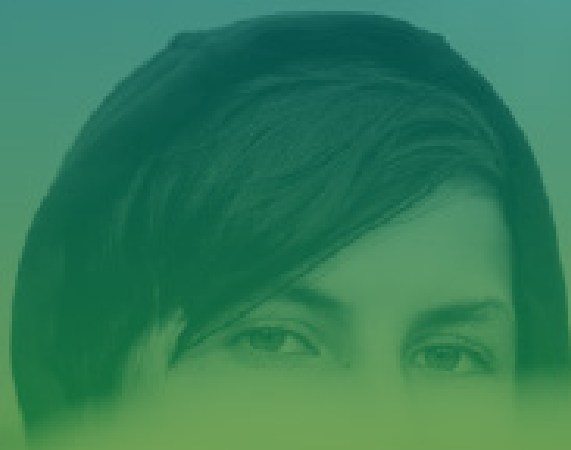


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CATCH → **ION**

Child Exploitation Resource Pack

for Parents and Professionals



Child exploitation can happen to any child.

This pack is designed to help adults reduce the risks of exploitation for children in their care and to help adults recognise and understand what is happening if a child is exploited. It also provides information about where to turn if you do identify signs that a child is at risk of being exploited or you are worried that exploitation is taking place. We hope this information will help you support and protect them.

Exploiters adapt their approaches in line with latest technology so grooming techniques are often opportunistic and sophisticated. The information provided in this pack is based on the insights of our frontline workers and the experiences of the children and young people we are currently supporting.

This pack is intended to be a live resource and will be regularly updated.

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What is Exploitation?

Exploitation is...

taking advantage of someone for your own benefit. The exploited person may feel they are consenting to this, but in fact there is a power imbalance and they are being manipulated, coerced or controlled.

Exploitation of children can take many forms- for example, using a child to distribute drugs or to handle money or weapons to avoid these being found. It can also mean persuading a child to do something sexual, even if they feel that they are willingly taking part.

Exploitation is a form of abuse. It can be emotional, sexual, financial or physical abuse or a combination of these. It can happen online or in person.

It can be perpetrated by a single individual or by a group. Sometimes young people are exploited by other young people of a similar age but often the exploiter is older than the child.

Finding out that your child or a child you know is being or has been exploited is distressing. Parents might find themselves in shock or in denial. They may feel angry, embarrassed, guilty or depressed. Adults around the child may blame themselves and feel they didn't do enough to protect them. They may feel angry with the child for 'allowing' this to happen.

However, children are never to blame for their own exploitation.

Vulnerability

Children and young people are especially easy to control and exploit simply because of their age. They often have less power, less confidence, less understanding and less experience of life than adults. This means exploitation can happen to any child. However, certain factors can make children more vulnerable at times. It may be that they are having a tough time due to life events or their personal circumstances. They may have poor mental health. They may have special educational needs or a medical diagnosis. They may be questioning their identity.

Many perpetrators are skilled at identifying and targeting vulnerabilities and isolating children from protective influences.

Challenges identifying child exploitation

Child exploitation can be difficult to identify. Children may not recognise what is happening. They may believe the exploiter is a friend who cares about them and looks after them.

Exploiters are adopting increasingly sophisticated techniques to 'groom' their victims.

Professionals and parents don't always recognise grooming. They may believe that the child is making their own choices without understanding the psychological or physical pressure the child may be under. They sometimes regard the child's actions as 'normal teenage behaviour'.



Different types of child exploitation

Child sexual exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation is when someone under the age of 18 is taken advantage of by someone else for sexual purposes. It is a form of child sexual abuse. A young person can still be sexually exploited even if they are over the age of sexual consent (16). Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology and images.

An abuser manipulates, coerces or forces a child or young person into performing sexual acts either in person or online. This sometimes involves the child getting something in return like affection, money, gifts or drugs and alcohol. It is not always possible to recognise that exploitation is going on because children may feel that the sexual relationship is equal, even if it's not.

Abusers often use the grooming process to gain the trust of the child or young person. They may use threats or violence, introduce them to alcohol or drugs or make the child feel special through attention or gifts. They may pretend to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. They will also aim to alienate them from their friends and family. Their actions are intended to make the child feel dependent on them. Because of the grooming process, children or young people don't usually know that they are being drawn into sexual exploitation or realise that the situation they are in is abusive. They often trust their abuser or may depend on them or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening.

Child criminal exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation is when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 to do something criminal. The victim may have been exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Criminal networks or gangs use their power and position to groom, recruit and exploit children to perform criminal acts on their behalf. This reduces the risks to criminals themselves as children are less likely to be suspected and are easy to manipulate and control.

Children can be used to keep or transport weapons, steal items or launder money through their bank accounts.

In County Lines exploitation, children are forced to move money and drugs from one area to another. They will often be made to travel outside their local area, where they will use dedicated phone 'deal lines' to sell drugs. In return they will often be given things that they want or need, such as money, gifts, status, perceived friendship, or protection. They are often coerced and controlled by threats of physical or sexual violence against them or their family members.

“Don't put all your trust in your 'friends'. Trust your instincts and don't ignore the red flags in your head.”

How grooming works



Targeting

A groomer will notice the child and find out more about them. They will get to know them and build trust by seeming to take an interest in the child, giving compliments or noticing things they do.



