

Child Sexual Exploitation – we all have a duty

Sexual exploitation affects thousands of children and young people across the UK every year. In 2016, 14,000 young people went missing in Gwent and 15% of those were identified as having been sexually exploited/ vulnerable to sexual exploitation. As a professional working within the community whatever your role/ occupation, you could have an important role to play in protecting children from exploitation.

What is CSE?

Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which a young person is manipulated or forced into taking part in a sexual act involving an exchange of some form of payment- which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, 'protection' or affection.

This type of abuse happens to **boys and girls** from any background, ethnicity or culture.

Signs/ behaviours to be aware of:

- appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- use of a mobile phone that causes concern
- going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- associating with other young people known to be involved in exploitation/clipping (receiving payment in exchange for agreement to undertake but not perform sexual acts)
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- entering/ leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults
- frequenting areas known for on/off street exploitation (sexual and criminal exploitation)
- suffering from sexually transmitted infections; pregnancy/ termination of pregnancy
- mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing (e.g. Expressions of despair- self harm; overdose, eating disorder, aggression, challenging behaviour)
- drug and alcohol misuse
- physical injury without plausible explanation
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list neither is it a checklist to identify that a child/ young person is being exploited. These examples are provided to aide your thinking and in identifying if there are safeguarding concerns for a child/ young

What you should be aware of:

CSE is much more prevalent than most people imagine but may often be hidden and can only be uncovered by people being vigilant and reporting their concerns.

Children/ young people that are the victims of sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited and rarely disclose the abuse.

Sometimes the child/ young person may recognise for themselves that they are being exploited but still choose not to disclose, this could be for a number of reasons, this still does not mean that they can give their “consent” to what is happening to them.

It is essential to remember that legally someone under 16 years old cannot consent to sexual activity and the policy and legal framework supports safeguarding children/ young people in recognising that they are **victims** of such abuse until the age of 18 years old.

Sexual exploitation in itself is complex, sometimes it is an organised crime involving numbers of people but it can also be occurring within one to one relationships within the community, the family network, and even between young people of a similar age themselves.

What can I do as a professional?

You may have opportunities to identify issues and concerns early so it is important to be aware and to act if you think there are concerns for a child/ young person.

Ensure you know who to talk to in your organisation if you have any concerns and don't delay!

If a young person is in immediate danger, call the police on 999. Additionally, pass any information on to the safeguarding lead in your area of work or contact the local authority's duty team and out of hours helpline.

What else can I do?

- stay alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse
- think 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
- identify opportunities to educate young people and their parents/carers about healthy relationships and about sexual exploitation.

For more information:

South East Wales Safeguarding Children board (SEWSC) www.sewsc.org.uk/

Barnardo's www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/cse-home

Breaking the cycle www.breakingthecycle.org.uk