in-depth knowledge of that individual. If this is the first time that you have met this child or young person please only utilise the first section of the pathway indicator.

Assessing exploitation is not an exact science however, practitioners should understand the signs that someone might be being exploited or is at risk of exploitation and look to put in a plan to build resilience or safeguard as appropriate.

There is also a section at the end of this pathway indicator where you can write down detailed notes and your professional opinion about the individual child or young person. This is used to evidence why you have initial child exploitation concerns. We recommend using this section as you may want to refer to your notes later or use them as part of any onward referral process you may undertake. Each risk factor and indicator has a specific ID which you may refer to here. Additional vulnerability factors have been numbered also.

What your results indicate and the suggested actions/pathway you should take can be found on **page 10**. The pathway will be linked directly to your local area so please follow the local procedures.

## 3. Definitions

We have also compiled a list of key terms and provided more information and links about specific issues which will help with your decision-making process when completing the pathway.

**Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)** is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and includes for instance, children forced to work on cannabis farms, theft and commit acts of violence. (Home Office, 2018)

**Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)** is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where 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 (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. (Department for Education, 2017)

**Modern Slavery** is the term used within the UK and is defined within the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Act categorises offences of Slavery, Servitude and Forced or Compulsory Labour and Human Trafficking. These crimes include holding a person in a position of slavery, servitude forced or compulsory labour, or facilitating their travel with the intention of exploiting them soon after. It is possible to be a victim of modern slavery within your own country and therefore applies to UK and non-UK resident children. (Modern Slavery Act, 2015)

**Grooming** is when someone builds a relationship, trust and/or emotional connection with a child or young person so that they can exploit them. Children and young people who are groomed can be exploited, radicalised, trafficked or sexually abused. (NSPCC)

**County lines** is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. (Home Office, 2018)

**Please note, people of all ages may be vulnerable to, and be victims of, exploitation.**

Exploitation does not stop once a person reaches the age of 18. Exploitation may start once the person reaches 18 but in many cases exploitation in childhood can carry on into adulthood meaning that a number of young people receiving support from children services may also need support from adult services. Where a young person is approaching the age of 18, you should consider making contact with Adult Social Care to see what support might be available.

Additional definitions/explanations can be accessed via the following links:

- [Exploitation](#)
- [Historic/Non-recent abuse](#)
- [Bullying and cyberbullying](#)
- [Homelessness and insecure housing](#)

Below you can find your specific local authority's safeguarding children board:

- [Southend Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
- [Essex Safeguarding Children Board](#)
- [Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

### **Process for referring to Essex Police**

There are two processes with regards to contacting Essex Police about child exploitation.

- If you have **concerns about a child**, [please visit this link to Essex Police's website](#).
- If you would like to **provide information about potential child exploitation activity** to Essex Police you will need to complete the [Share community partner intelligence](#) online form.

# 4. SET Partnership CE Pathway

**Yellow** – Indicators of vulnerability identified.

Some young people have obvious push and pull factors that increase their vulnerability to becoming a target for exploitation, such as:

- Substance use
- Emotional and mental health
- Problems at school
- Issues at home/ relationship breakdown
- Identity issues or peer group challenges
- Isolation/ lack of role models

Exploiters will use these factors to coerce the young person. Some young people can become victims of exploitation without any obvious vulnerabilities. However, multiple push and pull factors and some key vulnerabilities may increase the likelihood of exploitation, but vulnerabilities themselves are not evidence that exploitation is occurring so the young person should be supported by community services to reduce their vulnerabilities. Factors in this section may need a targeted response with a lead professional working alongside the child and their family and further exploration.

Factors	Yes
Alcohol and/or substance use	
Change in physical appearance (i.e. well cared for, sudden change in hygiene or having brand new clothes despite you having no knowledge of how they might have access to this)	
Change in personal behaviour (i.e. conduct issues, regularly missing or not attending appointments etc.)	
Having new unknown friends	
Reduced contact with family/friends and becoming more isolated	
Suspicious behaviour with phone/smart device (i.e. constantly looking/ checking it, after having looked at it leaving the room/area etc.)	
Child or young person remaining hypervigilant, nervous or protective about discussing things with you	
Problems at school (reduced timetable, exclusion, NEET)	
Emotional wellbeing issues	

**Amber – This section explores factors that are strongly linked to exploitation.**

However, as professionals we don't always have reliable information to support our concerns. This section will require a narrative to explore the child's current context.

In considering these indicators the referrer should state whether the indicator is suspected, but not confirmed or whether they reasonably believe it to be taking place in the balance of probabilities.

Factors	Suspected	Reasonably believe
Concerns raised on how substances are being obtained, concerns of them receiving gifts or exchanged for something else		
Child is going missing, this is unexplained or concerned that child is being influenced to spend more time outside the home		
Is the young person spending time far away from home with no clear reason, or in multiple places/exploitation hotspots/strange times of day/night.		
Are there dynamics within a relationship the young person has that indicates exploitation		
Is the young person being gifted items/commodities/tangible or online that could be a reward to coerce the young person		
Are there changes to the young person's behaviour/school attendance/presentation/peer groups that could indicate exploitation		
Is there a history of referrals/ allegations that show a pattern of potential exploitation over time		
Is there a possibility the young person's family is involved in the exploitation of their child		
Child or young person who deems themselves to be in a relationship with someone and there are concerns about that person's age and/or the balance of power in the relationship		
Carrying weapons		
Online presence may be linked to exploitation (glamourisation of gangs, drugs or fraud. Linked as friends to older people or gang members. Filming of criminal acts)		

**Red – Indicators of harm present or/and strong evidence of the presence and contact with perpetrators.**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Suspected</b>	<b>Reasonably believe</b>
Arrested in possession of drugs with an amount that suggests distribution		
Holding drugs or weapons (for others)		
Sharing nudes/streaming sexual acts under threat/coercion or in exchange for something		
Sharing acts of violence or peer on peer abuse		
Coercive relationship with another person that indicates exploitation		
Gang membership or associating with other known victims or perpetrators of exploitation		
Involvement in serious violence and weapon carrying offences		
Coercion to commit criminal offences		
Victim of serious violence including weapon related injuries that occur outside the home		
Reports of STI infections or repeated STI infections		
Evidenced contact with a known exploiter		

## 5. What actions should I take?

**Professional notes and comments:**

*(You may utilise the corresponding ID letter or number when commenting)*

**If you plan on making an onward referral please complete the following details:**

*If you don't know some of the child's details please leave blank*

**Your details**

**Your name:**

**Your organisation:**

**Contact details:**

Phone

Other

**Email**

**About the child**

**Child's name:**

**Child's date of birth:**

**Child's contact details:**

Phone

Other

**Email**

**Child's home address:**

# Southend CE Procedures



You have concerns about CE. After completing this pathway indicator, you found:

No immediate concerns, but vulnerabilities raised.

Indication of early/ potential CE but no immediate risk to child/ young person.

Indication of CE and/ or immediate risk to child/ young person.

Seek support from appropriate community-based agencies with the family's consent to support the child with the vulnerabilities noted in the pathway.

For advice  
Contact C-SPOC via phone to undertake consultation to seek support about concerns.

For referral  
Complete C-SPOC Form.  
Follow SET Procedures

**Send form to C-SPOC for immediate social care response. This will also need to be shared with the police.**

Assessment in the C –SPOC may result in a number of different outcomes including signposting to community-based services; Early Help support via the family or adolescent teams and consideration of a Child and Family Assessment by Social Care teams.

