



Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

What is it?

Hidden from view and going unnoticed, vulnerable young girls and boys are groomed and then abused, leaving them traumatised and scarred for life. (Barnardo's, 2012.)

Child sexual exploitation victims are extremely vulnerable and often have no understanding that they were being sexually exploited, trafficked and prostituted. In many cases they regard their main abuser as their boy/girlfriend.

Children and young people do not become involved voluntarily; they are forced or tempted into the situation by abusive adults or peers who present themselves as their 'friend' or 'boy/girlfriend'.

They find it very hard to understand or accept that they are being abused through sexual exploitation, and this increases their risk of being exposed to violent assault and life threatening events by those who abuse them.

CSE through prostitution is a form of abuse by which a child or young person is coerced or manipulated to engage in sexual activities either in return for something or for the profit of others. This is seriously harmful to children both emotionally and physically.

Sexual exploitation deprives children and young people of their childhood, self-esteem and life chances often through missing education and training. Their emotional and physical well-being is compromised and their experiences can result in self-destructive behaviours such as eating disorders, self-mutilation and crime.

Who is at risk?

Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances. This includes boys and young men as well as girls and young women. However, some groups of young people are particularly vulnerable. These include:

- missing or runaway or homeless children
- children in care
- children with prior experience of sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect
- adolescents or pre-adolescents
- Girls (boys are also at risk but current research suggests most victims are girls. Boys are considered less likely to disclose which may explain the gender imbalance and may also make boys more vulnerable)
- children not in education through exclusion or children persistently absent from school
- children from black and minority ethnic communities
- children from migrant communities
- refugee children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- trafficked children
- children with mental health conditions
- Children from households where domestic violence and abuse has been a feature
- children who use drugs and alcohol
- children with learning difficulties and disabilities
- children involved with gangs or living in communities where gangs are prevalent
- children from families or communities with offending behaviours
- Children living in poverty or deprivation
- Family breakdown / disrupted family life / problematic parenting
- Children of parents with a high level of vulnerabilities (e.g. drug and/or alcohol abuse, mental illness, learning disability, their own history of an abusive childhood)

Why are these children and young people particularly at risk?

The grooming techniques used to gain the child's attention, admiration and affection often taps into insecurities or a desire for acceptance and status by the young person:

- Being liked by someone older;
- Being liked/fancied enough that a stranger asks for their mobile number;
- Meeting someone who thinks they are special on the internet;
- Receiving alcohol, drugs, money or gifts;
- Getting a buzz and the excitement of risk taking/forbidden behaviour;
- Being offered somewhere to stay where there are no rules/boundaries;
- Being taken along to adult entertainment venues, red light or gay cruising areas (public sex environments);
- Being given lifts, taken to new places, and having adventures with a casual acquaintance.

Immediate Indicators

- Going missing
- Disengagement from education
- Drug and/or alcohol dependency
- Physical symptoms e.g. sexually transmitted infections, miscarriage, abortion, bruising or marks indicating physical or sexual assault
- Associating with older men or other 'risky' adults
- Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of the money to fund these activities
- New possessions, acquisition of money, expensive clothes, drugs or other possessions without plausible explanation about their source
- Being alienated from family or community
- Being in care and having placement breakdown
- Associating with other young people who are known to be victims of exploitation
- Some kinds of offending behaviour

The above categories/indicators should be used as a working guide in the identification of risk

Who are the abusers?

- Men and women
- Boyfriends/girlfriends - there is a presumption that children and young people are sexually exploited by people they do not know. However, evidence shows that they are often abused by 'boyfriends' or people with whom they feel they have a relationship.
- Family members - organised familial abuse or abuse within closed community groups, including sexual exploitation and the making and distribution of abusive images of children and trafficking of children into, within and out of the UK is not uncommon. Sometimes by providing drugs, alcohol or money to the parents or carers. This can often mean that the parents or carers approve of the perpetrator as a potential boyfriend or girlfriend as they are trusted and needed by the family

- Friends, peers and friends of older siblings - In some cases perpetrators are known to use younger men, women, boys or girls to build initial relationships and introduce them to others in the perpetrator networks.

This list is neither definitive nor prescriptive, given that each child's exploitation may be unique and change over time.

What should you do?

- **Ensure that everyone in the school or setting has read this factsheet and is aware of what child sexual exploitation is, which children are most likely to be at risk and what the potential indicators of child sexual exploitation are**
- **Ensure that all students attend school regularly, follow up promptly when a student is absent and refer any concerns promptly to the Education Welfare Service**
- **Follow your schools' safeguarding procedures.**
- **The Designated Safeguarding Lead will refer - where the risk is not immediate, this should be done using the Family Front Door.**

**If a child is thought to be at risk of immediate harm
contact the Police 999**

For the purpose of this document a child is anyone from 0 to 18 years