

Be aware, keep safe

How to keep you and your
friends safe from sexual
exploitation



Halo

HERTFORDSHIRE
safeguarding **children**
BOARD



Sexual exploitation – how much do you know?

Sexual exploitation is when someone uses you for sex. It can be hard to recognise because you often believe you're in a good relationship with the person - or people - who want to abuse your trust in them.

It could be a friend, or group of friends. It could be someone you think of as a boyfriend or girlfriend, a relative, a family friend or your mum or dad's partner. It could be a person or a new group of people you've only just got to know. It could even be someone you've talked to online.

But whoever it is, they could use clever ways to take advantage of your relationship - and that means you can be harmed almost before you know what's going on. For example, someone might give you money, drugs, alcohol, gifts or somewhere to stay and then force you to do one or more of these things in return:

- have sex with them or somebody they know
- do something sexual to them
- be touched inappropriately or in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable
- look at sexual images - including films or pictures
- watch them do something sexual, including having sex or touching themselves sexually

That's exploitation.

Who can you trust?

It's not always easy to tell. As we grow up, we develop relationships with lots of different people, which is great. But things can go wrong, and some people might try to take advantage of you before you know it.

That's why it's so important to look out for the warning signs that someone's behaviour towards you may not be all it seems.

One warning sign is when someone tries to get to know you better by making you feel really special. It becomes a problem if that person starts to try ways of controlling you, threatening you, or even becoming violent if you don't do what they want.

They might also try and isolate you from your friends, family and other people who care for you. This makes it easier for an abuser to put you in dangerous situations or force you to do things you don't want to do - with them or other people they know.



Sadly, young people who don't have many people looking out for them are even more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Harry's Story

13-year-old Harry met Jeff in the park after he ran away from home. Jeff invited Harry to his flat to get out of the cold. He let Harry watch TV, drink alcohol and gave him new clothes and credit for his mobile phone. He told Harry to keep their friendship a secret.

Jeff began introducing Harry to some of his friends. This made Harry feel important- he felt like he belonged with Jeff, like a family. However, Jeff began to be violent. Harry thought if he did everything Jeff asked things would go back to the way they were. But things didn't improve. Jeff made Harry have sex with him, and sometimes with his friends. Harry didn't want to, but he felt he would lose his new 'family' if he didn't.

Eventually, Harry realised that he needed help. He spoke to a teacher that he trusted, telling them everything. Harry is no longer friends with Jeff and is getting the support that he needs to break free from the cycle of abuse.

So be aware and keep safe – use our top tips to protect yourself from exploitation.

Three top tips to keep safe

- 1** Trust yourself to know when something is wrong. If someone makes you feel unsafe, pressured or frightened, follow your instincts and seek help.
- 2** Don't trust people you don't know, even if they seem friendly, and make sure you know who you are talking to online. Never give away personal details or agree to meet someone who you have only talked to online.
- 3** Don't be tricked into doing things that are unsafe, even if they seem like fun. What might look exciting at first could be more dangerous than you realise.

If you are worried about a situation that you, or a friend, are in, talk to an adult that you trust as soon as you can. People who can help you include teachers, parents, carers and social workers.

You can also call ChildLine confidentially on 0800 1111 or visit their website www.childline.org.uk

If you are scared that you, or a friend, are in immediate danger or you need urgent help, call 999 or contact your local police.



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For further information on abuse please visit
www.hertssafeguarding.org.uk

