

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

What is CSE?

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is the abuse of children and young people up to the age of 18, particularly where the young person is being manipulated, coerced or forced into engaging in sexual activity.

As a form of manipulation and control, the young person may receive gifts, affection, drugs, alcohol or attention from their abuser. It is common for young people to believe they are in a loving, consensual relationship, when in fact they are being exploited.

CSE can occur in different ways and in different situations. Many young people are often "groomed" by their abuser. Grooming is a carefully planned process with the aim of controlling a young person, to ensure that they do exactly what the abuser wants. At first, a young person may receive gifts and be showered with attention and love, but this may later turn to blackmail, threats of violence or actual violence.

It is not a young person's fault if they are sexually exploited. Abusers are experienced manipulators and often have real or perceived power over the young person including age, emotional maturity, intellect and physical strength.

Young people often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening.

CSE can happen to any young person from any background and affects boys and young men as well as girls and young women. Some young people may be more vulnerable to exploitation than others. This includes young people with learning disabilities, those who have lost someone and those who are experiencing difficulties at home.

People affected by CSE

There are no particular types of young people that can be affected by CSE. Any young person from any background, whether male or female can be at risk. CSE happens in all areas of the country.

CSE can occur in cars, hotels, houses, clubs and legitimate business premises, with a young person returning home afterwards.

Signs of CSE

There are a number of signs that **could** (not always present but common) indicate a child or young person is being groomed for sexual exploitation. These include:

- Going missing frequently or regularly returning home late.
- Regularly missing school or college.
- Having unexplained gifts or unaffordable new items in their possession.
- Reducing their contact with family or friends.
- Having older boyfriends and girlfriends or friendship groups.
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections.
- Mood swings and changes in emotional wellbeing or secrecy.
- Drug and/or alcohol misuse.
- Self harming.

Protecting children from exploitation

Young people are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation because they want to experiment, take risks, and push boundaries. However, there are a number of steps that you can take to protect your child:

- Talk to your child about healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Discuss internet safety with your child and take action to reduce any risks when they are online.
- Be aware of the warning signs of CSE.
- If you suspect a case of CSE is happening, report it.

If someone is in immediate danger, always ring the police on 999

In non-emergency situations you can report to 101.