



GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS: Identification of children at risk of sexual exploitation (Sept 2021)

1. Introduction

1.1. Schools and colleges are well placed to prevent, identify and respond to children at risk of sexual exploitation. This guidance aims to raise the awareness of child sexual exploitation in order to support education professionals to identify and respond appropriately to pupils at risk.

2. What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

2.1. The sexual exploitation of children and young people (CSE) under-18 is defined as

'A form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.'

'Like all forms of child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation:

- *can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16- and 17-year olds who can legally consent to have sex;*
- *can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;*
- *can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;*
- *can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;*
- *can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;*
- *may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example);*
- *can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults.*
- *The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and*
- *is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.'*

'One of the key factors found in most cases of child sexual exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something); for the victim and/or perpetrator or facilitator.

Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection).



It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a child/young person does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange, for example a child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.'

(Department for Education 2017)

3. Who is at risk?

3.1. Child sexual exploitation can happen to any young person from any background. Although the research suggests that the females are more vulnerable to CSE, boys and young men are also victims of this type of abuse.

3.2. The characteristics common to all victims of CSE are not those of age, ethnicity or gender, rather their powerlessness and vulnerability. Victims often do not recognise that they are being exploited because they will have been groomed by their abuser(s). As a result, victims do not make informed choices to enter into, or remain involved in, sexually exploitative situations but do so from coercion, enticement, manipulation or fear. Sexual exploitation can happen face to face and it can happen online. It can also occur between young people.

3.3. In all its forms, CSE is child abuse and should be treated as a child protection issue.



4. WARNING SIGNS AND VULNERABILITIES CHECKLIST¹

4.1. The evidence available points to several factors that can increase a child's vulnerability to being sexually exploited. The following are typical **vulnerabilities in children prior to abuse**:

- Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance use, domestic violence, parental mental health issues, parental criminality)
- History of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of 'honour'-based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect)
- Recent bereavement or loss
- Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships
- Attending school with young people who are sexually exploited
- Learning disabilities
- Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their families
- Friends with young people who are sexually exploited
- Homeless
- Lacking friends from the same age group
- Living in a gang neighbourhood
- Living in residential care
- Living in hostel, bed and breakfast accommodation or a foyer
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence
- Young carer

¹ [The Office of the Children's Commissioner \(2012\) Interim Report - Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Group and Gangs.](#)



4.2. The following signs and behaviour are generally seen in children who are **already being sexually exploited.**

- Missing from home or care
- Physical injuries
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Involvement in offending
- Repeat sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations
- Absent from school
- Evidence of sexual bullying and/or vulnerability through the internet and/or social networking sites
- Estranged from their family
- Receipt of gifts from unknown sources
- Recruiting others into exploitative situations
- Poor mental health
- Self-harm
- Thoughts of or attempts at suicide



4.3. Evidence shows that any child displaying several vulnerabilities from the above lists should be considered to be at high risk of sexual exploitation. If you identify a child who you consider to be suffering from or at high risk of CSE, it is important that the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in school is informed so that they can contact Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS).

5. Appropriate use of language

5.1. It is imperative that appropriate terminology is used when discussing children and young people who have been exploited or are at risk of exploitation. Language implying that the child or young person is complicit in any way, or responsible for the crimes that have happened or may happen to them, must be avoided. Language should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control young people have in abusive or exploitative situations and must recognise the severity of the impact exploitation has on the child or young person.

5.2. Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This in turn may prevent the child or young person from disclosing their abuse, through fear of being blamed by professionals. When victim-blaming language is used amongst professionals, there is a risk of normalising and minimising the child's experience, resulting in a lack of appropriate response. Further information can be found in the document ['Appropriate language: Child sexual and/or criminal exploitation guidance for professionals'](#) (February 2020).

6. Consent?

6.1. 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.

6.2. 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.



What can schools do to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation?

7. Training and Awareness

7.1. The DSL should ensure that all staff and volunteers who work with children and young people are made aware of Child Sexual Exploitation and the indicators of concern in order to identify and respond to concerns at an early stage. In addition to providing this written guidance to staff, training materials regarding Child Sexual Exploitation are available on the Norfolk Schools' website.

