

# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A guide for parents and carers



**ESSEX  
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# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

## YOU AND YOUR CHILD

Sexual exploitation affects thousands of children and young people across the UK every year. As a parent or carer, you could have an important role to play in protecting children from exploitation, helping to cut them free from this horrific form of child abuse.

### **WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?**

CSE is when an abuser manipulates, coerces or forces a child or young person into performing sexual acts.

Abusers are usually older males, but they can sometimes be of a similar age or be female. They are very sophisticated in the way they operate, meaning what they do is well thought out and planned.

An abuser will know areas to target. They are skilled in approaching children or young people in person or may use a younger man or woman, or boy or girl, to make the initial contacts. Some use the internet or mobile phones to engage the child or young person.

To do this they may use threats and/or violence, introduce them to alcohol or drugs and create a dependency, or make the child or young person feel special through attention or gifts, or pretend to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. They will also aim to alienate them from their friends and family. This is sometimes referred to as the grooming process.

Because of the grooming process children or young people don't usually know that they are being drawn into sexual exploitation or realise that the situation they are in is abuse. They often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening.

### **WHO DOES IT AFFECT?**

This type of abuse could happen to any young person from any background. It happens to boys and young men as well as girls and young women.

The victims of abuse are not at fault. Abusers are very clever in the way they manipulate and take advantage of the young people they abuse.



## **HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?**

Many young people are groomed by an abusing adult who befriends the young person and makes them feel special by buying them gifts or giving them lots of attention. They may use threats and/or violence, introduce them to alcohol or drugs and create a dependency, or pretend to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. Young people may be targeted online or in person.

In most cases the abuser will have power of some kind over the young person. It may be that the abuser is older or more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or that they are in a position where they are able to control the young person.

There are some situations that can make young people more vulnerable to exploitation; by becoming distant from the people who would usually look after them. Young people who are having difficulties at home, regularly go missing or have experienced care may be particularly vulnerable.

# SPOTTING THE SIGNS

When a child or young person is being exploited it can be difficult for them to see what is happening or know how to tell someone. It is important therefore that as parents and carers we are able to spot the warning signs and know how to best offer support.

## MISSING FROM HOME

This might be returning home late, staying out over night or missing school. They might be defensive about where they have been, who they have been with and what they have been doing.

## PHONE

Receiving excessive or strange messages or phone calls from people you and/or they don't know. Having adults as friends on social networking sites.

## GIFTS

Coming home with new expensive items that they couldn't normally afford like phone, jewellery, new trainers or computer games. Or talking about people who give them free food or cigarettes.

## ADULT FRIENDS

Associating with or developing close relationships with people over 18. They may give them lifts or invite them into adult activity like drinking, parties or even offer them the chance of a job.

## ALCOHOL OR DRUGS

Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs on a regular basis. Particularly alcohol that is normally associated with adult drinking.

## MOODS

Changes in mood, maybe acting secretive, withdrawn or aggressive.

## INJURIES

Having marks on their bodies which they try to conceal.

## SUDDEN CHANGE

In friendship groups, music taste, clothes, behaviour, school attendance.

## CARS

Getting picked up or dropped by unknown people, or talking about going to new places.

## Remember...

Even something that seems like normal teenage behaviour could be a sign that a child or young person is being sexually exploited. If you have any concerns report it to police by calling **101**, or Crimestoppers anonymously on **0800 555 111**.



# TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS

As a parent or carer, it is important to discuss with children the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships to help highlight potential risks to them.

There are also a number of practical steps you can take to protect children such as:

1. Spend time with your child, support them and let them know you love them. Remind them that if they ever have a problem or are concerned by something/someone they can come to you.
2. Encourage them to talk to you about anything, remind them it's ok for them to ask questions or share things with you even when things have gone wrong.
3. Know who their friends are, talk about them with your child and be cautious of any friends or older people who seem to have power over them.
4. Make sure that when they take their phone with them, it's charged and has credit or can be used to message you for free. Being on the same network often means you can message each other for free or there are simple apps available that can help you stay in touch.
5. Know where they go to hang out, make sure you feel it's an appropriate place for your child to be.
6. If they're going out encourage them to have a plan of how they are getting where they are going and how they are getting back. Ensure they have got enough money for this plan and agree a time to return home.
7. Drinking alcohol and taking drugs can make children unaware of risky situations and can make them a target for someone who may want to hurt them. If you think your child is drinking chat to them about the dangers, how to know their limits and how to seek medical help if they or a friend feels unwell.
8. If your child seems to be receiving free gifts/things from someone encourage them to think about what that person might want in return.
9. Take an interest in your child's online life; the people that they're friends with, talk to, game with and the photos they post or receive. If they want to meet up with people offline make sure they take an adult with them and meet in a public place.
10. Help your child stick to age restrictions on games, websites, videos and apps. If they are designed to be used by adults then chances are your child will be interacting with people older than them. Ask yourself if you would feel uncomfortable if your child was chatting to lots of unknown adults in the street and apply the same.

