

Child Sexual Exploitation

Definition

The sexual exploitation of children is defined as:

'involving exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money, mobile phones) as a result of their performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. It can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; e.g. being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability'.

[Child Sexual exploitation: definition and guidance for practitioners](#) 2007

Risks

Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances.

Sexual exploitation results in children and young people suffering harm, and causes significant damage to their physical and mental health. It can also have profound and damaging consequences for the child's family. Parents and carers are often traumatised and under severe stress. Siblings can feel alienated and their self-esteem affected. Family members can themselves suffer serious threats of abuse, intimidation and assault at the hands of perpetrators.

There are strong links between children involved in sexual exploitation and other behaviours such as running away from home or care, bullying, self-harm, teenage pregnancy, truancy and substance misuse. In addition, some children are particularly vulnerable, for example, children with special needs, those in residential or foster care, those leaving care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, victims of forced marriage and those involved in gangs.

There is also often a presumption that children are sexually exploited by people they do not know. However evidence shows that this is often not the case and children are often sexually exploited by people with whom they feel they have a relationship, e.g. a boyfriend / girlfriend. Children are often persuaded that the boyfriend / girlfriend is their only true form of support and encouraged to withdraw from their friends and family and to place their trust only within the relationship.

Many children and young people are groomed into sexually exploitative relationships but other forms of entry exist. Some young people are engaged in informal economies that incorporate the exchange of sex for rewards such as drugs, alcohol, money or gifts. Others exchange sex for accommodation or money as a result of homelessness and experiences of poverty. Some young people have been bullied, coerced and threatened into sexual

activities by peers or gang members which is then used against them as a form of extortion and to keep them compliant.

Due to the nature of the grooming methods used by their abusers, it is very common for children and young people who are sexually exploited not to recognise that they are being abused.

Leaders should be aware that particularly young people aged 16 and 17 may believe themselves to be acting voluntarily and will need practitioners to work with them so they can recognise that they are being sexually exploited. This is not an issue, which affects only girls and young women, but boys and young men are also exploited. However, they often may experience other barriers to disclosure.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It can take many forms from the seemingly 'consensual' relationship where sex is exchanged for attention, accommodation or gifts, to serious organised crime and child trafficking. (Human trafficking is the movement of a person from one place to another into conditions of exploitation, using deception, coercion, the abuse of power or the abuse of someone's vulnerability).

What marks out exploitation is an imbalance of power within the relationship. The perpetrator always holds some kind of power over the victim, increasing the dependence of the victim as the exploitative relationship develops.

Technology such as mobile phones or social networking sites can play a part in sexual exploitation, for example, through their use to record abuse and share it with other like-minded individuals or as a medium to access children and young people in order to groom them.

Sexual exploitation has strong links with other forms of crime, for example, [Domestic Violence and Abuse](#), online and offline grooming, the distribution of abusive images of children and child trafficking.

The perpetrators of sexual exploitation are often well organised and use sophisticated tactics. They are known to target areas where children and young people gather without much adult supervision, e.g. parks, takeaway outlets or shopping centres or sites on the Internet.

Children and young people may have already been sexually exploited before they are referred to Children's Social Care; others may become targets of perpetrators whilst living at home or during placements. They are often the focus of perpetrators of sexual abuse due to their vulnerability. All practitioners and foster carers should therefore create an environment which educates children and young people about child sexual exploitation, involving relevant outside agencies where appropriate. They should encourage them to discuss any such concerns with them, or with someone from a specialist child sexual exploitation project, and also feel able to share any such concerns about their friends.

Consent

This extract from The Office of the Commissioner for Children (OCC) Inquiry into CSE in Gangs and Groups (Nov 2012) helps to consider issues around consent.

"The law not only sets down 16 as the age of consent, it also applies to whether a person has given their consent to sexual activity, or was able to give their consent, or

whether sexual violence and rape in particular took place. In the context of child sexual exploitation, the term 'consent' refers to whether or not a child understands how one gives consent, withdraws consent and what situations (such as intoxication, duress, violence) can compromise the child or young person's ability to consent freely to sexual activity."