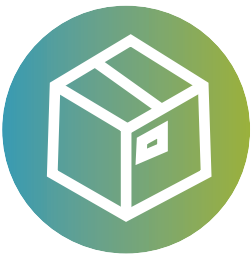
Befriending

The groomer then intensifies the contact. They will make a child feel special, understood and protected. They will spend a lot of time talking to the child and give them gifts and attention. They may begin gently to drive a wedge between the child and their family and friends. They will encourage secrecy between themselves and the child. All the time, they will be noting the child's vulnerabilities and finding out their needs and wants.



Hooking In

The groomer will now establish a firm relationship with a child, who will believe this is genuine and mutual. They will make the child dependent on them (for example: for protection, drugs, support- whatever the child needs) and take advantage of any vulnerabilities they have noticed. The groomer will begin to test the child out and desensitise them. This is to see how compliant the child is and to normalise poor treatment. By now, the child may feel they 'owe' the groomer in some way.



Controlling

At this stage, all pretence of genuine concern for the child will usually be dropped. The child will be manipulated and controlled through threats to themselves and others, physical and sexual violence, trickery and debt-bondage (where a child is told they 'owe' money to the groomer for things they have been given). The child may feel shame, fear and isolation so they don't think they can get help. They will often feel **trapped**.



Social Media

Social media has made it much easier for exploiters to reach children and young people. Some children are groomed very quickly on social media but don't understand who or what they are dealing with. They may never have any face-to-face contact with the person exploiting them. They may never realise they have been a victim of exploitation.

Warning signs of exploitation

Going missing

Skipping school, staying out late or staying out overnight can be a clear warning sign.

Whenever a child goes missing, you should report this to the Police by calling 101.

Sudden or dramatic changes in behaviour

Changes in friendship group, clothing style, music preferences, language used or school attendance. Also changes in mood, such as becoming aggressive or withdrawn. Behaviour may include stealing from you.

Phone activity

Receiving excessive numbers of messages and calls, including messages from 'new friends' or people you don't know. Being secretive about their phone use or blocking family from their social media. Having a second phone.

New social contacts

The child may start hanging around with new people. New and unfamiliar people might call at the house or pick the child up.

They may be chatting to new and different people on social media or gaming platforms.

Gifts and unexplained new items

Receiving or coming home with new items that a child wouldn't normally be able to afford, or being given free cigarettes, food, drugs or alcohol.

Physical or mental health issues

Children may have unexplained bruises or injuries. They may experience sexual or mental health issues but be unwilling to discuss what is going on.

Safeguarding outside of the family

Traditional child protection models tend to focus on protecting children at risk from their families. In exploitation cases, services take a contextual safeguarding approach, recognising that children and young people are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family, so risks can be extra-familial. This approach means we try to understand the risks children face in the various contexts they interact with (including online) and work to address those risks to keep them safe.

Getting help

If a child seems to have changed significantly over a short period of time and you are worried, don't wait. Find a calm and private moment to ask the child gently, 'Do you have time for a chat?', 'Are you OK?', 'You don't seem yourself. Is there anything I should know?'

Don't get upset or angry. If you are still worried, share your concerns with someone else.

Local support

Your local authority will have special services to support children and young people who are at risk of exploitation or are being exploited.

If you are worried about your own child, contact their school's safeguarding team or the local Children's Social Care Safeguarding Team to ask for advice and support.

If you are worried about a child you work with, speak to your organisation's designated safeguarding lead (DSL), who will know how to raise concerns.

There will also be other local services available in your area, including a team to support children who have been reported missing from home; support for children showing harmful sexual behaviour; and Youth Offending Teams.

National support and helplines

Parents Against Child Exploitation:
www.paceuk.info

NSPCC: Helpline 0800 800 5000
www.nspcc.org.uk

The Children's Society '[Look Closer](#)' campaign

Crime Stoppers:
www.crimestoppers-uk.org 0800 555 111

Childline: www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111

CEOP (On-line abuse or exploitation):
www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre
0370 496 762

Anti-Terrorism Hotline: 0800 789 321

Fearless: www.fearless.org

SPACE (Criminal Exploitation):
www.bespaceaware.co.uk

Catch22 poster hub: www.catch-22.org.uk/spot-the-signs-poster-hub

Police non-emergency line to report a person missing: 101 or www.police.uk/pu/contact-the-police/uk-police-forces

“For a long time, I felt angry with myself for letting it happen. Now I see that I was exploited and it wasn't my fault.”

Young person supported by Catch22

Glossary of terms

abuse- harm or distress caused by one person to another either physically, emotionally or sexually

alienate- make someone feel isolated or outside of the group

coerce- make or persuade someone to do something by using force or threats.

compliant- very likely to go along with what is expected of you or what other people want.

County Lines - criminal model where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries, usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs.

consent- mutual agreement or permission to do something or allow something to be done. True consent requires someone to know and understand what is happening, and to feel completely free to make a choice without any pressure.

desensitise- to make someone less likely to feel shock or distress when something happens by exposing them to it over and over.

exploiter- a person who uses other people for their own advantage.

extra-familial risks – risks that children face outside of their family

grooming- actions by an exploiter to befriend someone and build a relationship with that person so they can take advantage of them.

manipulate- control or influence a person or a situation for your own advantage

missing- the official definition of a missing person is: 'anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or risk of harm to themselves or another'. If a child is not where they should be and you think they are not safe, you should report them as missing.

normalise- make something seem normal and acceptable

perpetrator- someone who carries out a harmful or criminal act

safeguard- protect and keep safe

vulnerable- someone in need of special care or protection because of their age or another reason, such as disability.

vulnerability – a fact or characteristic that makes you more likely to suffer harm

“I don't know where we would be without our case worker. It's been a huge turnaround for us as a family. We will be forever grateful for the support when we desperately needed it.”

Parent of a young person supported by Catch22



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