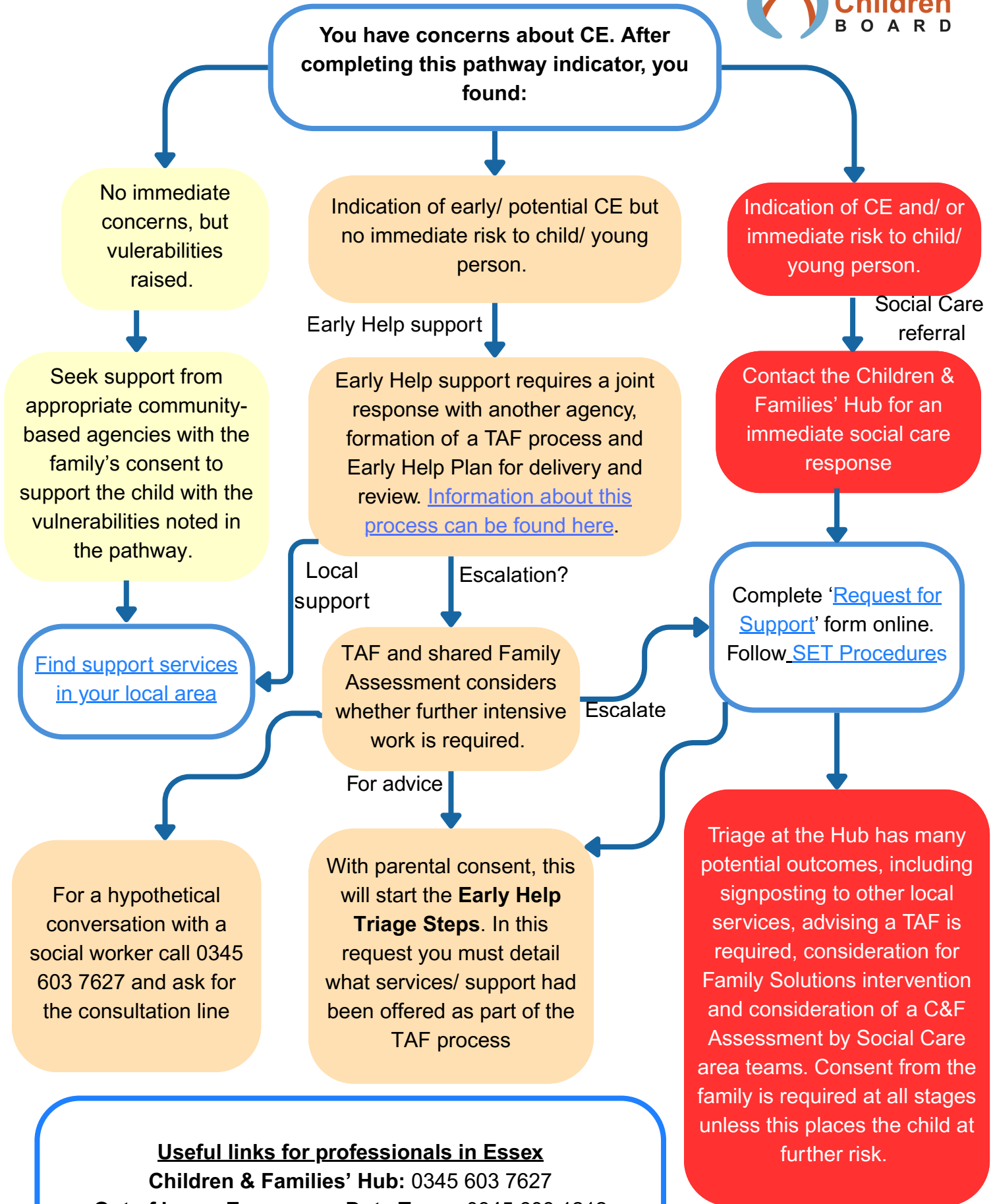
Consent from the family is required for any referral and all stages of intervention unless this places the child at further risk.

**Useful links for professionals in Southend**

**C-SPOC:** 01702 215007 (available Mon-Thu 9am – 5:30pm, Fri 9am- 4:30pm)

**C-SPOC:** [To access the form click here](#)

# Essex CE Procedures



**Useful links for professionals in Essex**  
**Children & Families' Hub:** 0345 603 7627  
**Out of hours Emergency Duty Team:** 0345 603 1212  
[Directory of Services](#)  
**Team Around the Family:** [TAFSO@essex.gov.uk](mailto:TAFSO@essex.gov.uk)  
**Police contact:** [occhildexploitationtriageteam@essex.police.uk](mailto:occhildexploitationtriageteam@essex.police.uk)

You have concerns about CE. After completing this pathways indicator, you found:

No immediate concerns, but vulnerabilities raised.

Seek support from appropriate community-based agencies with the family's consent to support the child with the vulnerabilities noted in the pathway.

Indication of early/ potential CE but no immediate risk to child/ young person.

For advice

Contact MASH via phone to undertake a consultation to seek support about concerns.

Indication of CE and/ or immediate risk to child/ young person.

Complete: [Thurrock CAF Referral Form](#)

Send form to MASH for immediate social work response. This will also need to be shared with the police.

Assessment in MASH may result in a number of different outcomes including signposting to community-based services; Early Help support via the family or adolescent teams and consideration of a Child and Family Assessment by Social Care Teams.

Consent from the family is required for any referral and all stages of intervention unless this places the child further at risk.

## Useful links for Thurrock

**Thurrock MASH:** 01375 652 802  
[thurrockmash@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:thurrockmash@thurrock.gov.uk)

**Emergency out of hours:**  
01375 372 468

**Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership website:**

[www.thurrocklscp.org.uk/lscp](http://www.thurrocklscp.org.uk/lscp)