



City of Edinburgh

Contextual Safeguarding - Risks Outside the Home (ROTH) Multi Agency Guidance

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Background

- 1.1** The purpose of this guidance is to provide a detailed overview of the systems and processes in place across Edinburgh to safeguard and protect children vulnerable to Risks Outside the Home (ROTH)¹. The guidance is underpinned by the core values and principles of the [Getting It Right For Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#) approach. In responding to the needs of children, it is recognised that help should be offered in a manner that is appropriate, proportionate and timely.
- 1.2** This guidance is intended to complement the [National Child Protection Guidance \(2021\)](#), the [Edinburgh and the Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures \(2024\)](#) and the [Multi-Agency Care and Risk Management \(CaRM\) Arrangements for Children and Young People who Present a Serious Risk of Harm to Others](#) (which will continue to apply to young people causing significant harm to others)².
- 1.3** The National Child Protection Guidance highlights the responsibility all agencies have to recognise and actively consider potential risks to a child regardless of whether the child is the focus of their involvement. Each organisation will have safeguarding arrangements in place, in line with GIRFEC and should follow these if they have concerns. Where there are concerns that do not meet child protection threshold child planning meetings should take place regularly, reviewing the information available and closely monitoring the risks.
- 1.4** This guidance is informed by the principles of [Contextual Safeguarding](#) which emphasise the importance of identifying and responding to harm and abuse to children outside their home (not simply the risks of harm and abuse which children may face at home, often from immediate family members). A child protection system can be defined as contextual when it satisfies the following four criteria:
- It can identify, assess and intervene with the *social conditions* of abuse (i.e. target the nature of the contexts in which abuse occurs rather than just the individuals affected by it);
 - It draws extra-familial contexts into child protection and safeguarding processes (which are traditionally focused on families);
 - It builds partnerships with sectors and individuals who manage extra-familial settings where young people spend their time (such as those responsible for the management of schools, community-based youth work settings, transport services, shopping centres, libraries, take-aways, shops), and;
 - Its impact is measured in relation to a change in the nature of the contexts where children are vulnerable to abuse or harm (rather than just focusing on a change in the behaviour of individuals who continue to spend time in harmful places) ([Firmin and Lloyd, 2022](#)).
- 1.5** In addition to the focus on context when analysing Extra Familial Risks and Harms (EFRH), it is also recognised that children (particularly during adolescence) tend to be part of a peer group(s). As such, this guidance focusses on considering and seeking to mitigate the ways ROTH in particular contexts may apply to multiple individuals simultaneously, moving the unit of analysis

¹ The terms Extra Familial Risks and Harms (EFRH) and Risks Outside The Home (ROTH) will be used interchangeably throughout the guidance.

² The [Child protection for professionals](#) page on the CEC website incorporates links to a range of useful resources for reference.

from the individual to the peer group as required and taking action to reduce risks identified. Youth work services, for example, already operate place-based, responsive services and should be supported to share information on areas of risk/ 'hotspots' within local communities for peer groups. This may involve community guardians from a range of pathways, not traditionally associated with child protection, in sharing information and raising concerns.

- 1.6** Ultimately a child may be vulnerable to ROTH while also vulnerable to harm within the family or while accommodated away from home. As such, this guidance may apply when a child is already the subject of Child Protection Planning Meetings (CPPMs) and/or Looked After Child (LAAC/LAC) Reviews (at home or away from home). The intention of the guidance is to ensure that additional multi-agency meetings are not created unnecessarily and where EFRH and contextual factors can be incorporated into existing child planning processes this should be strongly encouraged. However, where there is evidence of a risk of **significant harm** consideration must be given to initiating an Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD) as part of the child protection procedures³. Concerns about possible harm to a child from abuse, neglect or exploitation should always be shared with police or social work, without delay. The [National Child Protection Guidance](#) (Para 1.134) shares a useful checklist to support communication of essential information. Consideration should be given to one off events as well as a cumulation of concerns.
- 1.7** It is anticipated that the guidance will be of most relevance to children aged 12 – 17 (in recognition of the broad parameters of adolescence) although this does not preclude its application with younger children when this is assessed to be appropriate.

