

Sexual Exploitation

How to protect children
and young people

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Sexual exploitation affects thousands of children/young people across the UK every year. You could have an important role to play in protecting children/young people from exploitation.

What is Sexual Exploitation?

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which a young person is manipulated and/or forced into taking part in a sexual act or having a sexual act performed on them. This could be as part of a relationship, or in return for attention, affection, gifts, money, drugs, cigarettes, alcohol or somewhere to stay.

The young person may think that their abuser is their friend, or even their boyfriend or girlfriend. But the abuser will put the young person into dangerous situations, forcing the young person to do things they don't want to do.

Child sexual exploitation can also occur through the use of technology. For example, posting sexual images on the internet/mobile phones. The abuser may physically or verbally threaten the young person, or be violent towards them. They will control and manipulate them and try to isolate them from friends and family.

Who does it affect?

This type of abuse could happen to any young person from any background. It happens to girls and young women and boys and young men.

The victims of abuse are not at fault. Abusers are very clear in the way they manipulate and take advantage of the young people that they abuse.

How does it happen?

Many young people who are sexually exploited have been groomed by an abusing adult who befriends the young person and makes them feel special by buying them gifts or giving them lots of attention. It could involve a single abuser or a group of abusers. Young people may be drawn into sexual exploitation by other young people who are already involved. They may be targeted online or in person. Sexual exploitation can also occur between young people of a similar age.

In most cases, the abuser will have some kind of power over the young person. It may be that the abuser is older, more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or they are in a position where they are able to control the young person.

There are some situations that can make young people more vulnerable to sexual exploitation:

- becoming distant from the people who would usually look after them
- having difficulties at home
- regularly go missing
- have been/are in care
- have a disability
- have been trafficked into the UK/are trafficked within the UK

What are the signs?

Children and young people that are the victims of sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited. There are a number of signs that a child/young person may be being groomed for sexual exploitation.

These include:

- going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- associations with gangs
- associating with other young people involved in exploitation
- having older boyfriends/girlfriends
- change in appearance
- sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy
- mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing
- drug and alcohol misuse
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour

What can you do?

As someone working/volunteering with children/young people, you may be able to identify issues early. It's important to familiarise yourself with the signs that a young person is being sexually exploited so that you are able to recognise them.

If you are concerned that child/young person is at risk of sexual exploitation or is being sexually exploited you must inform your named child protection officer and make an immediate referral to Islington's Children's Social Care Referral and Advice Team, Tel: **020 7527 7400**
Email: cscreferrals@islington.gov.uk

Sharon Wedderburn is Islington's Specialist Social Worker for Private Fostering, Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. Contact Sharon for information and advice if you're unsure if a child/young person is at risk of or is being sexually exploited. Tel: **020 7527 7856**
Email: sharon.wedderburn@islington.gov.uk



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