

Child sexual exploitation

(Information taken from NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-exploitation/>)

If you're worried about sexual exploitation, we have information and advice to protect and help children and young people.

Finding out your child has been sexually exploited can be distressing and you might not know what to do next. Young people often trust their abuser and don't know that what's happening is wrong or are unable to tell anyone due to fear, intimidation and violence. We have advice to help you keep children and young people safe from sexual exploitation.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of [sexual abuse](#). When a child or young person is exploited they're given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they're in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called [grooming](#). They may trust their abuser and not understand that they're being abused.

Children and young people can be [trafficked](#) into or within the UK to be sexually exploited. They're moved around the country and abused by being forced to take part in sexual activities, often with more than one person. Young people in [gangs](#) can also be sexually exploited.

Sometimes abusers use violence and intimidation to frighten or force a child or young person, making them feel as if they've no choice. They may lend them large sums of money they know can't be repaid or use financial abuse to control them.

Anybody can be a perpetrator of CSE, no matter their age, gender or race. The relationship could be framed as friendship, someone to look up to or romantic. Children and young people who are exploited may also be used to 'find' or coerce others to join groups.

Types of child sexual exploitation

CSE can happen in person or [online](#). An abuser will gain a child's trust or control them through violence or blackmail before moving onto [sexually abusing](#) them. This can happen in a short period of time.

When a child is sexually exploited online they might be persuaded or forced to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- film or stream sexual activities
- have sexual conversations.

Once an abuser has images, video or copies of conversations, they might use threats and blackmail to force a young person to take part in other sexual activity. They may also share the images and videos with others or circulate them online.

[Gangs](#) use sexual exploitation:

- to exert power and control
- for initiation
- to use sexual violence as a weapon.

Children or young people might be invited to parties or gatherings with others their own age or adults and given drugs and alcohol. They may be assaulted and sexually abused by one person or multiple perpetrators. The sexual assaults and abuse can be violent, humiliating and degrading.

Signs of child sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation can be difficult to spot and sometimes mistaken for "normal" teenage behaviour. Knowing the signs can help protect children and help them when they've no one else to turn to.

Signs of sexual exploitation

- [Unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour](#).
- Being frightened of some people, places or situations.
- Being secretive.
- Sharp changes in mood or character.
- Having money or things they can't or won't explain.
- Physical signs of abuse, like bruises or bleeding in their genital or anal area.
- [Alcohol or drug misuse](#).
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy.
- Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Staying out late or overnight.
- Having a new group of friends.
- Missing from home or care, or stopping going to school or college.
- Hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups.
- Involved in a [gang](#).
- Involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting.

They may not know where they are, because they've been moved around the country, and seem frightened, confused or angry.

A child might know they're being sexually exploited. They might be worried or confused and less likely to speak to an adult they trust. If you're worried about a child and want to talk to them, we have advice on [having difficult conversations](#).

We're here to support you, no matter your worry. Call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:0808 800 5000), email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our [online form](#).

If a child reveals abuse

If a child talks to you about sexual exploitation it's important to:

- listen carefully to what they're saying
- let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it's not their fault
- say you'll take them seriously
- don't confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you'll do next
- [report](#) what the child has told you as soon as possible.

Effects of child sexual exploitation

Both sexual exploitation in person and [online](#) can have long-term effects on a child or young person. They may:

- struggle with trust and be fearful of forming new relationships
- become isolated from family and friends
- fail exams or drop out of education
- become pregnant at a young age
- experience unemployment
- have mental health problems
- make suicide attempts
- abuse [alcohol and drugs](#)
- take part in criminal behaviour
- experience homelessness.

Our [services can support children and young people](#) who have experienced sexual exploitation to help them move on and receive the care they need.

Report child sexual exploitation

To report sexual exploitation:

- call [999](tel:999) if the child is at immediate risk or call [101](tel:101) if you think a crime has been committed
- call Crimestoppers anonymously on [0800 555 111](tel:0800 555 111) or [online](#).

Report abuse

Call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000), email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our [online form](#).

Support

For parents and carers

Finding out your child has been sexually exploited can be frightening and distressing. But there's help for you and your family.

[PACE](#) works with parents and carers of children who are, or at risk of, being sexually exploited. You can call them for confidential help and advice on [0113 240 5226](tel:01132405226) or fill in their [online form](#).

[Barnardo's](#) can support parents through their services across the UK.

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For children and young people

We run therapeutic services for children who have experienced, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation and abuse:

- Hear and Now
- In Ctrl
- Letting the Future In
- Protect and Respect

Find out more about all [our services for children](#), including how to get in touch with ones in your area.

Other organisations that can help include [Barnardo's](#) and [The Children's Society](#). They run services for children and young people across the UK.

Barnardo's [Wud U? app](#) shows children how to make safe decisions.

Children and young people can contact:

- [Fearless](#) to report crime anonymously
- [Gangline](#) for free advice and support from ex-gang members
- [Victim Support](#) if they've experienced crime.

How Childline can help

We understand how difficult it is for children to talk about sexual exploitation and abuse. Whether it's happening now or happened in the past, Childline can be contacted 24/7. Calls to [0800 1111](tel:08001111) are free and confidential. Children can also contact [Childline online](#).

Childline has information and advice for children and young people about:

- [sexual abuse](#)
- [rape and sexual assault](#)
- [gangs](#)
- [online grooming](#)
- [keeping safe online](#).