Risks Outside The Home (ROTH) – Definitions

- 2.1** Child protection practice in earlier childhood tends to focus on risks and harms located within the family setting, often connected to caregivers. This tends to change somewhat in the teenage years. Developmentally, adolescence is a time of exploration, increasing independence, and risk taking. Young people become more engaged with, and influenced by, peer norms and relationships, and other adults, groups and communities not connected to their families (including online). These extra-familial contexts can pose a new set of complex risks at the interface with criminality, including:

- Human trafficking and exploitation⁴ can include [Child Sexual Exploitation \(CSE\)](#), or other extra-familial sexual abuse of adolescents and [Child Criminal Exploitation \(CCE\)](#), this includes 'county lines' drug distribution, and cuckooing of properties.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC);
- Peer-on-peer abuse (non-familial and non-sibling), including harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) and domestic abuse among adolescent couples;
- Online abuse;
- Gang affiliation and carrying weapons;

³ Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD) – [Information for the Workforce in Edinburgh](#)

⁴ It is important to understand that while human trafficking and exploitation may occur across international borders it can equally occur domestically e.g. a Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) group trafficking a young person from Edinburgh to Inverness

- Radicalisation and violent extremism⁵.

Across these extra-familial contexts the level of risk and concern may be amplified by a child's substance and/or alcohol use and poor mental health. Furthermore, EFRH may intersect with a child being missing from home or education, thereby aggravating the level of risk and concern.

2.2 CSE⁶ is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person or persons of any age take advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity, in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the presence of perceived consent does not excuse or mitigate the abusive nature of the act.

2.3 CCE is not defined in law but practitioners should be alert to the possibility that some children who are victims of trafficking and may be exploited by gangs and organised criminal networks. CCE can be associated with 'county lines', which refers to criminal exploitation by gangs which export illegal drugs into one or more areas (within the UK). Gangs may use dedicated mobile phone lines or another form of 'deal line'. Such gangs are known to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move (and store) drugs and money and often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. Equally children may be coerced into acquisitive crime (e.g. targeted theft of high value vehicles or housebreaking). Lastly it should be noted that a child may also be exploited by an individual acting alone. Further information regarding criminal exploitation and indicators are outlined in the [Criminal Exploitation Practitioner Guidance 2023](#).

2.4 As regards child trafficking and exploitation, the legal definition of the offence of human trafficking in Scotland is set out in the [Human Trafficking and Exploitation \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) ('the 2015 Act'). A person commits an offence of human trafficking if a 'relevant action' is taken with a view to another person being exploited (section 1). The offence of human trafficking is aggravated by being committed against a child (as defined in the 2015 Act as a person under the age of 18 years old) (section 6).

The 2015 Act (section 3) describes what constitutes exploitation for the purposes of the offence of human trafficking. The following are examples of exploitation:

- Prostitution and sexual exploitation;
- Criminal exploitation;
- Slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour;
- Securing services and benefits;
- Financial exploitation/benefit fraud;
- Removal of organs;
- Debt bondage; and,
- Begging

⁵ This definition draws heavily from *The Innovate Project's* definition of EFRH: <https://theinnovateproject.co.uk/about-the-project/extra-familial-risks/>. The practice of clustering all of these risks under the rubric "child exploitation" is also common in England and Wales.

⁶ The remaining definitions in this section are all drawn from the [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021](#).

2.5 With respect to online safety/child protection in the digital domain, online child abuse is any type of abuse that occurs in the digital environment facilitated through technology and devices such as computers, tablets, mobile phones and games consoles. Such abuse may include:

- Online bullying;
- Emotional abuse and blackmail;
- Sharing of intimate images;
- Grooming behaviour; and,
- Coercion and preparatory behaviour for abuse including radicalisation.

2.6 In relation to radicalisation and extremism, it is important for practitioners to be cognisant of obligations under the Prevent agenda as outlined in the [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for Scotland \(2015 - updated May 2024\)](#). Police Scotland colleagues on learning of radicalisation and extremism concerns may seek to complete a Dynamic Investigation Framework (DIF) assessment or Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) assessment which may in turn underscore the need for a Prevent Multi-Agency Planning Meeting (PMAP). It is important to recognise that concerns about radicalisation and extremism do not mean that there should be any derogation from GIRFEC principles when supporting the relevant child and a child protection Inter-agency Referral Discussion (IRD) may take place before or run alongside the PMAP process.

2.7 In more general terms, the potential for a child to be at increased risk of EFRHs may relate to their use of alcohol and/or illegal substances; their consistently going missing/absconding from their home or educational establishment⁷ and/or their own mental health difficulties. Moreover, it may be that a child is at risk of multiple ROTH simultaneously (e.g. CCE and CSE) and that these risks are amplified when, for example, missing from their children's house, struggling with anxiety/depression and/or self-medicating with illegal substances. Complex cases underscore the need for thorough and thoughtful assessment and the central role of Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRDs) in the planning of these assessments and interventions.

Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRDs)

3.1 It is important for practitioners to be cognisant of the need to respond proportionately to any concerns. Adhering to the principles of GIRFEC and the concept of [Early and Effective Intervention \(EEI\)](#), risks and needs whether intra or extra-familial can often be addressed successfully through Child's Planning Meetings (CPMs). However, for those situations where it is assessed that there is a risk of significant harm to a child or significant harm has occurred, moving to an Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD) is imperative, as detailed in the [Edinburgh and Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures](#). Decision making regarding the concerns and progress or not to an IRD must be recorded with a rationale for the decision. In addition to this consideration must be given to whether a referral to the Children's Reporter is required if there is evidence that compulsory measures of supervision are required.

3.2 Significant harm is not defined in law. As noted in local [Child Protection Procedures](#), "The extent to which harm is significant relates to the severity or anticipated severity of the impact on a

⁷ With respect to missing children, practitioners should also be familiar with [The Philomena Protocol](#) and the [Looked After & Accommodated Children Who Go Missing From Residential & Foster Care in Scotland](#) national guidance implemented by Police Scotland.

child's health and development". The decision-making forum of the IRD is the most appropriate setting, initially, in which to address ROTH as they relate to one or more children.

- 3.3** For children who are still attending school, education has a critical contribution to make to the IRD. It is essential that a child's experience at school is captured in the IRD and the views of the relevant school's Senior Management Team (SMT) are ascertained and recorded. The Interim Safety Plan (ISP) must incorporate relevant information and actions relating to education.
- 3.4** As part of an IRD, information from other organisations may be requested and fed into the discussions by key participants from health, police, social work or education. In instances of ROTH, this may involve key contributions from youth work and other community-based services working directly with an individual or peer group.
- 3.5** When ROTH are identified and these are assessed to be significant, IRD partners may take the view that it is necessary to move to an Initial Child Protection Planning Meeting (ICPPM) where consideration will be given to the need for a child's name to be placed on the Child Protection Register.
- 3.6** Where an ICPPM is not deemed necessary or further information is required to support decision making, the options below are open to IRD partners:
- **CARM meeting:** If there are significant concerns about the risk of harm which a child may present to others, IRD partners may feel a [Care and Risk Management \(CaRM\)](#) meeting could be useful to address these concerns. In such instances the Social Work Team Leader holding the IRD should contact the Duty Team Leader in the Young People's Service (YPS, 0131 529 6700, yps@edinburgh.gov.uk) for a CaRM meeting referral discussion. The purpose of the referral discussion is to ascertain whether the threshold for a CaRM meeting has been met. The potential outcomes are as follows:
 - CaRM meeting threshold met - YPS Team Leader to arrange CaRM meeting.
 - Risk assessments⁸ to be completed to ascertain whether there is sufficient basis for a CaRM meeting or to inform future discussions at a CaRM meeting.
 - CaRM meeting threshold not met – Continue to support child in accordance with GIRFEC principles.
 - **IRD Strategic Planning Meeting (ISPM):** This is a multi-agency meeting to share information to support planning for children from ROTH and review interim safety plans. These meetings will take place in person or on teams, IRD participants will agree who is best placed to chair the meeting. The ISPM provides an opportunity to consider the information available, identify any missing information and any specific assessments which are required. A decision of a ISPM could be to progress to an initial child protection planning meeting or CARM.

⁸ The three main risk assessments undertaken by YPS staff are the Short-Term Assessment of Risk and Treatability: Adolescent Version (START:AV), the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) and the Assessment, Intervention and Moving on 3 (AIM3) tool for the assessment of harmful sexual behaviour (HSB).

