

Child Sexual Exploitation – Three Minute Briefing

Introduction

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), which is characterised by the young person, or the abuser receiving some form of payment or gain for sexual activity with someone under 18. Some high profile cases have been reported in recent years, but CSE is not a new phenomenon and is not concentrated in certain communities or areas. All young people by the nature of adolescence are vulnerable to CSE but some are more vulnerable than others. Like CSA, CSE can involve contact and non-contact abuse, it is never the young person's fault and early detection and intervention is key.

Definition (DoE Guidance 2017)

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.

Key Facts

Like all forms of **child sexual abuse**, child sexual exploitation:

- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
- can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
- can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
- can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
- can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example)
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults.
- can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse.
- is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse.
- whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status and access to economic or other resources.

Context

- CSE is a complex form of abuse and can be difficult to identify.
- Relies on "professional curiosity" to identify
- Can be mistaken for normal adolescent behaviours
- Even when a young person can legally consent to sexual activity, consent is only valid when they have a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice.
- If a child feels that they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they don't comply **consent cannot legally be given no matter what the age of the child.**
- CSE is part of a wider continuum of exploitation, violence and abuse.
- Child sexual exploitation is not a catch all category for all forms of sexual harm in adolescence.
- Should be viewed within the wider continuum of sexual abuse and issues such as trafficking, modern slavery, domestic abuse and other gendered violence and going missing.
- The necessary focus of child sexual exploitation should not overshadow a focus on other manifestations of abuse.

Vulnerabilities

- Having a prior experience of neglect, physical or sexual abuse;
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (e.g. domestic violence, parental substance misuse, mental health issues, family criminality)
- Recent bereavement or loss;
- Social isolation or social difficulties;
- Absence of a safe environment to explore sexuality;
- Economic vulnerability;
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status;
- Connexions with other sexually exploited people;
- Family members or other connexions involved in sex work;
- Having a physical or learning disability;
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories); and
- Sexual Identity

Indicators

- Acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phone etc. without plausible explanation;
- Gang-association and/or isolation from peers/ social networks;
- Exclusion or unexplained absences from school, college or work;
- Leaving home/care without explanation and persistently going missing or returning late;
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls;
- Returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol;
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour for age/ sexually transmitted infections;
- Evidence of/suspicious of physical or sexual assault;
- Relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups;
- Multiple callers (unknown adults or peers);
- Frequenting areas known for sex work;
- Concerning use of internet or other social media;
- Increased secretiveness around behaviours; and
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.

Sheffield Referrals

If you are concerned about a child or young person you work with, call the Safeguarding Hub on 0114 273 4855 for assessment and referral onto support services. If the young person is at risk of immediate harm call 999

Further Information, Training & Resources

Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service 0114 201 8645 www.sheffieldfutures.org.uk

National Working Group for CSE www.nwg.org

NSPCC www.nspcc.org.uk

Barnardos www.barnardos.org.uk

The Blast Project – Just for Boys www.mesmac.co.uk/projects/blast

The Children's Society www.childrenssociety.org.uk