

Child sexual exploitation - information for parents and carers

What is sexual exploitation?

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that affects thousands of children and young people every year in the UK. It can happen to any young person from any background and affects boys and young men as well as girls and young women.

Many victims of child sexual exploitation have been groomed by an abusing adult or peer, that can be either male or female, who will befriend them, make them feel special by giving the young person lots of attention and sometimes buying them gifts. Victims are targeted both in person and online.

Some young people - in particular those having difficulties at home, those truanting or excluded from school, those who regularly go missing from home or care and those in care may be more vulnerable to exploitation but anyone can be targeted.

What are the signs?

Children and young people who are victims of this form of sexual abuse often do not recognise they are being exploited. However, there are a number of signs that could indicate a child is being groomed for sexual exploitation and, as a parent or carer, you have an important role in recognising the signs and protecting them.

These signs include:

- going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late;
- regularly missing school or not taking part in education;
- appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- associating with other young people involved in exploitation;
- having older boyfriend/girlfriend;
- being preoccupied with their mobile phone, which could indicate the child is being controlled;
- suffering from sexually transmitted infections;
- mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing;
- drug and alcohol misuse; and/or
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- being secretive and/or you have concerns about their online activity

What can I do as a parent or carer?

Discussing the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships with children and young people is really important in helping highlight potential risks to them.

There are also practical steps you can take, such as:

- stay alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse, e.g. bruising;
- be aware of new, unexplained gifts or possessions, e.g. mobile phones, and carefully monitor any instances of staying out late or not returning home;
- exercise caution around older friends your child may have, or relationships with other young people where there appears to be a power imbalance; and
- make sure you understand the risks associated with your child being online and put measures in place to minimise them

Contact details

You can contact the Multi-agency Referral Unit **0300 123 1116** in office hours or by e-mail MultiAgencyReferralUnit@cornwall.gcsx.gov.uk

The Out of Hours Service (social work) can be contacted on **01208 251 300**

If you are concerned that a child is at immediate risk you should call **999**
You should always contact us if you are worried a child or young person is at risk of abuse or neglect