CSE Risk Policy

Effective Date: September 2026

Review Date: April 2027

Purpose

This policy sets out how Life Journey Academy identifies, responds to, and reports concerns relating to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and sexual exploitation of adults. It applies to all children, young people, and adults supported by Life Journey Academy, and sits alongside the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, which governs the broader safeguarding framework.

Definition

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 in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may believe they are in a consensual relationship. They may not recognise that they are being exploited. CSE is never the victim's fault, regardless of perceived consent or apparent willingness. This distinction is critical and must be understood by all staff.

Adult sexual exploitation (ASE) follows the same pattern of coercion, manipulation, and power imbalance, but involves adults aged 18 and above. Adults with care and support needs, neurodivergent conditions, mental health difficulties, or significant trauma histories are at elevated risk. As with CSE, perceived consent does not negate exploitation where coercion, grooming, or power imbalance is present.

Both CSE and ASE can occur online as well as in person. Both can involve a single perpetrator or networks of individuals, and typically involve a period of grooming before abuse occurs.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All children, young people, and adults supported by Life Journey Academy, including those placed by schools, local authorities, or families directly, and adults accessing mentoring independently
- All staff, including both directors
- All delivery contexts: outreach sessions in schools, community settings, and LJA's Camberley learning space

Why This Matters to Life Journey Academy's Cohort

Life Journey Academy works with individuals who carry a statistically elevated risk of sexual exploitation across all age groups.

Children and young people: elevated risk factors present in LJA's cohort include:

- Looked-after children and those with care experience
- Young people with trauma histories
- Young people who have experienced significant school disengagement or absence
- Young people with SEMH needs, including anxiety, low self-worth, and difficulties with social relationships
- Post-16 young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET

Adults: elevated risk factors present in LJA's adult cohort include:

- Late-diagnosed neurodivergent adults, including those with autism and ADHD, who may have a limited understanding of boundaries or be more susceptible to social manipulation
- Adults with SEMH needs or significant trauma histories
- Adults who are socially isolated or have limited support networks
- Adults navigating significant life transitions without professional or family support

Staff must hold this awareness as a baseline, not only as a response to a specific concern.

Indicators of Exploitation

No single indicator confirms exploitation. A pattern or cluster of signs should prompt a conversation with the DSL. The following apply across age groups, with notes where adult-specific context is relevant.

Behavioural indicators:

- Unexplained gifts, money, new items, or resources, particularly where the source is unclear or the individual is reluctant to explain
- Associating with individuals whose relationship to them is unclear, particularly where there is an obvious age or power imbalance
- Secretive or significantly increased mobile phone use
- Going missing from home, provision, or agreed sessions, especially repeatedly
- Returning from missing episodes in an unknown or unrelated location
- Unexplained changes in behaviour, appearance, or mood
- Becoming withdrawn, unusually compliant, or difficult to engage
- Evidence of physical harm, including injuries in intimate areas
- Involvement in or exposure to substance misuse
- References to sexual activity that feel inconsistent or rehearsed
- Describing a relationship with a significantly older or more powerful individual in idealised or guarded terms
- Being collected from sessions by unknown individuals
- For adults: sudden changes in living arrangements, finances, or social circle

Online indicators:

- Sharing or being asked to share intimate images
- Contact with unknown individuals via social media, gaming platforms, or dating apps
- References to online relationships involving gifts, money, or requests for secrecy

Staff responsibilities

All staff must:

- Know the indicators listed in this policy and remain alert to them during sessions
- Report any concern, however small, to the DSL immediately. Concerns do not need to be certain to be reported.
- Never attempt to investigate a concern independently
- Never promise confidentiality to any individual raising a concern that may relate to exploitation
- Never confront a suspected perpetrator
- Record any concern or disclosure accurately and promptly, using the individual's own words where possible

If a child, young person, or adult discloses or hints at exploitation:

- Listen without interrupting
- Remain calm and non-judgemental
- Avoid leading questions. Open prompts only ("can you tell me more about that?")
- Reassure them that telling someone was the right thing to do
- Report to the DSL immediately after the conversation

Referral Pathways

Children and Young People

The DSL (Lee Johnson) is the first point of contact for all concerns involving children and young people.

On receiving a concern, the DSL will:

1. Assess the nature and immediacy of the risk
2. Refer to the local authority MASH in the relevant area: Berkshire, Surrey, or Hampshire depending on where the young person lives
3. Consider whether police involvement is appropriate from the outset. In CSE cases, early police involvement is often warranted given the criminal nature of the abuse
4. Where indicators suggest the concern may constitute modern slavery, including trafficking, coercion into criminal activity, or financial exploitation, complete both a child protection referral and a modern slavery referral simultaneously. Do

not wait to establish which category applies before referring. Further information on modern slavery referral routes is in LJA's Modern Slavery Policy.
5. Notify the commissioning school or local authority, unless doing so would increase risk to the young person
6. For looked-after children: notify the Virtual School Head and responsible local authority
7. Document all actions and decisions in the safeguarding record

Where there is immediate risk, call 999 first.

Adults

For adults, the response is guided by the Care Act 2014 and the principle of mental capacity.

The DSL will:

1. Assess the nature and immediacy of the risk
2. Consider the adult's capacity to make decisions about their own safety under the Mental Capacity Act 2005, capacity is decision-specific and time-specific, and should not be assumed either way
3. Where possible and safe to do so, seek the adult's consent before making a referral
4. Where the adult lacks capacity, where there is serious risk of harm, or where a third party is at risk, refer to adult social care in the relevant local authority without requiring consent
5. Consider whether police involvement is appropriate
6. Document all actions, the capacity assessment process, and the rationale for any decision made without consent

Where there is immediate risk, call 999 first.

Confidentiality

Exploitation concerns are not subject to normal confidentiality rules. The individual's safety takes precedence over confidentiality in all cases involving risk of serious harm. Staff must not promise or imply confidentiality when an individual raises concerns that may relate to exploitation.

Policy Review

This policy is reviewed annually by the DSL and DDSL, or following any exploitation-related incident or significant change in statutory guidance.

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