IRD Strategic Planning Meeting (ISPM)

- 4.1** The purpose of any ISPM is to enable a more comprehensive picture to be established of the full range of ROTH which may be affecting a child and to identify what actions are required to reduce or to mitigate the harm(s). ROTH meetings are intended to focus on identifying the contexts within which harm is occurring (e.g. peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods or other community spaces).
- 4.2** As regards who should attend an ISPM, the intention is to avoid being overly prescriptive to enable different, relevant professionals to attend depending on the specific circumstances of the child under consideration whilst also considering proportionate information sharing. ISPM support the IRD process, children and their parents/carers should be notified that the meeting is taking place and be updated of any relevant information and decisions.
- 4.3** The principal task of the Chair will be to summarise and consider critically the identified ROTH and agree a plan which can be incorporated into the child's plan.
- 4.4** As regards the proposed plan to address ROTH, particular consideration should be given to the activities and interventions outlined in the Contextual Safeguarding Approach Toolkit for Practitioners in Social Care⁹ including the:
- [“What’s happening?” tool;](#)
 - [Context weighting tool;](#)
 - [Safety mapping tool;](#)
 - [School assessment tool;](#)
 - [All around me tool;](#) and,
 - [Peer Group Assessment tool](#)
- 4.5** An Edinburgh ROTH Screening Tool has also been developed, which will be piloted and reviewed in line with the implementation of this guidance.¹⁰ Time should be taken during the ISPM planning meeting to outline how further assessments will be carried out and which tools will be applied.
- 4.6** On concluding the ISPM, it will be the task of the ROTH Chair to record an action note and share this with those included in the meeting. This information should then be recorded on any open electronic IRD (eIRD) record. Each agency is responsible for recording this action note on their own system. When specific tasks are identified which the Lead Professional is required to take forward, these should be reflected in the Child's Plan and scrutinised regularly through existing review processes. For complex cases a series of ISPM may be required. Emerging and recurring themes should be reported to the chair of the Child Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding Sub Group of the Child Protection Committee.

⁹ Although the Contextual Safeguarding tools elaborated above will be of particular relevance to practitioners working with children who have been referred to a ROTH meeting, they may equally have utility in work with children where there are emerging concerns and where early help is the focus.

¹⁰ Many thanks to the Oxford Safeguarding Children Board for allowing us to adapt their resources.

Information Sharing

5.1 Sharing relevant information as soon as possible is essential to protecting children from harm.

All practitioners should be supported by their organisation to be confident in sharing information appropriately and be guided in working and applying the law by their organisations policies and procedures¹¹. Information sharing should be lawful, fair and transparent. Protecting children from ROTH requires discussion and information sharing between agencies about children at risk of significant harm. Each agency is responsible for maintaining accurate and secure records.

5.2 Where there is a child protection concerns, relevant information must be shared with one of the core agencies without delays. The person sharing the information must be aware of the lawful basis for doing so, and agency data protection leads should be able to advise where doubt about the appropriate lawful basis exists.

5.3 Practitioners do not need to be certain that a child has been harmed or is at immediate risk before sharing information. Where someone has reasons to believe that a child may be at risk of harm, they must share relevant information with one of the core agencies to support analysis and decision making.

5.4 It is the role of designated Police, Social Work and Health colleagues to consider whether there may be a risk of significant harm, and if so, to progress Child Protection Procedures. If asked for information as part of a Child Protection investigation by one of the core agencies, organisations must comply.

5.5 It is not necessary to seek consent for a child or their parents/carers before sharing information when there is a Child Protection concern. Consent requires people to have choice and control about the sharing of their personal data. In most situations where there is a Child Protection concerns, parents will not have choice or control – the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration and override all other duties. Seeking consent may place the child at increased risk. Where appropriate, agreement and understanding about the sharing of information may be helpful in engaging individuals in the process. Children and parents/carers should be advised what information about them is being shared, with whom and why it is necessary unless they cannot be found, or to do so would be detrimental to the:

- Best interests of the child
- Health and safety of a child or another person
- Prevention or detection of crime and/or
- Apprehension or prosecution of individuals

¹¹ For more information refer to the Information Commissioner's Office, [10-step guide to sharing information to safeguard children](#).

Learning and Development

- 6.1** To support the implementation of this guidance training in contextual safeguarding will be available to multi-agency partners.

Appendix 1

IRD Strategic Planning Meeting (ISPM)

