



Tackling financial exploitation: Youth voice insights

July 2025

**The
Children's
Society**

We would like to give special thanks to all the young people who participated, and the organisations who supported us in facilitating these consultations.



Introduction



The Prevention programme

The Children's Society's national Prevention programme was established in 2019 and is commissioned by the Home Office. The programme works to drive improvements in the prevention and disruption of child sexual abuse (CSA) and exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE), and modern slavery on a regional and national basis across England and Wales. With expertise on the lived experiences of children, current and emerging forms of child exploitation, and effective approaches to improving victim identification and support, the programme has built a reputable profile recognised across law enforcement, child protection, healthcare, and the private sector. We work with thousands of professionals across these sectors each year to tackle child exploitation.

The programme also leads the award winning #LookCloser campaign, focused on supporting the public and businesses to spot child exploitation and take action to get them help.

The programme works closely with multi-agency partners across sectors and regions to ensure we are guided by emerging insight and intelligence. Drawing on evidence from direct practice, youth voice consultations, and emerging strategic insight, the programme is an agile resource that enables partners to develop and take ownership of new approaches to preventing child exploitation and abuse.

Aim:

To gain knowledge about young people's understanding of financial exploitation and their views on effective responses and support for young people at risk of or experiencing it. We also sought to create a resource for young people to help raise awareness of financial exploitation and how to get help, which was informed by young people's views.

Why are we doing this:

From our work on financial exploitation over the past few years and after conducting an informal literature review, we felt that there was little understanding of young people's awareness of financial exploitation amongst professionals and that young people have rarely, if ever, been consulted on this topic. By speaking to young people about their views on financial exploitation, we seek to address this gap and bring young people's perspectives to the forefront of our work in Prevention and the work we do with partners.

What do we mean by financial exploitation?

The Children's Society define child financial exploitation as: 'a form of child abuse that occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to encourage or compel a child under 18 to undertake a financial activity that benefits the perpetrator or facilitator. The perpetrator(s) might coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive the young person. This activity is often criminal and therefore a form of child criminal exploitation and includes, but is not limited, to money laundering and wider fraud.'

(The Children's Society, 2024)

How we did this

Between August and December 2024, we carried out 10 consultations with 126 young people across various youth forums and young people's panels in England and Wales. The participants were aged between 13 and 21, with the majority being under 18.

When consulting with these groups, we ensured representation from a variety of regions and locations. Participants were provided with information about the Prevention programme, the aims of our consultation, and how their views would inform and influence our work.

We followed ethical guidelines, ensuring that confidentiality was maintained and that any information which could identify participants was changed or removed. This was clearly communicated to the young people prior to their participation. We also obtained consent from all the young people and ensured that their engagement was voluntary and informed.

We adhered to a session plan, which included the use of scenarios to outline financial exploitation. Our knowledge of financial exploitation and its impact on young people informed these scenarios, which then served as a foundation for initiating discussions with the young people. We asked them to consider how the characters in the scenarios might feel and how they might respond to various types of intervention. This approach facilitated in-depth conversations and provided valuable insights into effective intervention strategies, as well as highlighting young people's current perceptions of financial exploitation and its impact.

The insight collected from these consultations was analysed to identify [common themes and insights](#). The responses were categorised based on the feelings and reactions of the characters in the case studies, specific vulnerability factors highlighted by young people, and their suggested interventions.

[The findings outlined in this report demonstrate general views on financial exploitation as opposed to reflections from lived experience](#). However, it is possible that some young people within these groups may have lived experienced of financial exploitation and may have expressed views from this perspective.

While we sought to engage with a wide range of groups, a limitation of our methodology is that we only consulted with existing youth forums and panels. [These forums and panels may not be accessible to all young people](#). Despite our efforts to offer sessions across England and Wales, the availability of these groups is sometimes limited.

How will this information be used?

These insights will be embedded within our national prevention work to improve awareness of financial exploitation and responses to this issue. We will also use these insights internally at The Children's Society, including to inform our policy work and in our engagement with and support for external professionals across the statutory, voluntary, and commercial sectors. This includes banks and financial institutions, relevant government departments including the Home Office and Department for Education, policing, social care, and education.

