

# Child sexual exploitation

## Advice for Healthcare Staff

A pocket guide to provide practical information to healthcare staff to safeguard children and young people





# Contents

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?	1
Signs & indicators of possible CSE	3
Where does CSE happen?	6
Risk factors	7
Myth busting	8
Information sharing	12
What to do if you suspect a child or young person is at risk of CSE	13
Key Messages	14
National contacts	15
Local contacts	16

# What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is when an individual takes sexual advantage of a child or young person (anyone under 18) for his or her own benefit.

Power is developed over the child or young person through threats, bribes, violence and humiliation or by telling the child or young person that he or she is loved by the exploiter. This power is then used to induce the child or young person to take part in sexual activity.

Exploitative relationships are built on the child or young person's social, economic or emotional vulnerability. Children and young people cannot consent to their own abuse: so a child or young person at risk of CSE is a child or young person at risk of significant harm and they must be safeguarded.

A child or young person's awareness of exploitation is reduced or lost by them receiving 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) when performing, or being used for, sexual activities.

*Example: A child or young person being persuaded to post sexualised images of themselves on the internet or via their mobile phone.*

CSE occurs throughout the UK affecting boys as well as girls, from any social, ethnic or financial background. It robs them of their childhood and has serious long term effects on every aspect of their lives and may be life threatening.

**Remember:** CSE is more than just sexual assault: Perpetrators who sexually exploit children commit multiple crimes when they do so

**Remember:** Exploited children may go on to be exploited young adults if they are not supported and helped

# Signs & indicators of possible CSE

## Physical

- Self-harm/attempted suicide
- Unexplained change in appearance and/or behaviour
- Repeated testing for sexually transmitted diseases /pregnancy
- Repeated symptoms of urinary infections
- Pelvic-inflammatory disease
- Repeated pregnancies/miscarriages/terminations
- Repeated or prolonged alcohol abuse
- Drug/substance misuse
- Unexplained injuries
- Lack of personal hygiene/care

## Psychological

- Mental health problems
- Low self-esteem/low self-confidence
- Eating disorders
- Suicidal thoughts/ideation
- Multiple personality disorders
- Dissociation
- Psychosis
- Depression
- Sleep disorders/nightmares
- Eating disorders
- Alcohol/drug/substance abuse
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Conduct disorder
- Learning disability/difficulty
- Poor attachment/attachment disorder
- Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance use, domestic violence, parental mental health issues)

In all cases, trust in your professional instinct and remember to be professionally curious

Safeguarding the child or young person must be your priority

## Behavioural

- Absent from school or exclusion due to behaviour
- Staying out overnight with no explanation
- Regularly missing from home or care
- Receiving gifts from unknown sources
- Unaccounted for money/goods e.g. mobile phones/credit, drugs or alcohol
- Gang member or association with gangs
- Offering to have sex for money/other payment
- Change in physical appearance
- Overtly sexualised dress
- Associating with unknown adults; other sexually exploited children or vulnerable children
- Reduced contact with family, friends and other support networks
- Getting into cars with unknown adults or associating with known perpetrators
- Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking sites.
- Having a much older boy or girlfriend

# Where does CSE happen?

## QUESTION:

Where are children & young people likely to be targeted by perpetrators?

## ANSWER:

Any area where children & young people congregate in the absence of parental or adult supervision or where they can easily be accessed

## Examples:

- Shopping centres
- Social networking and gaming sites
- Arcades
- Cafes
- Fairgrounds
- Skate parks
- Parks
- Cinema complexes
- Take away food outlets and restaurants
- Hotels/B&Bs
- Alcohol outlets including local shops with alcohol licenses
- Taxi ranks
- Railway and bus stations

# Risk factors

Child in care  
Early child protection concerns  
Previous sexual abuse  
Learning disability or difficulties  
Children & young people who are unsure of their sexuality

Being a teenager  
Bereavement of significant person  
Family alcohol/drug/substance abuse  
Lack of parenting skills and protective factors  
Male dominant home  
Living in poverty  
Neglect

**Factors that increase the risk for a child & young person**

Alcohol abuse  
Drug/Substance misuse  
Domestic abuse  
Absence from school

Gang association  
Social isolation  
Being blackmailed  
Peers who are sexually exploited  
Absence from home/homelessness

**Remember:** Any child or young person can be at risk of sexual exploitation

# Myth busting

**MYTH:** A child or young person can give consent to sex after consuming alcohol or drugs regardless of their age

**Reality:** No they cannot. Consent is not lawful at any age when drunk or drugged.

**MYTH:** The child or young person did not take opportunities to escape so is not being coerced

**Reality:** There are many reasons why children and young people may feel unable to escape an exploitative situation, including fear of reprisal, vulnerability and psychological dependency on the person exploiting them (Stockholm Syndrome). Failing to escape does not mean they are not being exploited.