Leaders must also consider other factors which might influence the ability of the person to give consent, e.g. learning disability / mental ill health. Young people under the age of 16 cannot legally consent to sexual activity. Sexual intercourse with children under the age of 13 is statutory rape. A child under 18 cannot consent to their own abuse through exploitation.

Indicators

Anyone who has regular contact with children is in a good position to notice changes in behaviour and physical signs that may indicate involvement in sexual exploitation and as such this would include Cadet Leaders.

Parents, carers and anyone in a position of responsibility with a child should also know how to monitor online activity and be prepared to - monitor computer usage where they are suspicious that a child is being groomed online.

The fact that a young person is 16 or 17 years old should not be taken as a sign they are no longer at risk of sexual exploitation.

Young people with a disability may have increased vulnerability as well as young people up to the age of 21 who were looked after for whom the local authority has statutory care leaver responsibility and / or where there may be child in need and/or child protection issues.

Barnardo's 'Puppet on a String' report 2011 sets out three different models of activity in the spectrum of sexual exploitation:

<p>Inappropriate relationships</p>	<p>Usually involving one perpetrator who has inappropriate power or control over a young person (physical emotional or financial). One indicator may be a significant age gap. The young person may believe they are in a loving relationship.</p>
<p>'Boyfriend' model of exploitation and peer exploitation</p>	<p>The perpetrator befriends and grooms a young person into a 'relationship' and then coerces or forces them to have sex with friends or associates. Peer exploitation is where young people are forced or coerced into sexual activity by peers and associates. Sometimes this can be associated with gang activity, but not always.</p>
<p>Organised / networked sexual exploitation or trafficking</p>	<p>Young people (often connected) are passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities where they may be forced / coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. Often this occurs in 'sex parties', and young people who are involved may be used as agents to recruit others into</p>

the network. Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised 'buying and selling' of young people by perpetrators.

Practitioners should receive training on child sexual exploitation, and therefore be aware of the key indicators of child sexual exploitation. This list is not exhaustive, but they include:

Health

- Physical symptoms (bruising suggestive of either physical or sexual assault);
- Chronic fatigue;
- Recurring or multiple sexually transmitted infections;
- Pregnancy and/or seeking an abortion;
- Evidence of drug, alcohol or other substance misuse.

Education

- Truancy/disengagement with education or considerable change in performance at school.

Emotional and Behavioural Issues

- Volatile behaviour exhibiting extreme array of mood swings or use of abusive language;
- Secretive behaviour;
- Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults;
- Reports of being seen in places known to be used for sexual exploitation, including public toilets known for cottaging or adult venues (pubs and clubs);
- Being withdrawn and secretive.

Identity

- Low self-image, low self-esteem, self-harming behaviour, e.g. cutting, overdosing, eating disorder.

Relationships

- Hostility in relationships with staff, family members as appropriate and significant others;
- Physical aggression;
- Placement breakdown;
- Reports from reliable sources (e.g. family, friends or other professionals) suggesting the likelihood of involvement in sexual exploitation;
- Detachment from age-appropriate activities;
- Associating with other young people who are known to be sexually exploited;
- Sexual relationship with a significantly older person, or younger person who is suspected of being abusive;

- Unexplained relationships with older adults;
- Possible inappropriate use of the Internet and forming relationships, particularly with adults, via the Internet;
- Phone calls, text messages or letters from unknown adults;
- Adults or older youths loitering outside the home;
- Persistently missing, staying out overnight or returning late with no plausible explanation;
- Returning after having been missing, looking well cared for in spite of having no known home base;
- Missing for long periods, with no known home base;
- Going missing and being found in areas where they have no known links.

Please note: Whilst the focus is often on older men as perpetrators, younger men and women are also involved and Leaders should be aware of this possibility.

Social Presentation

- Change in appearance;
- Going out dressed in clothing unusual for them (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older young people).

Family and Environmental Factors

- History of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; neglect; domestic violence; parental difficulties;
- Break down in family relationships.