8. Promotion of healthy relationships through the curriculum

8.1. Educational settings play an important role in helping children and young people gain an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable relationships and sexual behaviour and to gain a sense of self-worth and respect for others. The [Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#) curriculum, provides a vehicle for this important learning which can help prevent children and young people becoming involved in sexual exploitation.

8.2. By enabling children and young people to explore what makes a safe and healthy relationship, schools can help to develop the awareness and skills to recognise and manage potential risks of harm, stay safe and seek help if they need it. It is important that this message is repeated throughout a child's time at school to support prevention through the promotion of safe practices. Both primary and secondary schools have a vital role to play in this preventive education and awareness raising.

9. Identification

9.1. Schools may wish to map pupils against the CSE vulnerabilities checklist provided in this document and target interventions appropriately with regular review.

9.2. In addition, schools should be vigilant to the link between children going missing and the risk of CSE. The DSL should ensure that attendance staff and those monitoring truancy during the school day are fully briefed on CSE and monitor/log unexplained absences and those pupils leaving during the school day with the potential for CSE in mind.

9.3. Many schools ensure a staff presence at entrances/exits to the school at the beginning and end of the school day. These staff should be mindful of who is dropping-off and collecting pupils; gather details, including vehicle details, if there are any concerns.

10. Referral

What to do if you are concerned about a child:

If you have concerns that a child is at risk of or suffering Child Sexual Exploitation you should contact the Children's Advice and Duty Service without delay on 0344 800 8021.

In all referrals, screenings and consultations with other agencies, it is important that you are clear that you believe the child is at risk of or is a victim of sexual exploitation.



11. Useful Contact Numbers and Websites:

- In an emergency call the police – **999**
- **Leeway 0300 561 0077** is a Norfolk based service providing advice, support and information to adults and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. They offer a range of community services and also run three refuges for women and children in Norfolk. They can be contacted on.
- **Women's Aid and Refuge** run the 24hr National Domestic Violence Helpline – **0808 2000 247** They also provide guidance and support to those experiencing domestic abuse.
- **The Harbour Centre 01603 276381** is a Norfolk based Sexual Assault Referral Centre providing a range of services and support to victim of Rape and Serious Sexual Assault. The centre is open to both male and female victims.
- **Missing People 116 000** is a national charity that provides advice and support to missing people and their families.
- **The Samaritans 116 123**
- **The National Stalking Helpline** provides guidance and information to anyone who is currently or has previously been affected by harassment or stalking. Further information about the services they offer can be found at <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/> and they can be contacted on **0808 802 0300**
- **FRANK 0300 123 6600** provide confidential drugs advice.

12. Local Guidance

- **Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership**
- **Norfolk CSE Policy, Procedures and Guidance**

13. Organisations

- **National Working Group**
- You can sign up to this organisation to receive newsletters and access resources
- **Barnardo's - Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation**
- **CEOP** (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) works with child protection partners across the UK and overseas to identify online and offline threats to children and young people.
- **BLAST!** Project for boys and young men. This website provides support and guidance for boys and young men experiencing sexual exploitation. Their website contains information and resources for young people and professionals around CSE.

14. Further information and local resources

- **Abuse in relationships: Disrespect NoBody** from the Home Office and Government Equalities Office.
- **Consent: PSHE Association lesson plans** from the PSHE association.



- [The Rose Campaign](#) [Reaching Out on Sexual Exploitation] aims to develop systems and strategies, working with other agencies, to tackle the hidden issue of Sexual Exploitation in Norfolk and tackle online grooming.
- [Young and Free](#) provided by East Coast Community healthcare provides guidance for young people on **sexual health and healthy relationships**.
- As well as information on chlamydia screening, the C-Card section also contains lots of information on sexuality, rights, pregnancy, STIs and services.
- [Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation](#) - comprehensive website containing information and advice about Child Sexual Exploitation. The site is aimed specifically at parents but also contains some information for professionals.