

## Context

### *Definition:*

Child sexual exploitation is a form of **child sexual 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 sexual activity (a) in **exchange** for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity **appears consensual**. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of **technology**.

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This quick guide focuses on young people under the age of 18.

Practitioners should use their professional judgement and consider consulting their safeguarding lead, children's social care or the police if they have concerns about any child, regardless of their age.



Note: Children who have not yet reached their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday cannot consent to sex. Sexual intercourse below 13 years of age is termed “statutory rape” and is a serious criminal offence which must **always** be reported to the Police.

## Introduction

Remember any child or young person can be at risk of sexual exploitation.

Therefore practitioners should be inquisitive and establish a rapport with young people to enable them to ask questions in a conversational and exploratory style using the following themes, making it as easy as

possible for the young person to “open up” and trust the practitioner:

**Home Life:** Who do you live with? How are you feeling? What do you enjoy at home?

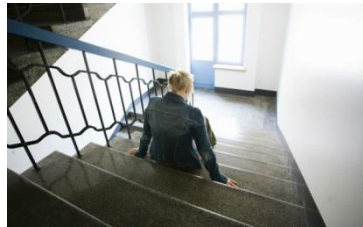
**School/College life:** What's going well for you? What are you worried about?

**Personal Relationships:** Who can you talk to? Who in your life can you trust with questions and worries?

**Sexual Activity:** Are you in a relationship? Are you having sex? Are you happy with the sex you are having? Has anything changed in how your partner treats you?

**Practitioner Relationships:** Are you being supported by any other practitioners? e.g. School, CAMHS, Social Worker, Counsellor

Practitioners should be relaxed, adapt to the individual young person's presentation and needs and ask direct, open questions in a calm, reassuring, professional and respectful way.



## Potential Warning Signs

**Home Life** Not happy at home, spending minimum time at home, being a looked after child, going missing, signs of a chaotic home life, unaccompanied asylum seeker, domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health issues, learning difficulties.

**School/College Life** Not in education or employment, doesn't enjoy education, poor attendance, exclusions from education, social isolation, poor or non-existent friendship groups.

**Personal Relationships** Evidence of self-harm, poor self-esteem, evidence of social media or online vulnerabilities (e.g. risk taking online, sending explicit images, "sexting", excessive use of mobile phone), drug and alcohol misuse, learning difficulties.

**Sexual Activity** Repeat requests for emergency contraception and/or Sexually Transmitted Infection testing, pregnancy / abortions, questions about consent ("I didn't really want to", "I didn't say no, but I wish now that I had"), disclosures of violent, controlling and physically abusive relationships, sexual relationships involving drugs and alcohol.

**Practitioner Relationships** Evidence that the young person is accessing other support services, for example CAMHS, School / College Counsellor, Sexual Health Services, Social Worker, Targeted Youth Support, Youth Offending Team, other support services, such as the Barnardo's BASE project.

### *Who Are The Perpetrators?*

Research into Child Sexual Exploitation shows that there is not one type of abuser. Perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) can be male or female, come from any ethnic background and be any age. They may have a low social and/or economic status or they could be a wealthy individual in a considerable position of authority. Exploitation can also involve opportunistic or organised networks of perpetrators who may profit financially from trafficking children between different locations to engage in sexual activity often with multiple men

## What to do if you are worried

If any of the above indicators are present or on the basis of professional judgement a practitioner considers the young person is at risk of sexual exploitation or is a victim of sexual exploitation the practitioner must:

- Follow your organisation's Safeguarding Procedures
- Complete a screening tool (check with your LSCB for the screening tool used in your region)
- Refer to Children's Social Care and/or the police depending on the level of concern
- Don't wait for a disclosure, take action when you are worried about signs, indicators or behaviours.