Navigating this report	
Social media Perceptions of perpetrators Education about financial exploitation Awareness and constrained choice	The first section will look at young people's understanding of financial exploitation across social media, their perceptions of perpetrators, and their views on current education they receive on financial exploitation.
Police Banks	This section will explore young people's perceptions of the police and banks, what responses they feel they might receive, and what the barriers to reporting are.
Exploited young person's feelings	This section will explore how a young person who has been financially exploited may feel.
Peer influences	This section will explore the ways in which exploited young people may be coerced, manipulated, or forced to exploit other young people.
Support for young people who have been financially exploited Specific considerations	This section will look at what support would be beneficial to young people who have been financially exploited, as well as specific considerations for professionals and adults offering intervention.

Section 1



Social media

What are young people telling us?

- Young people regularly see 'scam' posts across social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat.
- Posts on social media relating to 'quick cash' or 'bank transfers' may seem more legitimate if they were posted by an influencer, if the person posting had a verified account, or if the person posting was known to the young person either in real life or online.
- 'Scam' social media posts which portray a particular lifestyle, such as those with fast cars or expensive jewellery, may be appealing to young people.
- Young people would be unlikely to report a social media post to the platform or authorities, as they feel it would be unlikely that there would be any response.
- Younger teenagers may be more likely to engage with social media posts promising quick cash schemes.



"No one would report a scam [on social media] as it's not worth reporting, nothing would be done."

"It's pretty common to see pyramid schemes advertised on Tik Tok

You also often get sent discount codes from friends and followers.

It's not unusual to see ways to save money appear on your feed."

Perceptions of perpetrators

What are young people telling us?

- Young people are more likely to engage with money transfers if they have an existing relationship with the person who is asking them, or if the person asking them is also a young person.
- If the adult asking to use a young person's bank account is a woman, young people may be more likely to feel that they can trust them. This request may be viewed as more genuine and that they need to help her.
- Young people would be more likely to agree to a bank transfer if they were approached directly as opposed to seeing a social media post.

"If an acquaintance offered it [money], he wouldn't [transfer money], if he trusted them he would."

"You can trust people your age more than older people. If an older person asks you [to transfer money], it's more likely to be illegal."

"If the perpetrator was a woman instead of a man, the friend might have been more sympathetic and thought that the woman was asking [the young person] to use the account because she needed her to, or the need was genuine."

Education about financial exploitation

What are young people telling us?

- There aren't many school assemblies about online safety and financial exploitation, and when these assemblies do happen, they aren't engaging.
- These assemblies could be more engaging by being more interactive; for example, plays or using resources.
- Young people should begin receiving information about financial exploitation and how to stay safe online while at primary school.

"In primary and secondary schools we would have an assembly, where a charity would come in and speak to us about the dangers in online spaces, we would be shown scary videos but they sometimes had the opposite effect."

"We receive surface level information about possible risks but nothing in depth."



"Financial exploitation isn't spoken about at school, they only talk about knife crime in school and even that they only do like once every two years. They just say knives exist - they call them bladed articles and say don't stab people. They tell us stuff we already know."

"When we were growing up then we got taught about cyber stuff through school. But maybe very young children who have not had this yet would get scammed."



- Current education delivered in schools around exploitation, crime, and safety often gets the messaging and approach wrong by underestimating children's existing knowledge, focusing on telling young people what they should and shouldn't do or scaring them regarding the dangers.
- Young people would benefit from hearing directly from people who have experienced financial exploitation about the risks involved with sharing your bank details.¹
- Schools and teachers don't care about financial exploitation or educate young people about the risks involved with sharing bank details.
- Young people are not taught financial literacy, and this can leave them more vulnerable to financial exploitation.

"Children need to be educated in school around the dangers of being online."



"If assemblies were to happen,
it should be
occurring during
primary school
before children get
their chances of having
their own social media
accounts."



Awareness and constrained choice

What are young people telling us?