Housing

- Pattern of previous street homelessness;
- Having keys to premises other than those known about;
- Being located when missing at the property of adults with whom there is no clear link to e.g. not a family member.

Income

- Possession of large amounts of money with no plausible explanation;
- Acquisition of expensive clothes, mobile phones or other possessions without plausible explanation;
- Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding.

Other Areas to Consider

Cadet Leaders should be aware that many children and young people who are sexually exploited do not see themselves as victims. In such situations, discussions with them about concerns should be handled with great sensitivity. Seeking prior advice from in Force teams, specialist agencies and the [National Safeguarding Manager](#) may be useful. This should not involve disclosing personal, identifiable information at this stage.

In assessing whether a child or young person is a victim of sexual exploitation, or at risk, careful consideration should be given to the issue of consent. It is important to bear in mind that:

- A child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex (it is statutory rape) or any other type of sexual touching;
- Sexual activity with a child under 16 is also an offence;
- It is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old if they hold a position of trust or authority in relation to them;
- Where sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old does not result in an offence being committed, it may still result in harm, or the likelihood of harm being suffered;
- Non-consensual sex is rape whatever the age of the victim; and
- If the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or his or her family has been subject to violence or the threat of it, they cannot be considered to have given true consent; therefore offences may have been committed;
- Child sexual exploitation is therefore potentially a child protection issue for all children under the age of 18 years and not just those in a specific age group.

The child sexual exploitation training which practitioners receive should also include what information should be given to the police in such cases, for example vehicle registration numbers, names, physical descriptions. It may also include what action staff should take in the case of suspected sexual or physical abuse in order to protect potential evidence, which may be useful in the case of an alleged perpetrator being prosecuted.

Children and Young People who go Missing

A significant number of children and young people who are being sexually exploited may go [missing](#) home or care, and education. Some go missing frequently; the more often they go missing the more vulnerable they are to being sexually exploited. If a child does go missing, a safeguarding referral should be made following the National and Force process.

Protection and Action to be Taken

Where the concerns about the welfare and safety of the child or young person are such that a referral to Children's Social Care should be made the Force and National Safeguarding Policy and Procedure must be followed.

Supporting Children and Young People out of Child Sexual Exploitation

Cadet Leaders and practitioners from statutory agencies and other voluntary sector organisations together with the child or young person, foster carers, and his / her family as appropriate, should agree on the services which should be provided to them and how they will be coordinated. This may mean the Unit Leader working together with other statutory organisations.

The monthly MACE – Multi Agency Child Exploitation meetings will aid with ascertaining the level of risk and identify an action plan of support for the young person which will run

alongside any safeguarding plans which may be in place. The types of intervention offered should be appropriate to their needs and should take full account of identified risk factors and their individual circumstances. This may include, for example, previous abuse, missing incidents, involvement in gangs and groups and/or child trafficking. Health services provided may include sexual health services and mental health services. Advice should be sought from the nearest specialist service which works with children and young people involved in child sexual exploitation. A referral should be made as appropriate, if the child or young person is in agreement.

For children who are Looked After (LAC) issues raised and actions planned should be incorporated into the child's [Care Plan](#) and [Placement Plan](#), and reviewed as part of the [Looked After Child Review](#).

Because the effects of child sexual exploitation can last well into adulthood, support may be required over a long period of time. In such circumstances, effective links should be made between children and adult services and statutory and voluntary organisations. For young people who are Looked After, this should be incorporated into their pathway plan

Further Information

[What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited](#)

[Barnardos - Child Sexual Exploitation](#)

[Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation – The Rotherham Response \(March 2015\)](#)

[National Crime Agency - UK Human Trafficking Centre](#)

[Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan, Department for Education, 2011](#)

[Tackling child sexual exploitation: A resource pack for councils](#)

[Responding to child sexual exploitation – College of Policing](#)

[Child Sexual Abuse - The Children's Commissioner](#)

[Sex and Relationships Education \(SRE\) for the 21st Century, Brook, PSHE Association and Sex Education Forum, 2014](#)