# TIPS TO HELP KEEP CHILDREN SAFE ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

In today's digital age children are becoming more and more active online. One main reason is to access social media. Young people use social networking sites on a day-to-day basis to share photos, connect with friends and much more.

This increase in activity has made it harder for parents and guardians to keep track of what their children are accessing online. Many CSE victims are targeted through social media and on the internet.

## **1. HAVE THE CONVERSATION EARLY AND OFTEN**

Children and young people spend an average of 12 hours a week online and it becomes part of their routine early on in life. That's why it's important to start talking to your child about keeping safe online at an early age. It's easier to have conversations about online safety little and often, rather than trying to cover everything at once.

## **2. EXPLORE ONLINE TOGETHER**

Ask your child to show you their favourite things to do online, and show an interest in what they do - just like you would offline. This will give you a much better idea of what they're getting up to. And it gives you a way to support and encourage them while learning what they know.

## **3. KNOW WHO YOUR CHILD IS TALKING TO ONLINE**

Children don't think of people they've met online through social networking and online games as strangers, they're just online friends. Explain to your child that it's easy for people to lie about themselves online, like their age, for example, because you have never met them.

## **4. SET RULES AND AGREE BOUNDARIES**

It's useful to agree on some ground rules together. These will depend on your child's age and what you feel is right for them, but you might want to consider the amount of time they can spend online, and the websites they can visit.

## **5. MAKE SURE THAT CONTENT IS AGE-APPROPRIATE**

You know your child best, so check that the websites, social networks and games they're using are suitable for them.

**6. STOP YOUR CHILD FROM SEEING UNSUITABLE OR HARMFUL CONTENT ONLINE**

You can set up parental controls to stop your child from seeing unsuitable or harmful content online. Remember that if your child goes online away from home, the same controls might not be in place at other people's houses or on public Wi-Fi. Agree with your child how they will use public Wi-Fi or let other parents know what your child is or isn't allowed to do online.

**7. CHECK THEY KNOW HOW TO USE PRIVACY SETTINGS AND REPORTING TOOLS**

Check the privacy settings on any online accounts your child has, like Facebook or games, and remind them to keep their personal information private. And talk to your child about what to do if they see content or are contacted by someone that worries or upsets them. Make sure they know how to use tools to report abuse.

For more advice visit the Online Safety section of the NSPCC website at [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)



# GETTING HELP

If you are concerned that your child is being sexually exploited then there are people who can help.



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## THE POLICE: 999 or 101

The police care a lot about the safety of children and young people. If you think your child is in immediate danger then ring 999 or you can report concerns by dialling 101. You can also tell the police if your child has gone missing.



## CRIMESTOPPERS: 0800 555 111

or [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

Crimestoppers guarantees anonymity to all callers and website users. If you are concerned a young person is being sexually exploited, call 0800 555 111 or visit [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org) to provide information.



## CEOP: [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

CEOP provide lots of information about helping your children to stay safe on line. You can report online concerns to them.



## PACE: 0113 2405226

or [www.paceuk.info](http://www.paceuk.info)

Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE) offer a national support team who can talk to you about your immediate concerns, help you to assess the level of danger your child is in, and signpost you to agencies in your area. They take calls during office hours, Monday to Friday.



## NSPCC: 0808 8005000

You can ring the NSPCC helpdesk on 0808 8005000 to report concerns and get advice if you are concerned about your child being exploited. They can be accessed 24 hours a day.



## BARNARDO'S:

[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

For more information and research about child sexual exploitation and how it affects children and young people.

**Remember:** if you are concerned about your child there are people in your child's school you can talk to.