

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of Child Sexual Abuse. It is much talked about but do we know exactly what it means and how we can spot the signs of it?

The definition is as follows:

‘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.’

The new working together advice on CSE and the new definition can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>

The ‘something’ received by the child or young person can include both tangible items such as food, somewhere to stay, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money and more intangible ‘rewards’ such as perceived affection, protection or a sense of belonging. Fear of what might happen if they do not comply can also be a significant influencing factor.

There are also some myths about CSE:

- It only happens to girls.
- It happens mainly to children in care.
- It only happens to lower/working class children.

It is important to point out from the outset that it can happen to **absolutely any child**, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, whether they live in care or in a family setting and regardless of class or economic background. Children who live in care may present themselves as being at more risk because of the number of times that they go missing and because of their vulnerabilities and these kids may be easier to identify. However it also happens to middle class kids who grow up in a happy and stable family environment but for whatever reason succumb to the coercion or manipulation of another person. These are the kids that are hard to identify and whose parents either don’t recognise the signs or simply choose not to believe that their son or daughter could be the victim of such abuse.

When should we consider CSA?

- reports of missing persons,
- domestic abuse,
- self-harming episodes

- *Withdrawn or a change in the child's behaviour or appearance*
- *Secrecy, especially around mobile phones and internet usage*
- *Increased texting or social media usage*
- *Alcohol Misuse*
- *Drug Misuse*
- *Going missing and/or staying out late*
- *Non-attendance at school*
- *Unexplained acquisition of cash, clothes etc*
- *Involvement in crime*
- *Associations with older people*
- *Frequenting party houses*

CSE is something that parents and carers everywhere should be aware of. This type of offending is about men and women taking advantage of vulnerable young people for their own sexual gratification. Some of the things to look out for include children persistently returning home/to care late, being agitated/stressed before they go out and returning distraught/dishevelled or under the influence of drugs or alcohol; having a significantly older 'boyfriend' or 'friend' or lots of new friends, and the acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phone etc without a plausible explanation.

Victims of child sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited and sometimes confuse what is exploitation and what is genuine affection. Young people rarely disclose that this is happening to them, the onus therefore is on those close to them or who work with them to be aware of the signs and know what to do when they have concerns. Parents and carers should be helped to talk to their children and take an interest in what they are doing. Are they being picked up or dropped off in cars by unknown adults, appearing to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Are they persistently going missing or returning late or returning with unexplained gifts? Do they seem more agitated than usual or are they acting out of character? Have they a significantly older 'boyfriend' or 'friend' or lots of new friends?

What do I do if I think a child has been the subject of CSE?

- Take time to talk to the child and ask salient questions to get a full picture. Remember the victim may not realise they are a victim or alternatively may be traumatised by their experience therefore a sensitive approach is paramount;
- Speak to colleagues and defence union for advice. Contact Gateway to speak to Social services.

The emphasis remains on identifying those at risk of CSE, safeguarding them through a multi-agency approach.

Mnemonic S.A.F.E.G.U.A.R.D is used:

S – Sexual health and behaviour

A – Absent from school or repeatedly running away

F – Familial abuse and/or problems at home

E – Emotional and physical condition

G – Gangs, older age groups and involvement in crime

U – Use of technology and sexual bullying

A – Alcohol and drug misuse

R – Receipt of unexplained gifts or money

D – Distrust of authority figures

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