- Young people would be worried about responses from police, family, schools, or social care if they had initially agreed to the money transfers.
- Young people who have some awareness that a bank transfer involved money made through criminal activity may be too worried about being in trouble with their parents or carers or the police to ask for help.
- Young people may think that because they are not yet adults, they aren't breaking the law.
- Offers of quick money may be tempting to young people if they feel they have nothing to lose.
- If it was a friend or partner asking to use your bank account for a transfer, you may say yes in order to help them out, even if you were aware that it was illegal.
- Smaller amounts of money being transferred would feel okay, whereas larger amounts of money may make young people feel more sceptical.
- If you have people relying on you financially, you may feel you have no choice but to engage with bank transfers, even if you know it is illegal.
- Young people may be aware that the money was made through illegal activity, but don't think it is illegal to transfer it.

"[The young person] knows it's 'drug money' but because he didn't commit a crime to get the money, he doesn't think it's illegal."

"If [a young person] was offered [an amount of money] to use his bank account for a quick transfer he would say yes because he's having a hard time at home and because he has caring responsibilities, he needs the money."

"If [the young person] lives in a deprived area [she] would say yes because she hasn't got anything to lose."

"she does know there is a risk, but she might not have any choice."



Section 2



Police

What are young people telling us?


- Young people who have experienced financial exploitation would be worried about being criminalised or met with a punitive response. This would serve as a barrier to engaging with investigations.
- Young people who have experienced financial exploitation may only consider reporting to the police if they are receiving threats of violence from perpetrators.
- Young people who have experienced financial exploitation may feel that contacting the police could put them at risk of further harm from the exploiter, particularly if the police response was too slow.
- Gender and age may impact the response to financial exploitation, with both girls and younger teenagers being perceived as more vulnerable and therefore more likely to receive a protective response.
- Some young people felt that there is less investment in the wellbeing of young people from deprived areas, and therefore these young people may not be offered support. Other young people felt that victims of financial exploitation from deprived areas would be more likely to be seen as vulnerable.

"Often the police can't do anything, there's no going back. There is law but they never find the person who did this."

"Police wouldn't care
[about a young person
from a deprived area
being a victim of
financial exploitation],
they only care
about wealthy
people."

- Previous negative experiences with the police, including police brutality in young people's native countries could create distrust and impact the likelihood of a young person reporting financial exploitation.
- The police may not care or be able to do anything about the exploitation.
- Young people may not want to report financial exploitation to the police as they do not want to be perceived as a victim, or be perceived as a 'snitch'.
- Police should be more like youth workers; young people would be more likely to open up to them if they had a more informal approach and weren't in uniform.

*"I'd be worried police
will ask too many questions,
will take me to jail."*



*"If you live in a
deprived area,
you know not
to trust the
police."*

"If a young person reports financial exploitation to police, a police officer should be sympathetic and understanding and offer support and reassurance that they are not to blame."



Banks

What are young people telling us?

- Young people who have immigrated to the UK may face language barriers when contacting their bank. They may also have less awareness about financial exploitation and not know to report this.
- There should be more safeguards for under 18s who have bank accounts. This could include spending limits and parental supervision of the account.
- It could be helpful to close the bank account of a young person who is experiencing financial exploitation, so as to avoid further money loss to perpetrators. However, this needs to be done in a way that enables victims to still access finances and obtain loans in the future. This could include special accounts for victims of financial exploitation which are more closely monitored.
- Victims of financial exploitation would potentially contact their bank if they lose money; however, young people feel that banks would not support young people who have been victims of financial exploitation, as the bank would think it is the young person's fault for sharing their account details.
- Banks should offer more information about financial exploitation and what to do if you are a victim. Banks tell you not to engage with scams but not about financial exploitation and what to do if you experience it.

"I think banks should spend money on programmes like this [the Prevention programme], teaching young people and sharing stories, not just saying 'don't do fraud'."

"Back home we don't use bank accounts... It's a big step when we come here, to open an account. We don't have information and can get scammed, we think it's a normal thing."

