

Child Sexual Exploitation



“The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves 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 performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition, for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no 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.” The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children & Young People, 2008 Both girls and boys can be exploited.

Online Sexual Exploitation includes:

- o Befriending through online chat rooms/messaging services
- o Online grooming techniques, e.g. stalking, identity pretense, false promises e.g. meeting celebrities, tickets, gifts
- o Asking children to take and share indecent images of themselves
- o Leverage for further demands, e.g. threat to show other people recorded sexual acts by child/young person
- o Arranging offline meeting for purpose of sexually abusing child
- o Contact from perpetrators in other countries, & abused online
- o Speed of grooming can be very quick - leaving little ‘thinking time’

The restrained influencing of a child over several months has been largely replaced by rapid escalation to threats, intimidation and coercion.

ALL children and young people, including those from supportive families can be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. However, some children and young people are known to be at greater risk. For example, those that: Have a chaotic home/family life, have a history of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of ‘honour’-based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect), have experienced loss/bereavement, are associated with gangs through relatives/peers, or are living in a gang neighbourhood, have friendships with children/young people who are being sexually exploited, have learning difficulties, live in residential care, or hostel/bed & breakfast accommodation, have low self-esteem/confidence, are Young Carers (i.e. have caring responsibilities for parents/family members with mental or physical health problems, or who are misusing substances)

Children and young people who are being sexually exploited may be: going missing from home or care, absent from school, increasing their use of social media, dating sites, image sharing apps etc., involved in risky online relationships including new contacts with people out of city, sharing inappropriate/indecent online images with peers, or with people only met online, becoming isolated/estranged from family and friends, meeting people befriended online, involved in offending behaviour, misusing drugs/alcohol, experiencing sexual cyber-bullying, changing their physical appearance, experiencing repeated sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations, in poor mental health and/or self-harming, having thoughts of, or attempting, suicide, receiving money & gifts from unknown sources

“In assessing whether a child or young person is a victim of sexual exploitation, or at risk of becoming a victim, careful consideration should be given to the issue of consent. It is important to bear in mind that: a child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex (it is statutory rape) or any other type of sexual touching; sexual activity with a child under 16 is also an offence; it is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old if they hold a position of trust or authority in relation to them; where sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old does not result in an offence being committed, it may still result in harm, or the likelihood of harm being suffered; non consensual sex is rape whatever the age of the victim; and if the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or his or her family has been subject to violence or the threat of it, they cannot be considered to have given true consent and therefore offences may have been committed. Child sexual exploitation is therefore potentially a child protection issue for all children under the age of 18 years and not just those in a specific age group.”

Any member of staff who suspects or receives information that a child or young person may be involved in sexual exploitation (including suspicion that they are being groomed online), should refer their concerns to their Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy, who will refer the matter to Children’s Social Care. If there are concerns about the involvement of a person who: works with children, and/or is in a Position of Trust ...the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) should be informed, via the Essex Safeguarding Children Advisory Service, details below. Where appropriate, the child or young person’s wishes and feelings, as well as those of their mothers, fathers and carers should be sought and taken into consideration when deciding how to proceed. However, practitioners should be aware that this may not always be in the child or young person’s best interest and may put them at further risk of harm. Some children or young people may have been trafficked and need support to access services. Practitioners should refer to the ‘Designated Competent Authorities’ based within the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and The United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA). Their contact details are below. UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC): Tel. 0844 778 2406; Fax: 08704965534 Email: UKHTC@nca.x.gsi.gov.uk