

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Factsheet for Schools

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

CSE is a form of sexual abuse that occurs “where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into taking part” in 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 and/or through violence or the threat of violence.

Adapted from [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)

Prevalence:

According to the NSPCC, 86,962 sexual offences against children were recorded by police across the UK in 22/23, including rape, sexual assault, grooming and sexual exploitation.

In the first six months of 2024, the IWF reported that child sexual abuse reports related to sexual extortion increased by 19%.

The NSPCC also says that online grooming crimes against children have increased by 89% in six years.

Additional vulnerabilities:

Any child can be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Children and young people are more vulnerable to abuse when they:

- have previous experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- lack a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (due to domestic abuse or parental substance misuse, parental mental health issues or criminality, for example)
- experience a bereavement or loss
- are socially isolated or have social difficulties
- don't have a safe environment to explore their sexuality
- are economically vulnerable
- are homeless or in insecure accommodation
- have connections with other children and young people who are being exploited in any way
- 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).

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Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Factsheet for Schools Continued...

Spot the Signs:

Sometimes there are indicators, sometimes there are none, and professionals can dismiss these as simply the behaviour associated with children and young people growing up.

Signs can include a child or young person who:

- acquires money, clothes, mobile phones, etc., without plausible explanation
- has gang association and/or isolation from peers/social networks
- is excluded or has unexplained absences from school, college or work
- leaves home/care without explanation and persistently goes missing or returns late
- receives excessive numbers of texts/phone calls
- returns home under the influence of drugs/alcohol
- undertakes inappropriate sexualised behaviour for their age/develops sexually transmitted infections and/or pregnancy occurs
- displays evidence of/suspicion of physical or sexual assault
- has relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups
- has multiple callers (unknown adults or peers)
- frequents areas known for adult sex work
- has concerning use of the internet or other social media
- displays increasing secretiveness around behaviours
- self-harms or displays significant changes in emotional wellbeing.

What to do:

- **Check young people have safe relationships** – in their family, with their peers and with your staff. Create a culture where it's okay to talk, even about the most difficult things.
- **Always take young people seriously.**
- **Be aware of additional vulnerabilities** – are there children at your setting who may be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation? Could they benefit from early intervention?
- **Consider the child's lived experiences.** Build and use your relationships with children and young people to understand what's happening in their community (in school, locally and online). Be aware of the strong influence of peers and social media.
- **Listen to/observe the 'voice' of the child.** Children and young people often find it difficult to speak about their experiences – what is their behaviour trying to tell you? Work with them to build trust and be a safe person for them to come to when needed.

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Spot the Signs:

- **Avoid victim-blaming language** that can deflect attention from and down-play the experiences of victims leading to lack of confidence in reporting and broken trust.
- **Don't make assumptions** about the level of independence or control a child or young person has simply by the way they present themselves to you and others.
- **Share information at an early stage about concerns.** You may be preventing CSE by working with children and young people who experience neglect, domestic abuse or a breakdown in their relationship with their parents.
- **Work closely with parents and families**, in agreement with your safeguarding lead, and where it's appropriate, work closely with families to understand and reduce the risk.
- **Ensure that interventions are as child-centred and trauma-informed as possible.** Protective work should be long-term and not simply focused on changing the child or young person's behaviour.
- **Support the young person.** If a child or young person finds it difficult to engage with services or attend meetings, such as police interviews, consider why and what support could be put in place. Children may need reassurance that they are being taken seriously.
- **See this as your responsibility** – raise it with your designated safeguarding lead, follow your school's safeguarding policies and listen carefully to the advice you are given. Take it higher if you feel concerns are not being taken seriously. Make a referral yourself if you need to and follow your local escalation procedure to raise concerns between agencies. If a child is at immediate risk, call the police.
- **Take action** – and keep taking action until you know that children and young people are safe.

Useful Links:

[Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse](#)

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse—[help for education settings](#)

[Stop it now—preventing child sexual abuse](#)

[Lucy Faithfull Foundation—preventing child sexual abuse](#)

[NSPCC—it's not ok:](#) Teaching resources around abuse and exploitation

[The Children's Society](#)

Children's Commissioner—[Talking to your child about online sexual harassment: A guide for parents](#) and [Preventing child sexual abuse](#)