"They can't, wouldn't do anything. Banks just want to cover their backs, they have a lot of premiums to pay, they do not help. At end of the day you are on your own."



Section 3



Exploited young people's feelings

What are young people telling us?

- Young people who have experienced financial exploitation may be worried about getting into trouble for money laundering and what the consequences of this might be.
- Young people experiencing financial exploitation may feel trapped, helpless, in too deep, or as if there isn't a way out.
- Victims of financial exploitation may feel embarrassed, guilty, or stupid for falling for a scam. They also may not feel as if they can trust anyone.
- The amount of money being transferred impacted how young people would feel and their awareness of risk and danger. For example, small amounts of money at the start were seen as exciting and [they felt] relief it had worked with no consequences. However, as larger sums of money were transferred, young people were more aware of the risk involved and getting into trouble but felt they weren't able to say no.
- Young people experiencing financial exploitation may feel they have no choice but to allow transfers if they begin receiving threats. They may be scared for their own and their family's wellbeing and safety.
- If a young person is receiving threats from the people who have exploited them, they may feel they need to carry a weapon for safety.

"[A young person experiencing financial exploitation] would be bricking it and doesn't know what's going to happen to him."

"If a young person got scammed, they wouldn't tell anyone as they would be embarrassed and feel stupid."

"[A young person being financially exploited] might tell his closest mates about it but he's worried about seeming vulnerable or like he's being groomed. He's worried about how it would look"



"If you got scammed by someone you trust, you won't know who you could trust any more so wouldn't talk to anyone about it."

Section 4




Peer influences

What are young people telling us?

- Young people might ask other young people to use their bank accounts if they were being threatened and felt desperate.
- If bank transfers were successful, the young person's friends may want to do it too.
- Young people experiencing financial exploitation wouldn't tell their friends or ask them to do it so as not to put them in danger.

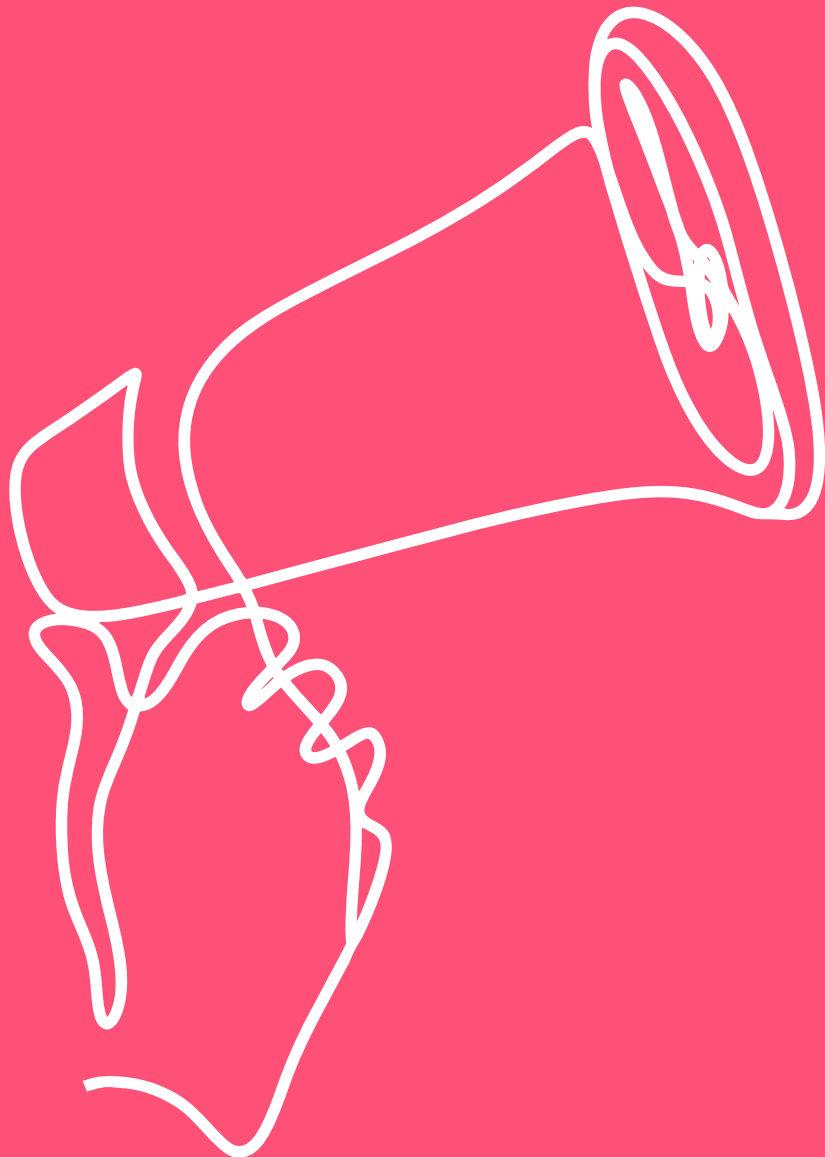
"[The young person] might ask people to get involved if he was desperate and needed a way out."

