

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION – PARENTS GUIDE

Incidents of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) have been widely reported in the media recently, with high profile cases in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford & Derby receiving much publicity. As a parent, it's easy to think "it won't happen in this area", or "at least my children won't be involved in it", but how do you know that this would be the case?

CSE is happening in the Cambridge area and it is important for parents to know the issues - Would you know what Child Sexual Exploitation is? Would you know how to spot the signs that your children are being or have been sexually exploited? Would you know what to do if you believe your child is involved?

This briefing is a guide to help you understand the issues more clearly. What is child sexual exploitation? Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) occurs when children and young people under 18 are involved in exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where they (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.

Common myths of CSE:

- It doesn't happen around here. CSE occurs all over the country and is not restricted to inner city areas. Just because we live in a generally safe area does not mean that this type of crime does not happen.
- It only happens to girls and young women. Boys are just as likely to be targeted as victims by perpetrators.
- Only men perpetrate the abuse. Women groom victims as well as men. They may use different grooming methods, but targeted young people are vulnerable to female perpetrators.
- The perpetrators are all of a certain ethnic race. Both victim and perpetrator can come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- CSE is only committed by middle aged men. Not so. Young people can groom and then sexually abuse children just as easily as older perpetrators.
- The victims are mainly children in care. Despite the focus in the media, the vast majority of victims are not "looked after" children. Those youngsters living at home are just as vulnerable to exploitation, indeed the majority of victims are living in family environments.
- Parents should be able to spot the warning signs. How many parents know the tell-tale signs of abuse? They may suspect something is wrong with their child, but might not associate this behaviour with CSE.

What parents should look out for with your child:

- Being secretive or withdrawn
- Being hostile towards others (including family members)
- Becoming disruptive at school or at home

- Associating or developing new friendships/relationships
- Associating with other sexually exploited children
- Regularly coming home late or going missing from home or school
- Suddenly having a new network of friends
- Being isolated from existing friends and social networks
- Bringing home new mobile phones, jewellery, cash, clothes or other items without a plausible explanation
- Changing the way they dress, and the way they look in appearance – weight gain/loss, no/more make up
- Having physical marks such as bruises on their body
- Becoming involved in crime
- Having unexplained absences from school
- Being involved in manipulative friendships

This is not a complete list, but gives an idea of some of the changes a victim of CSE might undergo.

Practical steps a parent can take Stay alert to changes in your child's behaviour, or any physical signs of abuse such as

- bruising

Be aware of new unexplained gifts or items which come into their possession.

- Be aware of your child staying out late or not coming home.
- Be aware and exercise caution around any older or new friend that your child may have, especially new friendships. Look for “power imbalances” in these relationships. Is the child being manipulated or controlled?
- Make sure that your children know the possible risks of using the internet/social media. Talk to them about privacy settings, apps and sexting.

What should you do?

- Make time to talk to your child and ask if there is anything that is worrying them. Let them know that whatever they say won't get them into trouble and the most important thing is to tell you about anything that's upsetting them. Continue to talk to the child. Most children who are being abused find it very difficult to talk about it. By having ongoing conversations, the time may come when they're ready to talk. Keep a diary. This is a good way to keep a note of your concerns and the way your child is behaving. It can also help to spot patterns of behaviour.
- Do not assume CSE only happens to certain young people. Talk to your child's teacher or health visitor. Report your worries. If you ever notice any behaviour that makes you suspect a child is being abused, discuss it with a trained child protection professional. By not reporting your concerns it could also mean that the abuse will continue. An assessment by professionals used to dealing with cases of suspected abuse will be the best way forward, even if the child has not directly revealed that something is wrong or if there's any other uncertainty on your part.

The NSPCC helpline is open 24 hours a day on 0808 800 5000 for advice and support. Report any suspicion to the Police on 999 if the child is in immediate danger, or 101 for non-emergency reports.

Useful contacts

999 - Police emergency number

101 – Police non-emergency number

Cambridgeshire Social Services- 0345 045 5203 between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday. If it is outside office hours or at the weekend, call the Emergency Duty Team on 01733 234 724

NSPCC– www.nspcc.org.uk National charity safeguarding

children Safe & Sound – www.safeandsoundgroup.org.uk

Specialist support for young victims and those at risk of exploitation Parents Against Child

Sexual Exploitation (PACE) - www.paceuk.info Support for parents and carers of young people at risk of exploitation

Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre (CEOP) - www.ceop.police.uk Works with child protection partners to identify threats and co-ordinates activity to reduce risk

Further information on CSE can be found in the school's reception area and on the following website

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpDwvFVHprM>