

## Child Sexual Exploitation

Children and young people under the age of sixteen cannot, by law, consent to sexual intercourse and anyone engaging in sexual activity with a child under the age of sixteen is committing an offence. Although the age of consent is sixteen, it is illegal for those under eighteen to be paid for sexual services in money or in kind. All children involved in sexual exploitation should be treated as victims of abuse, even those aged between 16 and 18. Concern that a child, young person or vulnerable adult may be involved in sexual exploitation or at risk of being drawn into it should always initiate action to ensure child's safety and welfare.

### Definition:

*Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves 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) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person 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 or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.*

National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children  
and Young People 2008

Although the definition of sexual exploitation is long and detailed, in essence such abuse is characterised by children and young people receiving goods, favours or money in return for sexual activities. In all such exploitation, the balance of power remains with the abuser(s) through age, intellect or resources.

This is an extract from the Safeguarding Handbook 2015  
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## Models of Sexual Exploitation

Three models of sexual exploitation have been identified:

<b>Inappropriate Relationship</b>	<b>Boyfriend</b>	<b>Organised Crime</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One abuser</li> <li>• Power and control</li> <li>• Physical, emotional, financial</li> <li>• Believe abuser is offering a genuine relationship</li> <li>• Often a significant age gap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initially, one abuser, grooming and gaining trust</li> <li>• Apparently consensual sexual relationship starts</li> <li>• Relationship becomes abusive</li> <li>• Victim threaten with violence and forced to engage in sexual activity with others</li> <li>• Growth in peer exploitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving criminal gangs trafficking victims around the UK and the world</li> <li>• Established networks across the UK move victims from location to location</li> <li>• Forced or coerced into sexual activity with multiple partners</li> <li>• Involves buying and selling of young people</li> </ul>

Sexual exploitation affects both males and females, services working with sexually exploited young people suggest that around a third of victims are male.

There are a number of risk groups where such abuse is more likely:

- a history of running away or going missing
- homelessness
- those in care or care-leavers (especially residential care)
- young people with learning difficulties
- migrant children
- unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- those disengaged from education
- young people involved in substance misuse
- young people in gangs
- poor mental health
- parental drug/alcohol misuse
- disrupted family life
- domestic violence
- history of physical or sexual abuse

Sexual exploitation takes many forms and a range of coercive techniques is used from grooming and the development of a 'consensual' relationship, through to extreme violence. Abusers target areas where children and young people meet with a reduced level of supervision, including shopping centres, takeaways, cinemas, bus or train stations and local parks. Much of this exploitation occurs in private, away from known areas of prostitution, saunas or massage parlours.

### **Warning Signs**

- going missing for periods of time
- returning home late
- disengagement from education
- poor school attendance (including truancy and school exclusions)
- appearing with unexplained gifts: clothes, jewellery, trainers, phones, money
- associating with others involved in sexual exploitation
- frequently in the company of older people, particularly boyfriends or girlfriends
- poor sexual health
- mood swings/poor anger control/changes in emotional well-being
- drug and alcohol misuse (often a method of increasing compliance)
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour, especially around strangers
- association with 'risky' adults
- chronic tiredness
- secretive behaviour
- low-level crime, eg. shoplifting
- self-harm
- talking about visiting different areas, especially at night

### **Further information:**

Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (DCSF 2009)  
[www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/sexualexploitation](http://www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/sexualexploitation)

Puppet on a string: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation (Barnados 2011)  
[www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/barnados](http://www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/barnados)

If only someone had listened: Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (Office of the Children's Commissioner 2013)  
[www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/commissionerexploitation](http://www.safeguardinghandbook.co.uk/commissionerexploitation)

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