"[The young person] wouldn't tell his mates as he doesn't want to put them in danger."



"If you were being threatened you would involve other people out of desperation."

Section 5



Support for young people who have been financially exploited

What are young people telling us?

- Young people who have experienced financial exploitation should be able to access mental health support and counselling.
- If young people are in coercive relationships, they need support to leave this relationship and learn about healthy relationships and what exploitation can look like.
- Victims of financial exploitation need to hear from other young people who have experienced similar things so that they know they are not alone and it is not their fault.

"You need someone to explain you've not done anything wrong. You are safe. You might not understand what happened to you. You might need someone to let you know you are a victim, and not to blame."

- If the young person is in poverty or facing challenges at home, they need holistic support to ensure all their support needs are met.
- Victims of financial exploitation need additional support at school and to be given enough time to catch up if they have missed work.
- There should be support for the young person's family and/or other adults supporting the young person, so that they can also understand that it wasn't the young person's fault.
- Young people are most likely to talk about their experiences and feel understood by youth workers.

"The young person would need one-to-one counselling. They need to unload and process what has happened."



"Support the young person to get out of the toxic relationship and remind them that if the exploiter really loved them they wouldn't do that."

"[The young person] needs to meet other young people who have been through the same so he knows he's not alone."

Specific considerations

Throughout our consultations, we spent time with young people developing characters based on who they thought may be at risk of financial exploitation. We identified the following themes in these characters, as well as key considerations for adults supporting young people who have been exploited.

Additional needs

- Young people with learning disabilities may not be aware of the risks involved with sharing bank details.
- People struggling with mental health issues may be more likely to be targeted.



Socio-economic status and links to financial exploitation

- Young people who are living in poverty may be more inclined to engage with 'scam' social media posts, as they need the money.
- Perpetrators of financial exploitation may take advantage of young people who are struggling financially as they know the young person needs the money.
- Young people from wealthier backgrounds may have less awareness about financial safety and therefore may have less understanding that something is illegitimate.
- Young people who need to support their parents or family financially may engage with 'scams' if they feel they will make money.
- Young people may be aware of the risk surrounding financial exploitation, but if they are living in poverty or in a deprived area, they may feel they have no choice.
- Young people may receive more of a protective response if they had engaged with illegal money transfers in order to buy food and other necessities, as opposed to wanting the money for things like nice trainers.

"A young person living in poverty is more likely to be victim of financial exploitation to move money through their account and the need for money would outweigh any concerns that it was illegal."

"Living in poverty would make a young person likely to agree to using their bank account to transfer money for a small fee as they need the money."

Age

- Younger teenagers who are beginning to spend time with older teenagers may be exposed to more risk, but have less awareness about risk and may therefore be more vulnerable.
- Young people who have just got their first phone might be more susceptible to online scams.
- Younger teenagers might be more vulnerable to financial exploitation.

"The main age range is around 14 to 17 for getting targeted as they are still figuring out the skills of life and right from wrong."

