

Child sexual exploitation (CSE): information for all staff

Issue

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a [form of sexual abuse where children are sexually exploited for money, power or status.](#)

This can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults, but does not always involve physical contact and can happen online. For example, young people may be persuaded or forced to share sexually explicit images of themselves, have sexual conversations by text, or take part in sexual activities using a webcam.

Children or young people who are being sexually exploited may not understand that they are being abused. They often trust their abuser and may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship.

What to do

- Discuss any suspected CSE, or risk of it, with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL)
- Do not assume it only happens to certain children, or is perpetrated by certain adults
- Teach pupils how to make positive choices and informed decisions in their relationships so they can protect themselves from, and be more aware of, sexual exploitation
- Display posters and distribute leaflets to advertise services that children can use to get information and advice about CSE

What to look for

[Indicators of sexual exploitation](#) can include children who:

- Appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- Associate with other young people involved in exploitation
- Have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- Suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant
- Display inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Suffer from changes in emotional wellbeing
- Misuse drugs and/or alcohol
- Go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late
- Regularly miss school or education, or do not take part in education

All children are at risk of CSE, but there are additional factors which can increase a child's risk of exploitation. These include:

- Experiences of child abuse
- Poverty
- Family conflict
- Poor parental role models
- An unsettled care history
- A history of running away
- Homelessness
- Learning difficulties
- Mental health difficulties
- Drug and alcohol misuse, and/or financial problems caused by addiction
- Gang membership



Context and prevalence

CSE is not a specific offence in law, so there are no official police statistics on how often it occurs. Offenders are often convicted of associated crimes, such as sexual activity with a child.

CSE can happen to anyone, anywhere, and perpetrators of CSE come from all backgrounds. It is potentially a child protection issue for all children under 18 and you should work on the basis that it happens in your local area. Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

You should always consider the issue of consent when determining whether a child or young person is a victim of sexual exploitation, or at risk of becoming a victim. You must bear in mind that:

- A child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex or any other type of sexual touching
- Sexual activity with a child under 16 is an offence. It is also an offence if the young person is 16 or 17 years old but the other person holds a position of trust or authority in relation to them (for example, a teacher)
- Sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old may still result in harm or the likelihood of harm being suffered even when it does not result in an offence
- Non-consensual sex is always rape whatever the age of the victim
- Offences may have been committed if the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or their family has been subject to violence or the threat of it. In these situations, they cannot be considered to have given true consent



Where to go next

- [Child sexual exploitation, NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/)
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/>
- [Working with children who are victims or at risk of sexual exploitation, Barnardo's model of practice, Barnardo's \(Adobe pdf file\)](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cse_barnardo_s_model_of_practice.pdf)
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cse_barnardo_s_model_of_practice.pdf
- [How to spot CSE, NHS Choices](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/abuse/Pages/child-sexual-exploitation-signs.aspx)
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/abuse/Pages/child-sexual-exploitation-signs.aspx>
- [Sexual exploitation of children: Ofsted thematic report, GOV.UK – Ofsted](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-exploitation-of-children-ofsted-thematic-report)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-exploitation-of-children-ofsted-thematic-report>

Questions for staff

- How confident are you to identify the signs of CSE?
- Which of the additional factors which contribute to increased risk of CSE are most relevant in our setting?
- What are the key issues when considering consent for children who may be victims of sexual exploitation?
- Can you think of young people in our school who you feel may be more vulnerable or susceptible to CSE? What could we do in a proactive way to reduce the likelihood of them becoming victims?
- What preconceptions or prejudices might reduce our capacity to spot the signs of CSE in some young people?
- What role could young people themselves play – with the right support – in reducing the prevalence of CSE?

Sources

The information in this factsheet is based on the following sources:

- [Keeping children safe in education, GOV.UK – DfE \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550511/Keeping_children_safe_in_education.pdf)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/550511/Keeping_children_safe_in_education.pdf
- [What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited, GOV.UK – DfE \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279511/step_by_step_guide.pdf)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279511/step_by_step_guide.pdf
- [Child sexual exploitation, GOV.UK – DfE \(Adobe pdf file\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf