

One minute guide

Child Exploitation

March 2021

What is Child Exploitation

Child Exploitation refers to the exploitation of any child under the age of 18. Exploitation can happen to any child regardless of their age, gender, background, socio economic status, religion or culture. It occurs across all communities in the UK and whilst some children have additional vulnerabilities, any child can be targeted.

Exploiters can be male or female, from any or all backgrounds, communities and religions.

There is no 'typical exploiter' model and no 'typical child subject to exploitation' model.

Child Exploitation can take many forms, such as sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, radicalisation, modern slavery and child trafficking. Often children are subjected to more than one form of exploitation at a time.

What Does It Look Like?

Exploited children do not always have a free choice about whether to take part in criminal or sexual activity. Children may not consider themselves to be victims, they may think that they are consenting to the activity from free will and may not understand that they are being exploited by the individual who said they were their friend, their boyfriend, their girlfriend or their brother.

When exploiting children, exploiters commonly maintain control with high levels of intimidation and threat. Violence may be threatened to not only the child but their family as well. Weapons may also be used to frighten the child into complying and children of any gender can be sexually abused as part of exploitation. The child may live under such constant pressure that if they encounter a professional e.g. a teacher, social worker, police officer, nurse they are unable to tell that professional what is really happening to them for fear of repercussions and may rely on practitioners to look past the obvious and to use their professional curiosity to find out more and protect the child from harm.

Please remember that children cannot consent to their own exploitation.

Can Any Child Be Targeted by Exploiters?

Any child can be approached by an exploiter; however, exploiters commonly target children who have additional vulnerabilities for example having learning difficulties, experiencing the breakdown of family, struggling at school, living in care homes/being a Looked After Child or experiencing deprivation or poverty at home.

Children are groomed by exploiters and part of this process is giving the children an incentive such as cash or gifts, e.g. if the child lives in a deprived home where the parents' choice is heat or eat and there's not enough money to live comfortably, then being able to 'earn' your own cash for yourself or to give to your parents for food can be a powerful incentive. As can wearing clothes or trainers that make the child feel that they fit in with their peers. Or it might not be cash or gifts, the grooming process may involve giving children affection or attention and making that child feel special, valued, noticed or loved when that child does not feel those things in their day to day life.

An exploiter can also create such an incentive by providing a child with 'free' drugs then once addiction is apparent, the exploiter can demand the cost of those drugs back retrospectively or can offer a future supply if the child works for them or does favours for them and their friends.

Exploiters are very skilled in drawing out what a child wants or needs and taps into those deep-seated needs and aspirations. It can very difficult for a child to refuse or reject these pull factors particularly if there is no replacement offered elsewhere.

What Can I Do?

As professionals we need to acknowledge that children can be under tremendous pressure and threat from exploiters to act in the ways they do and that sometimes for them, it feels like there is no choice but to comply. If you are concerned about a child please follow your usual safeguarding procedures.

Remember! Children and Young People:

Need to feel safe and heard in order to talk

Will often distrust the police and other adults in authority

May behave aggressively as this is a common response to trauma

May have committed offences as part of their exploitation

Can be frightened of what might happen to them next

May not always look vulnerable or act how we expect a victim should act

Key Contacts and Further Information

[Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership website](#)

[Child Exploitation and Plugging Infographic for GP's](#)

[For more information on Child Exploitation and Local Resources click here](#)