"When a child is 13 or 14, the risk jumps. They have not reached that age where they are having to knuckle down to study, but they are also spending time with older teens ... at this age you see more risk taking."

Gender

- Boys might be more vulnerable to financial exploitation as they want to emulate particular lifestyles that they see online involving nice cars and expensive jewellery.
- Boys may feel more of a responsibility to be financially independent from a young age, and so may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation.
- Girls may receive more of a concerned and protective response from their friends, whereas boys may receive less sympathy.
- Vulnerable girls may be groomed into financial exploitation via social media and then exploited into other forms of criminal exploitation.

Culture

- Refugee and migrant young people may not have had access to bank accounts in their native countries and therefore have less awareness about risk associated with this once obtaining an account in the UK.
- Internationally trafficked young people may not typically have access to bank accounts in the UK and so may not be aware of the risks associated with sharing bank details when they do get an account.
- Small amounts of money can mean a lot to refugee and migrant children; therefore, they may be more vulnerable to being exploited when promised even small amounts of money.
- Some minoritised communities offer each other financial support, so it may not feel unusual to be asked to transfer money.
- Young people who have had negative experiences with authorities in their native countries may find it challenging to trust authorities such as social care or the police in the UK; this may impact how likely they are to make disclosures about exploitation or access support

"In many countries we are not used to tech, we don't have bank accounts in [young person's native country], even with a job, it's just cash, only serious jobs have bank accounts."

"Young people might be used to giving money to people in their communities to help them."

"If you've got no guardian, [young people have got] no one to help them, if you're new to the country, going through the asylum system, [young people] are thinking just of financial freedom."

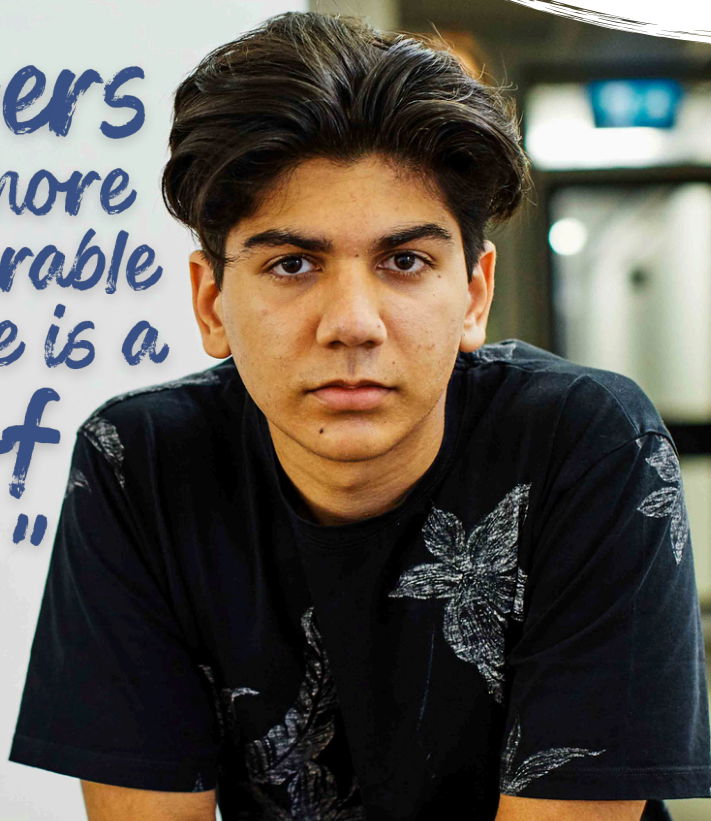


Family

- Young people growing up in care may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation. They also might be less able to seek support due to fear of being criminalised, having their phone confiscated, or having to move placements.
- Young people who have challenging relationships with their parents may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation and less likely to talk about their experiences.
- Young people in single parent households, particularly those who experience financial hardship, may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation.

"People whose parents aren't around to protect them will make them more vulnerable."

"Care leavers might be more vulnerable because there is a lack of support."



"If he tells
his parents,
social services will get
involved and
anything could
happen."