**MYTH:** Crossing a border is required in order to be trafficked

**Reality:** Trafficking can occur anywhere. You do not have to move countries to be trafficked. Moving from one town to another is trafficking.

**MYTH:** A child or young person cannot be a victim of sexual exploitation if they go home and sleep in their own bed at night

**Reality:** Perpetrators of CSE attempt to maintain a covert relationship with children and young people. Much of this type of exploitation is committed during the child or young person's free time in order to prevent detection

**MYTH:** CSE only happens to 'looked after' children and children in local authority care

**Reality:** Any child or young person can be at risk of or experience CSE wherever they live and whatever their own vulnerabilities

**MYTH:** Children and young people who are perpetrators cannot be victims

**Reality:** Children and young people may appear to be willing accomplices, but this should be seen in the context of the controls exerted by the perpetrator and the submission of the child or young person to them

**MYTH:** CSE is only perpetrated by men

**Reality:** Women are known to be perpetrators of this crime too. They may use different grooming methods but are known to target both boys and girls.

**MYTH:** Only adults sexually exploit children and young people

**Reality:** Peer on peer exploitation happens too. Young people are known to invite other young people to parties where they will then be introduced to other young people or adults and forced to perform sexual acts on young people and/or adults. Young people are also known to use 'sexting' as a way of communicating and distributing images.

**MYTH:** It only happens to girls and young women

**Reality:** CSE happens to boys and young men too and they are just as likely to be targeted. However, boys and young men may be less likely to disclose or seek support, due to stigma, prejudice or embarrassment, or the fear that they will not be believed.

**MYTH:** A child or young person is not a victim of CSE if they refuse offers of help

**Reality:** Children and young people may initially refuse offers of help. This does not mean that they do not need help but that you will need to build trust and a positive relationship with them, to safeguard them effectively.

# Information sharing

When there is suspicion that a child or young person is being exploited, this suspicion **MUST** be shared with other appropriate agencies, **even where there may be issues with consent.**

Sharing information can mean the difference between life and death for a child or young person.

Nothing should stand in the way of sharing information particularly in relation to sexual exploitation. The effective identification, disruption, intervention, protection and prosecution of perpetrators of this crime depend on effective multi-agency working.

Sharing small clues such as unofficial places where children and young people might gather can have a big impact on the disruption and prevention of this criminal activity.

For further support regarding sharing information contact your local Named and Designated Safeguarding Professionals or access the following guide *Information Sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers.*

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice)

# What to do if you suspect a child or young person is at risk of CSE

- Remember the child or young person's welfare is of paramount importance
- Make sure you are alert to the signs of CSE
- Know where to turn to if you need to ask for help
- Refer to children's social care or the Police if you suspect that a child is at risk of harm or is in immediate danger
- Contact your organisation's Named or Designated Safeguarding Professional for advice and support
- Know and understand your organisational and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and processes
- Share information

## Remember:

- All children and young people have the right to be safe and protected from harm
- Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility

# Key Messages

- CSE is more than just sexual assault:  
Perpetrators who sexually exploit children commit multiple crimes when they do so
- Children and young people cannot consent to their own abuse
- Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility
- Share information – no matter how trivial you think it may be
- Any child or young person, male or female, can be at risk of CSE
- Perpetrators can be women as well as men
- Grooming can take place in many forms; on line, social media, mobile technology and face to face
- Exploited children may go on to be exploited young adults, if they are not supported and helped
- Exploited children and young people may refuse help but they still need to be safeguarded

# National contacts

NSPCC

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

or **Tel: 0808 800 5000**

Barnardo's

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

Childline

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

or **Tel: 0800 11 11**

Child exploitation and on-line protection centre  
(CEOP) [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

NWG network [www.nwgnetwork.org](http://www.nwgnetwork.org)

Missing Children helpline:

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

or **Tel: 116 000**

Parents against child sexual exploitation:

[www.paceuk.info](http://www.paceuk.info) or **Tel: 0113 240 5226**

# Local contacts

# Local contacts