

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?



An introduction
for parents and carers



Child sexual exploitation is a serious issue affecting young people throughout the UK. This leaflet for parents and carers gives a brief introduction to what child sexual exploitation is, how to spot the signs and where to go for help in Derbyshire if you have concerns.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation is the abuse of children and young people up to the age of 18, where the young person is being manipulated, coerced or forced into engaging in sexual activity.

As a form of manipulation, the young person may receive something – such as affection, a bed for the night, food, alcohol, gifts – from their abuser. The young person may also believe they are in a loving, consensual relationship, when in fact they are being exploited.

How does child sexual exploitation happen?

Child sexual exploitation can occur in different ways and in different situations. Many young people are 'groomed' by their abuser, which tends to conjure up the image of an adult hiding behind a computer screen talking to young people online. However this is not the only form of grooming and young people can also be targeted in person.

Grooming is a carefully planned process with the aim of controlling a young person, to ensure that they do exactly what the perpetrator wants. Initially, a young person may receive gifts and be showered with attention and affection, but this may later turn to blackmail, threats of violence or actual violence.

It is not a young person's fault if they are sexually exploited. Perpetrators of child sexual exploitation often have power – real or perceived - over the young people they abuse. This power may be due to their age, their status, their intellect, or their physical strength. They use this power to manipulate and control their victim.

Who is at risk?

Any child – male or female – could be a victim of this form of abuse, regardless of their background.

Some young people may be more vulnerable to exploitation than others; for example young people with learning disabilities, and young people who have experienced the death of someone significant in their lives.

Child sexual exploitation happens in all areas of the country, in cities, towns and villages.

Who are the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation?

Perpetrators can be male or female from any background, any age group and any ethnicity. Often, perpetrators are well-liked, articulate and plausible.

Sexual exploitation can also happen between young people and within peer groups.

How do I know if my child is being exploited?

Child sexual exploitation can be difficult to identify, but the following signs may suggest that your child is being, or at risk of being, sexually exploited:

- Regularly coming home late
- Going missing from home frequently
- Regularly missing school or college
- Bringing home unexplained or unaffordable new items, such as clothes, a mobile phone or jewellery
- Reduced contact with family and friends
- Behaving out of character
- An older boyfriend, girlfriend or friendship group
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections
- Self-harming
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Experimenting with drugs and/or alcohol

What can I do to protect my child from exploitation?

Young people are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation because they want to experiment, take risks, and push boundaries. However, there are some things that you can do to protect your child:

- Talk to your child about healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Discuss internet safety with your child and take action to reduce risk when they are online
- Be aware of the warning signs of child sexual exploitation and access support if you have any concerns

What do I do if I have concerns?

If you believe that a child is in immediate danger and needs protection call the police on 999. If the child is not in immediate danger and you would like some advice from the police, call them on 101.

Contact Call Derbyshire on 01629 533190 and choose the option for urgent child protection calls.

Other sources of support and information:

Safe & Sound Derby works with young people in Derbyshire who are being, or at risk of being, sexually exploited - www.safeandsoundderby.co.uk, 01332 362120, info@safeandsoundderby.co.uk

Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board - www.derbyshirescb.org.uk, 01629 532181

NSPCC offers support if you're worried about a child - **0808 800 5000**, help@nspcc.org.uk or text **88858**

ChildLine offers support, advice and information for children and young people www.childline.org.uk, 0800 1111

Pace UK work alongside parents/carers of children who are, or at risk of, sexual exploitation www.paceuk.info, 0113 240 3040

Parents Protect! Giving adults the information they need to protect children – www.parentsprotect.co.uk, 0808 1000 900

Think U Know information for young people, parents and practitioners www.thinkuknow.co.uk