

## **Sexual exploitation**

As your child starts secondary school, they are likely to enjoy more freedom than at any time in their childhood. Whilst this is an important part of growing up, you will be aware that as a parent you need to help them to enjoy this increasing sense of freedom in a safe manner.

Adolescence is a time of change for your child as they explore new relationships and develop a wider social circle, so it can be difficult at times to tell the difference between typical teenage behaviour and warning signs that they may be getting involved in an unsafe relationship.

Knowing the signs to look for can help you prevent your child entering an unsafe relationship, intervene early if they are vulnerable, and get the right help. This guide is intended to offer you some straightforward information and advice on how to keep your child safe from such relationships.

### **Did you know?**

Every year, thousands of children in the UK are forced or manipulated into sexual activity in a form of abuse called child sexual exploitation

Individuals or groups befriend, or 'groom', the child in a process designed to break down their existing relationships with family and friends to establish control

Grooming is like a process of recruitment and the victims are introduced into a lifestyle which they are made to believe is normal, but which is actually abusive

Grooming can take place online or offline and can include violence, lies, blackmail, or threats

There are different models of grooming – children might experience exploitation at parties, by groups of older men or (less often) women, as part of a gang, or even by friends their own age

Once groomed the child is expected to participate in sexual activities, often in exchange for something such as alcohol, gifts, money, affection, drugs, or a place to stay

Girls and boys from all cultural and social backgrounds can be vulnerable to this happening to them

### **What are the signs my child might be in an unsafe, exploitative relationship?**

- Changes in behaviour, especially secretive, defensive and/or aggressive
- Changes in their appearance, style of dress and tastes
- Receiving strange calls or messages on mobiles or social media sites from unknown contacts and not wanting to be separated from their mobile
- Having more than one mobile phone or social media account, such as two different Facebook profiles
- Being in possession of new, expensive items they normally couldn't afford, such as mobile phones or jewellery
- No longer engaging with their usual friends and possibly associating with older men or women or new, friends who you have concerns about
- Staying out late or overnight with no explanation of where they are going; Going missing from home or care
- Appearing with physical injuries
- Drug or alcohol misuse, self-harm
- Involvement in offending
- Sexual health problems
- Skipping school
- Evidence of sexual bullying or vulnerability through the internet or social media
- Adopting a new street language or answering to a new street name
- Often appearing unwell or tired and sleeping at unusual hours
- Deteriorating mental, emotional health.

If you feel concerned about your child and they are exhibiting some of these signs, they might be at risk of sexual exploitation.

### **How can you and your child stay safe?**

It is important for parents to know that a child may have been told by the abuser not to talk to you about what they are doing. The child might believe they are in an exciting relationship, or might have been threatened with violence if they talk.

Here are some steps you can take to safeguard children from sexual exploitation:

- Talk to them openly and regularly about what makes a healthy relationship
- Keep up to date with technology and show an interest in what they do online
- Be alert to sudden changes in behaviour or appearance
- Be aware of who their friends are
- Be aware of any unexplained gifts or possessions
- Talk to your child's teacher about any concerns
- Talk to specialist charities for independent information and support, such as the NSPCC, Parents Protect (Stop it Now) or Pace
- Report anything suspicious to the police using the details below
- If you feel something is not right, trust your instincts and seek help. Never put yourself or your child at greater risk by confronting the abuser yourself.

If you are concerned that a child you know may be a victim of child sexual exploitation, report it to Bedfordshire Police by calling 101 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

In an emergency or if a crime is ongoing always dial 999.

You can also text or email your local Police Safeguarding Unit at 07786 200011

### **What support is available?**

When a child is the victim of sexual exploitation, the consequences can be devastating and long-term for the entire family, but families don't have to go through this alone.

### **PACE**

Support for parents and carers of children who are, or are at risk of being, sexually exploited by perpetrators external to the family

Website: <http://www.paceuk.info/>

### **Stop it now**

Report your concern or get advice on all aspects of child sexual abuse

Website: <http://www.stopitnow.org.uk/>

### **NSPCC**

Report abuse, advice and guidance for parents and carers

Website: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/>

### **Childline**

Counselling support for children through email, phone, and chat.

Website: <http://www.childline.org.uk/>

### **Information and Support Leaflets**

**Information Leaflet for Professionals** – Child Exploitation (Luton Safeguarding Children Board)  
**Download Document**

**Parents Protect** – A leaflet from 'Stop it Now' Helping parents protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation. **Download Document**

**Spot the Signs** (a leaflet for young people) – How to keep you and your friends safe from sexual exploitation: an information leaflet produced by Barnado's for Young people. [Download Document](#)

**Spot the Signs** (a leaflet for professionals) – advice and guidance from Barnado's for professionals. [Download Document](#)