

Child Exploitation (CE)

Child criminal exploitation occurs where 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 into any criminal activity: in exchange for something the victim needs or wants

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Child exploitation is when an abuser takes advantage of a young person for their own personal gain. You might think this does not concern your child, but it can take many forms, including sexual exploitation or making a child commit crime, such as selling drugs.

This takes the form of county lines dealing, which is where people travel from large cities such as London, Liverpool or Manchester to sell drugs in new areas. There have been significant increases in parts of Cumbria. They often target teenagers who can also get younger children involved.

How does exploitation happen?

Children are often targeted with gifts or money and made to feel a sense of belonging or coerced by someone they look up to.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is where a young person is abused by an older person they may initially see as their friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend. It might seem like a normal friendship or relationship to begin with. There is no specific profile of who commits this crime. Child sexual exploitation can happen between young people too. Perpetrators regularly buy the child gifts and trick them into believing they are in a loving relationship before abusing them.

These types of abuse can happen to any child, at anytime, anywhere. This is why it's important to raise awareness and help parents recognise the signs.

How does CSE happen?

Someone, either known or unknown to the family, encourages a close relationship with the young person. This could be as a friend or as their boyfriend or girlfriend. It can happen to any child or young person.

It can happen online or offline, and without the young person being aware. At first, the young person feels good about the relationship with the person offering them presents, money, alcohol, or simply emotional attention.

CSE is hard to spot even for the young person concerned. Grooming takes place over time. The young person may not see themselves as a victim, if they do they may be prevented from speaking out, as they think it's their fault.

Online, it's easy for an adult to pretend to be someone of a different age or gender. They'll try to gain the victim's trust by using websites, games and social media.

They may suggest meeting or try to talk the young person into sending naked photographs, taking part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone, or having sexual conversations by text. Sometimes they'll encourage the victim by offering a gift or compliments in return. You can help by keeping up to date on social media/webs/apps and knowing what your child is using, as well as talking to your child about safe internet use.

What can you do to keep your children safe for all kinds of exploitation?

1. Know the tell- tale signs:

Look out for:

- a) unexplained gifts/ money
- b) changes in mood
- c) going missing
- d) staying out late
- e) significantly older friends
- f) being secretive about where they are going
- g) lack of interest in activities and hobbies

2. Keep up to date with the technology your child uses. Discuss the risks online (see the Online Safety link on the website).

3. Consider talking about the subject in an age- appropriate way.