

Understanding child exploitation



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Child 
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What is child exploitation?

Child exploitation is a form of child 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 criminal and/or sexual activity either:

- In exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or
- For the financial advantages or increased status of the offender or facilitator.

A child may be a victim of exploitation, even where the activity appears consensual. It does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

There are different types of child exploitation, these are:

- Child Criminal Exploitation
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- County Lines
- Gangs
- Modern Slavery
- Human Trafficking
- Financial

Whilst there may only be signs of one type of child exploitation present, you should always consider whether multiple forms of exploitation are taking place.

Key things to remember:

- A child can never consent to their abuse.
- Children are often unable to recognise themselves as victims.
- A child is not responsible for protecting themselves against abuse and lack control in these situations.
- There are often threats of violence made against the child and/or their family/friends.
- Children may be fearful, ashamed and/or embarrassed about what has happened to them.

Who is most vulnerable to child exploitation?

There are some factors that could mean a child is more vulnerable to child exploitation, these are:

- Bereavement or loss
- Isolation
- Care status
- Disability
- Living within a household where there is domestic abuse
- Economic vulnerability
- Homelessness
- Connections with other children who are being exploited
- Lack of family or general support network

However, it is important to remember that just because these factors are present, it does not mean a child will be a victim of child exploitation.

It is also vital to remember that children with no known vulnerability factors could be a victim of child exploitation.

Spotting the signs

The signs of child exploitation can be subtle and are often similar to what could be described as 'normal' teenage behaviour, or 'pushing the boundaries'.

Here are a few of the potential indicators that a child is vulnerable to exploitation or may be being exploited:

- Missing episodes
- Drug and/or alcohol use and abuse
- Gifts from unknown sources – New trainers, mobile phones etc
- Isolation from family and friends
- A change in friendship groups or dynamics
- Self-harm
- Change in sexual activity, STIs/pregnancy
- Involvement in criminal activity including violent offences, drug related offence, theft offences
- Excessive and/or secretive use of phones or devices
- Changes to emotional wellbeing and/or behaviour

If these signs are present, it does not mean a child is a victim of exploitation. They could also be an indicator that something else is happening in a child's life that they need support with.

It is important to remain open-minded and to have honest, open, non-judgmental conversations to try and understand what is happening to identify the best way to support them.

Talking about child exploitation

Talking to a child about child exploitation can feel overwhelming, especially if you are worried that they may be experiencing abuse.

Sometimes behaviour changes are a normal part of growing up, but as an adult you should trust your instincts if you think there may be something more going on.

It is important to be supportive and not to make the child feel they are being punished as this is likely to have a negative effect.

Here are some tips to help have that difficult conversation.

- Make it clear that the child is not in trouble and that you are worried about them
- Provide reassurance that a child will not be punished
- Remain calm
- Be patient
- Use open questions to encourage conversation
- Do not speak over the child whilst they are trying to explain
- Pick your timing well
- Find the best way for a child to communicate whether this is verbally, writing notes, drawing etc.

Remember:

Children who are, or have, experienced abuse will find it incredibly difficult to talk about.

When a child discloses abuse, the response is one of the most important things.

Your response can help a child to feel supported, help them start making sense of what has happened and could give them the courage to report it.

Support

Kent Police - kent.police.uk

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command, advice for parents and carers – thinkuknow.co.uk

Crimestoppers, Independent UK charity taking crime information anonymously – crimestoppers-uk.org

Fearless, anonymous reporting for a safer community – crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/what-is-fearless

Missing People Charity – missingpeople.org.uk

Iverson Trust, Support for child exploitation – iversontrust.org.uk

Reporting child Exploitation concerns

All concerns of child exploitation should be reported to Kent Police to ensure that they can be safeguarded, and the concerns investigated. Reporting child exploitation to Kent Police provides an opportunity for potential offenders to be brought to justice. The report may help us to protect multiple children from experiencing abuse, harm and trauma.

Contact us on 999 if a child is in immediate danger, or where an offence is taking place or has just taken place.

Contact us on **101**, LiveChat or via Online Reporting if a child is currently safe and supported.



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