

What can I do as a professional?

As a professional working with young people, you may have opportunities to identify issues early so it is important to familiarise yourself with the signs that a young person is being exploited and to share this information with your colleagues or professionals in other agencies.

Other steps you can take to help protect young people include:

- staying alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse and investigating these further
- ensuring you know who the child protection lead is in your workplace and that you are aware of the procedure to follow if you have concerns about a young person
- thinking about ways that you might be able to better support and help young people to share information if they are worried about their own or another young person's situation
- identifying opportunities to educate young people and their parents about healthy relationships and about sexual exploitation

Barnardo's have produced a range of tools, including B Wise2 Sexual Exploitation, Nae Danger and Respecting Self, to equip professionals with the resources to educate young people about sexual exploitation. For more information go to: www.barnardos.org.uk/research_and_publications.htm.

Further guidance on how to safeguard children and young people can be found in 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation': www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DCSF-00689-2009.

If a child is in immediate danger, call 999 or contact your local police.

Barnardo's has launched its *Cut them free* campaign to reduce the number of children experiencing the horror of sexual exploitation in the UK.

You can find out more and show your support at: www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree.

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Do you work with young people?

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Help cut children and young people free from sexual exploitation



Sexual exploitation affects thousands of children and young people across the UK every year. As a professional working with young people in an education, health or social care setting, you could have an important role to play in protecting children from exploitation – helping to cut them free from this horrific form of child abuse.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse, in which a young person is manipulated or forced into taking part in a sexual act. This could be as part of a seemingly consensual relationship, or in return for attention, affection, money, drugs, alcohol or somewhere to stay.

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

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



How does it happen?

Many young people Barnardo's work with 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. Young people 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 power of some kind over the young person. It may be that the abuser is older or more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or that 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 exploitation; by becoming distant from the people who would usually look after them. Young people who are having difficulties at home, regularly go missing or who have experienced care may be particularly vulnerable.

What are the signs?

Children and young people that are the victims of sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited. However, there are a number of telltale signs that a child 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
- associating with other young people involved in exploitation
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- suffering from sexually transmitted infections
- mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing
- drug and alcohol misuse
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

