

## Child sexual exploitation Source: NSPCC

### What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation 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 (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

DfE, Child sexual exploitation (2017)

### Statistics

Over 2,400 children were victims of sexual exploitation in gangs and groups from August 2010 to October 2011 (Office of the Children's Commissioner).

152 children were trafficked for sexual exploitation in 2013 (Serious Organised Crime Agency and UK Human Trafficking Centre).

### Signs and indicators:

Sexual exploitation can be very difficult to identify. Warning signs can easily be mistaken for 'normal' adolescent behaviour.

Young people who are being sexually exploited may:

- Be involved in abusive relationships, intimidated and fearful of certain people or situations
- Hang out with groups of older people, or antisocial groups, or with other vulnerable peers
- Associate with other young people involved in sexual exploitation
- Get involved in gangs, gang fights, gang membership
- Have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- Spend time at places of concern, such as hotels or known brothels
- Not know where they are, because they have been moved around the country
- Go missing from home, care or education.

They may also show signs of sexual abuse or grooming. If you're worried that a child is being abused, watch out for any unusual behaviour, things you may notice include:

Withdrawn, suddenly behaves differently, anxious, clingy, depressed, aggressive, problems sleeping, eating disorders, wets the bed, soils clothes, takes risks, misses school, changes in eating habits, obsessive behaviour, nightmares, drugs, alcohol, self-harm, thoughts about suicide

## **Sexual abuse: signs and symptoms**

Children who are sexually abused may:

### **Stay away from certain people**

- They might avoid being alone with people, such as family members or friends
- They could seem frightened of a person or reluctant to socialise with them.

### **Show sexual behaviour that's inappropriate for their age**

- A child might become sexually active at a young age
- They might be promiscuous
- They could use sexual language or know information that you wouldn't expect them to.

### **Have physical symptoms**

- Anal or vaginal soreness
- An unusual discharge
- Sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Pregnancy.

## **Grooming: signs and symptoms**

The signs of grooming aren't always obvious. Groomers will also go to great lengths not to be identified.

Children may:

- Be very secretive, including about what they are doing online
- Have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- Go to unusual places to meet friends
- Have new things such as clothes or mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- Have access to drugs and alcohol.

In older children, signs of grooming can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour, but you may notice unexplained changes in behaviour or personality, or inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age.

## **The effects of sexual exploitation on children**

Sexual exploitation can have devastating effects on a child or young person that can last throughout their lives. Every child and situation is different.

## **What research tells us about the effects of child sexual exploitation**

Child sexual exploitation has long-term effects on young people's social integration and economic well-being and may adversely affect their life chances. Some of the difficulties faced by victims include:

- Isolation from family and friends
- Teenage parenthood
- Failing examinations or dropping out of education altogether
- Unemployment
- Mental health problems
- Suicide attempts
- Alcohol and drug addiction
- Aggressive behaviour
- Criminal activity.

([PACE, 2013](#); [Safe and Sound, 2013](#); [Berelowitz, 2012](#))