

The First 72 hours

Best practice guide:

Speaking to a migrant young person when they first come into local authority care



This document is intended to capture the learning from the Rise service at The Children’s Society. Rise works with boys and young men who have been trafficked internationally. The information within is also based on conversations with a small number of young people, reflecting on their own experience of going missing from care after being trafficked.

We know the first 72 hours in care are crucial to protect victims of trafficking, who all too often go missing when they first enter local authority care. Therefore this guide focuses on this crucial window of time.

Safeguarding

This guide focuses on relationship building rather than safety planning and safeguarding. However, we recommend the following safeguarding actions are considered for any migrant young person entering care whom you suspect may have been trafficked:

- Consider restricting phone and internet access initially to disrupt potential communication with traffickers. When taking such action it is vital that you explain why and set a date for it to be reviewed.

Restricting phone and internet access can be vital but it is also disempowering and isolating and poses a threat to early trust and relationship building. Ensure you listen to the young person’s view on this restriction and keep them informed.

- Include the young person in safety planning, ask if there are any locations they don’t feel safe and avoid placing them in such areas. Ask what would help them to feel safe.
- Consider placing the child out of borough where there is any evidence to suggest exploitation took place within it. This may be key in disrupting contact between the young person and their traffickers.
- Consider initiating a Section 47 investigation for any child you suspect has been trafficked, as they may still be at risk of harm from those who trafficked them.

Placements

It is important to consider what placement will be best for a young person in this crucial time. In our experience, foster care will often be the safest choice during this initial window. In the mid-to-long-term, a range of options should be considered, including the young person in



decisions as much as possible. Sometimes being in a family home will not suit a young person, especially if they have travelled long distances unaccompanied and been forced to be self-sufficient for a long period prior to arrival in the UK. For others, foster care will be the safest and most supportive option, particularly where foster carers have received trauma-informed training on supporting trafficking victims.

Practitioners identified two key elements to having successful conversations of this kind: quick relationship building and showing the support and opportunities that can be offered.

1. Relationship building

- **Fast relationship building is key at this point.** These conversations, even if brief, need to take place one-on-one in order to build this trust and rapport. A good way to do this is to acknowledge that things may be new and confusing. Be calm and kind. Offer the young person a drink or food if you can. Explain your role but acknowledge that this might be something new to them; they might not be familiar with social care or support systems for young people.
- **It may help to draw a quick sketch of who you are and the other key professionals you will be introducing them to.** This will help the young person to get a visual understanding of who these people are and their individual roles.
- **It is important to get a sense of the young person and to engage with their interests.** If possible, try to find out a bit about them and what they enjoy (hobbies etc). For example ask what sports they like to watch or take part in and what music they listen to, find out what food they like. This also a good time to find out if they have any specific aspirations for their lives. Take an interest in them as a person and their aspirations and validate these and any progress towards them wherever possible.
- **It is also useful to acknowledge that the young person might have seen difficult things in their life.** Make it clear there is no pressure to talk about these things now, but that people can support them if they're having trouble sleeping or dealing with these feelings. It also might be good to acknowledge here that they may have been made to do things they didn't want to do to try to get a better life. Say gently that you know some of these experiences may have been difficult.
- **Acknowledge that it might be hard for them to trust you, but you want to work with them over time to build that trust and show them what you can offer.** If you can, explain that you've worked with young people in similar situations before. Explain that you are not from the police or the government and that your role is to protect and support them. Young people might have experiences of being persecuted by the police or security services outside of the UK and so it's important to show you are different.

2. Showing what is possible for them in the future

- **At this point, it may be appropriate to acknowledge sensitively that there might be people contacting them who might want to do certain things.** If you feel able to address this subtly, this is a good point to say that in the UK we have a belief that children must never be hurt physically or forced to work. Acknowledge that things are different in many other countries and it's understandable if things feel very different or new. It can be good to gently recognise they may feel a pressure to work or do things for others. Acknowledge that they might be worried about things that could happen to them or that there may be pressures back in their own country.
- **Remember that in order to address the (potentially very significant) pull of traffickers and real risk of re-trafficking,** you are persuading someone to disengage from an existing relationship which they might feel very reliant on. You need to show what support a child can get through staying in local authority care, without preaching to them or overemphasising the possibility of leaving. Some key things to mention are that you can help a young person access:
 - **Education** (keep in mind that education and employment opportunities are key for many migrants).
 - **Support for jobs or opportunities** you might want for your future.
 - **A safe place to live for free** – you can explain where you are now taking them.
 - **Help getting a lawyer** to try and allow them to stay in the UK long-term.
 - **Finding projects or groups where they can meet other young people from similar backgrounds** (it is important to risk assess these, as local community groups can be sites of exploitation or grooming, or have links to traffickers).
- **Don't overpromise,** but be clear about what is possible in terms of specialist and social

care support. Make it clear that we have a duty to protect a child and it's very unlikely that a child will ever be sent back to another country while they are still a child.

- **Young people who've been trafficked may have been told that if they stay in social service care they will be sent back to their country.** They also might have been told that if they stay with their traffickers they will have a better future and opportunities. You need to provide them with the information which will help them see what support they can be given by social services.
- **If a young person is facing criminal charges, be clear that you will support them to access a free solicitor.** Be clear about what will happen next and who can support them while the criminal justice process is ongoing, and keep them informed throughout the process. Fear around criminal prosecution and imprisonment is a large push factor towards going missing. It's important that the young person doesn't feel they are facing this alone and they understand what is happening. Additional safety planning is also likely needed to try and mitigate this risk.
- **Many young people are under pressure to earn money in order to pay back those who facilitated their journeys** regardless of whether they have experienced other exploitation. It is important to consider the pressure this places on a young person and the risk it poses as a strong push factor towards illegal and exploitative work.

Ending the conversation

Explain what will happen next and that you are going to take them somewhere safe. Give an overview of how this will work – for instance, if taking them to a foster placement, give a bit of outline of the role of a foster carer and say you'll meet this person together. If you are able, give them a reliable contact number to call if they are in a situation where they don't know what to do or who to trust, or feel unsafe. This doesn't need to be a 24/7 number, but it does need to be a way to contact you directly (ie work mobile number). Let them know when you will next see them and how you'll be in contact.

The Children's Society and our supporters have been there for vulnerable children and young people for more than 130 years.

We believe that every young person should have the support they need in order to enjoy a safe, happy childhood.

That's why we run services and campaigns to make children's lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger.

Together with our supporters, we're improving the lives of children today and long into the future.

