



SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

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The Exploitation of Children- Russell Webster

Child exploitation is now much better understood in schools. However, our mental model tends to have one significant gap: we picture exploitation as something adults do to children. The reality is more complicated.

Children who are themselves being exploited can go on to exploit others. A child managing or recruiting peers within a county lines network may look, on the surface, like a perpetrator. They may simultaneously be a victim, operating under coercion, debt bondage, or the threat of violence against their family.

Researchers from the Universities of York and Leeds have written about this on Russell Webster's site, introducing the concept of the "alpha victim." This term describes children who are both experiencing exploitation and enacting harm on others, typically within county lines networks. A child may appear to be recruiting or controlling peers while themselves operating under coercion, debt bondage, or the threat of violence, making them simultaneously a perpetrator in appearance and a victim in reality.

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AVAILABLE COURSES

Advanced Safeguarding for Designated Safeguarding

Next live online Advanced Safeguarding Course:
Thursday 21 May 2026 [Book Online](#)

On-demand Version

The on-demand version is available year-round and is regularly updated [Book Online](#)

Safeguarding and AI

Artificial intelligence is already woven into young people's lives, not just in homework, but in how they seek advice, manage emotions and interact with others. This webinar looks at AI through a safeguarding lens.

Child and Youth Radicalisation

The radicalisation of children and young people is not a new concern, but the speed and scale at which it can now occur has changed significantly. Social media has given extremist voices direct, unmediated access to young people, and the process that once took months can now happen far more quickly.

Schools sit on the front line of this and need a working understanding of how radicalisation develops, what triggers it, and where intervention is possible. ACT Early's guide to the stages of radicalisation is a useful, accessible starting point.

To read more, [click here](#)

Internet Watch Foundation

The online child sexual abuse landscape is changing in a way that we need to understand. This is no longer primarily about hidden forums in dark corners of the internet. Organised criminals are running commercial operations, charging for access to abuse imagery, and reinvesting the profits to fund further production.

The IWF's 2025 annual report identified 15,031 commercial child sexual abuse webpages, up from 7,028 in 2024, representing a doubling in a single year. These are structured businesses with payment systems, tiered access, and deliberate strategies to avoid detection. This is organised crime operating with commercial logic, and the profits drive the creation of new abuse material.

Question of the Week

Thinking back in your role, what's something you remember noticing, that only made sense later?