

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) 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 in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or 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.

Like child sexual abuse, CSE:

- can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual
- can include both contact (penetrative & non-penetrative) and non-contact sexual activity
- can take place in person and/or via technology
- can involve force and/or enticement, and may include violence or threats of violence
- may occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge e.g. through copying or posting images or videos on social media
- can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, children or adults
- can be a single incident, a series of incidents, opportunistic, and/or complex organised abuse
- is typified by a power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse due e.g. to age, gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and/or access to economic or other resources

Top tips:

- CSE can occur without any warning signs or risk indicators being present
- The presence of indicators may also be explained by other forms of vulnerability rather than child sexual exploitation
- Clear communication and close multi-agency working is key to effective & timely responses
- Agree the role of each professional
- Planning for transitions for all needs should start early

Avoid stereotypes:

- CSE can affect any child or young person **male or female** under the age of 18 years
- is perpetrated by men and women from **all ethnic backgrounds**

CSE is never the victim's fault

A key factor is the presence of some form of exchange in return for something:

- **Tangible** e.g. money, drugs, alcohol
- **Intangible** e.g. status, protection, perceived love or affection
- **Prevention** of something negative e.g. a child engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm their family.

As this exchange occurs within an unequal power dynamic, the receipt of something by a child or young person still makes them a victim.

Consent cannot be given even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them.

Even though the legal age of consent to sexual activity is 16 years, a person between 16 & 18 years old cannot 'consent' to abusive or exploitative sexual activity as they have legal protection as a child.

Your safeguarding duty to protect and support does not depend on the child or young person's desire to be safeguarded:

- Always focus on the child/young person
- Help them to understand that they are valued and listened to

Further information & resources:

- [Sheffield Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures](#): SCSP fact sheet and guidance
- [NSPCC](#): What is child sexual exploitation?
- [Parents Against Child Exploitation](#)
- [Barnardo's](#): advice for parents, professionals and young people
- [Child sexual exploitation: definition and a guide for practitioners, DfE 2017](#)
- [Child Sexual Exploitation, November 16](#), SCSP Learning Brief
- [Sexualised Behaviour](#), Safeguarding Sheffield Children Website

Vulnerabilities:

ALL children and young people can be vulnerable to sexual exploitation, but some are known to be at greater risk if they:

- have a prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- lack or have lacked a safe & stable home environment e.g. experiencing domestic violence, parental substance misuse, mental health issues, criminal activity
- have experienced recent bereavement or loss
- experience social isolation or social difficulties
- do not have a safe environment to explore sexuality
- are economically vulnerable
- are homeless or are in insecure accommodation
- have connections with other children and young people who are being sexually exploited
- have family members or other connections involved in adult sex work
- have a physical or learning disability
- are in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories)
- are exploring their sexual identity

Warning signs:

- acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones etc. without plausible explanation
- gang association and/or isolation from peers & social networks
- exclusion or unexplained absences from school, college or work
- leaving home or care without explanation and persistently going missing or returning late
- excessive receipt of texts & phone calls
- returning home under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- inappropriate sexualised behaviour or sexually transmitted infections for age
- evidence or suspicions 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
- increasing secretiveness around behaviours
- self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

What to do next:

Any member of staff who suspects that a child or young person **may be** involved in sexual exploitation or are being groomed or exploited online, should refer their concerns to their Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy, who will refer the matter to Children's Social Care.

Children's Social Care will initiate a child protection enquiry and contact the Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service to consider convening a Sexual Exploitation Meeting based on the indicators of risk.

If there are concerns about the involvement of a person who:

- works with children, and/or
- is in a 'Position of Trust'

...the **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** should be informed, via a [LADO Request form](#)

Where appropriate, the child or young person's wishes and feelings, and those of their parents and carers should be sought and taken into consideration when deciding how to proceed.

However, practitioners should be aware that this may not always be in the child or young person's best interest and may put them at further risk of harm.

Some children or young people may have been trafficked and need support to access services.

[The National Referral Mechanism](#) (NRM) is the framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.

Governors, Management Committees & senior managers need to make clear their commitment to deal effectively with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

All education settings should ensure that:

- a trained and regularly updated **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Lead** is identified to staff & students
- the CSE Lead & the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy (DSL/D) (if they are different people) work closely together
- all staff are made aware of and understand CSE indicators and referral pathways
- students are taught (age-appropriately) about:
 - CSE and how to protect themselves and each other
 - Healthy (including sexual) relationships, peer pressure, bullying, online-safety, gang activity etc. and how these topics can relate to CSE
- students know who to go to for help and support, and who to report CSE concerns to inside and outside the education setting
- relevant staff work in partnership with other agencies
- procedures are in place to gather, record and share CSE information with the Sheffield Sexual Exploitation Service, including data on pupils who run away or go missing
- they consider effective ways of raising awareness of CSE with parents and carers

Educating children and young people – some important principles:

- **The need for early and continuous education:** students need to be educated about the risk of child sexual exploitation (and other forms of sexual abuse) before perpetrators approach them
- **Effective, age-appropriate education**, which sensitively supports younger children on these issues and which forms part of a planned programme of study across key stages
- Wider **resilience-building** work
- **Use all avenues of communication:** personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons are an obvious route for educating students about the risks of child sexual exploitation and other forms of harm, as are pastoral services and school nurse services
- **Consider** how this message can be delivered outside mainstream education, e.g., in youth clubs, community settings or the family home?
- **Adopt a holistic approach:** the risk of child sexual exploitation should be part of a wider programme about sexuality and sexual development, choice and consent, healthy relationships, harmful social norms and abusive behaviours and online safety
- **Build on existing initiatives** e.g. online safety and ensure messages dovetail across these different programmes of work
- **Engage male and female** students & address the risks of perpetration and victimisation & the potential for overlap
- **Contextual considerations:** education should be delivered in a safe non-judgmental environment by credible individuals who are confident discussing the issues and able to challenge unhelpful perceptions
- **Where specific vulnerabilities** are identified e.g. going missing, gang-association or drug & alcohol misuse, more targeted work should be undertaken, while taking care to avoid stigmatisation or labelling
- **Accessible and appropriate support** should be immediately available should any issues of concern be identified during education activity