School

- Young people who don't attend school, or who don't have supportive networks at school, may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation.
- Young people with limited English, and who may not be in full time education due to this, may be more vulnerable.
- Young people who attend schools in deprived areas may be more likely to experience financial exploitation and other types of exploitation.
- Young people don't always feel supported by teachers or able to ask teachers for support with issues like exploitation.

Support networks

- Young people without strong support networks may be more vulnerable to financial exploitation.
- Friendships can serve as a protective factor to young people, and if a young person has friends who have awareness of financial exploitation, they may be more likely to seek support.
- Being financially exploited could result in a young person becoming isolated and losing existing support networks such as friendships.
- Young people with prior experience of other forms of exploitation and abuse are less likely to trust adults and report if they are now also experiencing financial exploitation.

What might impact the response to young people who have been financially exploited?

Factors include:

the young person's
level of awareness
that money
passing through
their account was
linked to criminal
activity

being care
experienced

their age

whether the adults
interacting with and
supporting them
have received
training on financial
exploitation

why they needed
the money



Appendix



Appendix 1

<p>Protection</p> <p>Our engagement with children and young people will not introduce unnecessary risks to their safety and wellbeing. We will always seek to ensure that they are protected from harm and they can be anonymous and not exposed to public scrutiny when it may harm their interests. Any engagement activity will operate to the standards set in The Children's Society Safeguarding Policy and contribute to our understanding of how best to safeguard young people and protect them from harm.</p>	<p>Recognition</p> <p>We will always acknowledge and celebrate the contributions made by children and young people and will give them information and feedback on how their contribution is used and makes a difference.</p> <p>That recognition includes providing accreditation and awards for developing skills.</p>	<p>Provision:</p> <p>We will always ensure that young people are able to participate in activities without cost to them or their families.</p> <p>Our engagement with them will provide a tangible benefit to them that otherwise would not have been available.</p>	<p>Professionalism:</p> <p>We will engage with children and young people in ways that shows our respect for them and our aspiration to take account of their needs and wishes in all circumstances.</p> <p>We will be honest and transparent at all times. Our confident and competent approach to engagement means we are ready and willing to share power with young people.</p>
<p>Belonging and Sharing:</p> <p>We will seek ways of enabling young people to share their experiences with each other and develop skills and knowledge that enhance their wellbeing. This recognises the friendship and kinship that develops amongst young people when they participate in collective activity.</p>	<p>Choice and Influence:</p> <p>We will always ensure that children and young people make an informed decision to participate and that the influence of their contribution is clear. We also want to make sure that a wide range of young people are offered a multitude of opportunities to participate and engage in.</p>	<p>Mutual gain:</p> <p>There needs to be a tangible benefit to the adults involved for the engagement activity to have meaning and credibility. Where possible, the benefit being sought should be made known to young people from the beginning.</p>	<p>Inclusive:</p> <p>We will ensure the opportunity to participate is extended to all and any regardless of personal circumstances, background or perceived competence and ability. We acknowledge that young people can grow in their capacity to participate and start their journey at different levels.</p>

Our Principles

Based on The Children's Society's Youth Engagement Principles

Across the country, young people's needs are being ignored, with those facing abuse, exploitation, or mental health struggles only receiving help at crisis point.

At The Children's Society, we know a brighter future is possible. That's why we've been working for more than 140 years to reach children where they are to tackle the struggles they face today. We provide complete support that's specific to them and challenge the government to deliver policies that will continue to protect them.

A future of hope and happiness belongs to every child. Together, we can make sure that no child has to face life alone.

Email: prevention@childrenssociety.org.uk

Bluesky: [@TCSPolicy.bsky.official](https://bsky.app/profile/TCSPolicy.bsky.official)

X: [@childrenssociety](https://twitter.com/childrenssociety)

Tel: 0300 303 7000

Report authors

Melissa Adler, Danielle Riley and James Simmonds-Read

Citation

Adler M, Riley D, Simmonds-Read J.
Tackling financial exploitation: Youth voice insights.
The Children's Society: London; 2025