

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)?

Children and young people who are sexually exploited are the victims of sexual abuse, in which they are manipulated, coerced or forced into taking part in a sexual act. This could be in return for food, alcohol, gifts, drugs, accommodation or money; or less tangible goods such as attention, affection or status.

The sexual activity may seem part of a seemingly consensual relationship; in Lambeth peer-on-peer abuse is a common form of CSE. It can also be linked to gang culture and county-lines, when young people are being used to carry and sell drugs from Lambeth to different areas in the country.

It can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example, being persuaded to send sexual images ("nudie").

As parents, carers and family members you have a really important role to play in protecting your child from this harm.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Many young people might not consider that they are being exploited or abused, they see the abuser as a boyfriend or girlfriend. The perceived affection, status or material things they are being given may cause them to accept abusive expectations, demands or unwanted sexual acts being performed on them or demanded of them.

During the 'grooming' process – which can happen online or in person - the abuser often makes the young person feel special by giving them a lot of attention and affection; for example they might invite the young person to parties, offer alcohol, cigarettes or drugs, give them gifts such as a mobile phone.

They may alienate the young person from their friends and family, or ask them to keep secrets. After abusers gain the young person's trust and affection, things change.

In most cases the abuser will have power over the young person of some kind; they may have a certain social status for example in a gang or peer group, or it may be material or physical power that exerts control. They can be violent, verbally threatening and lead the young person into dangerous situations.

Young people are not always groomed, the abuse may be opportunist.



WHO IS VULNERABLE?

All children and young people, from any background, can be vulnerable to being exploited as they may not have the maturity to question other people's motives. Young people can be very trusting and want to please others while abusers are very clever in the way they manipulate and take advantage.

BOTH GIRLS AND BOYS CAN BE SEXUALLY EXPLOITED.

However, at times some children and young people may be more vulnerable to being sexually exploited.

These include:

- Having special needs or a mental health difficulty which may impact on making safe choices
- Having had a recent loss, death in the family or a frightening incident which caused distress or trauma
- Having met new friends who are drawing them into unsafe situations
- Attending penthouse or hotel parties with unknown adults
- Having an older girlfriend or boyfriend and be abused within this relationship
- Going missing from school/ home, you may not know where they are or who they are with
- Being involved in "County lines", drug dealing out of Lambeth
- Heavily abusing drugs or alcohol
- Feeling unsupported or understood by their families and friends and seek out strangers on line

HOW TO SPOT THE SIGNS

As a parent or carer, you will know that young people can change or present challenging behaviour, especially during adolescence.

However, you may have noticed the following warning signs that your child may be groomed or experience sexual exploitation.

- Going missing for periods of time and being defensive about where they have been; or regularly returning home late, maybe under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- Being more distant and secretive about where they go, who they see or talk to online, receiving odd or excessive calls or messages, threats or bullying on social media or their mobile
- Appearing to have more money, unexplained gifts and new possessions they could not afford
- Sudden change in friendship groups, music taste, clothes and associating with other young people involved in exploitation or anti-social behaviour
- Having a significantly older boyfriend or girlfriend or associating with older peers, they may give them lifts or invite them to adult activity like drinking or going to new places
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour or language, suffering from sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy scares or signs of physical harm like marks or scars

You know your child best, if you think their behaviour is out of character, then you need to speak to them and seek support.

TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

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 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.
- 2 Know who your child's friends are and where they hang out, make sure it's an appropriate place. Talk with your child about their friends and be cautious of any friends or older people who seem to have power over them.
- 3 Stay alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse such as bruising.
- 4 If your child seems to be receiving free gifts/things from someone encourage them to think about what that person might want in return.
- 5 Carefully monitor any episodes of staying out late or not returning home.
- 6 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. Encourage them to have a plan of how they are getting where they are going, how they are getting back and what time, and that they have got enough money to get back.
- 7 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.
- 8 Make sure you understand the risks associated with your child being online and putting measures in place to minimise these risks, such as sticking 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.

HOW TO GET HELP AND SUPPORT

If you are concerned about your child, or another child being groomed or exploited, and would like advice or report a concern, please contact one of the following:

Lambeth Children's Social Care: 0207 926 5000 (24/7)

Lambeth has a specific Child Sexual Exploitation Co-ordinator.

NSPCC www.nspcc.org.uk

You can ring the NSPCC helpdesk on **0808 800 5000** to report concerns and get advice if you are concerned about your child being exploited. They can be accessed 24 hours a day.

Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE)

www.paceuk.info

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 on **0113 2405226** during office hours, Monday to Friday.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection command (CEOP)

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.

Parents Protect! www.parentsprotect.co.uk

Parents Protect! is an information and resource website to help parents and carers better protect children from sexual abuse. It lists the Stop it Now! helpline **0808 1000900** where parents can get advice and support.

CRIMESTOPPERS 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 the website to provide information.

National Working Group Network for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG Network)

www.nwgnetwork.org/for-parents/

The NWG is a UK network of practitioners working on the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and trafficking within the UK. They offer helpful information for parents as well as real stories.



IF A CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER, ALWAYS DIAL 999



Child Sexual Exploitation

Guidance for Parents, Carers and Families