

**Would you recognise if
a child or young person
was being sexually
exploited?**

**Information and advice for
professionals working with
children and young people**



Halo

HERTFORDSHIRE
safeguardingchildren
BOARD



Hertfordshire safeguarding children board (HSCB) is working to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and help prevent it happening to young people in Hertfordshire.

Sexual abuse affects thousands of children and young people in the UK every year. As a professional working with young people in an education, health, criminal justice or social care setting, you could have an important role to play in protecting children from this horrific form of child abuse.



What is child sexual exploitation?

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse, in which a young person is manipulated or forced into taking part in a sexual act. This could be as part of a relationship which seems to be normal and loving or in return for attention, affection, money, drugs, alcohol or somewhere to stay.

In many cases, victims will be 'groomed' by an abusing adult, who befriends them and makes them feel special by buying them gifts or giving them lots of attention. Usually the abuser will have power of some kind over the young person. It may be that they are older or more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or that they are in a position where they are able to control the young person.

This type of abuse could happen to any young person from any background. However, certain young people, such as those who are having difficulties at home, regularly go missing or who have experienced care, are more vulnerable.

What are the signs?

Often, the victims of sexual exploitation are not aware that they are being exploited. Sometimes, a victim may think they won't be believed - especially if the abuser is the partner of their mum or dad, a relative or close family friend - and so they may be reluctant to ask for help.

However, there are a number of telltale signs that a child or young person may be being groomed.



These include:

- going missing for periods of time or regularly coming home late
- regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- associating with other young people involved in exploitation
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- suffering from sexually transmitted infections
- mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing
- drug and alcohol misuse
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- changes in eating patterns

What can I do as a professional?

As a professional working with young people, you may have opportunities to identify issues early, so it is important to familiarise yourself with the signs that a child or young person is being exploited and share this information with your colleagues or professionals in other agencies.

Other steps you can take to help protect children and young people include:

- staying alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse and investigating these further
- ensuring you know who the child protection lead is in your workplace and that you are aware of the procedure to follow if you have concerns about a young person
- thinking about ways that you might be able to better support and help young people to share information if they are worried about their own or another young person's situation

www.hertssafeguarding.org.uk



If in doubt, seek advice or make a referral about your concern by contacting:

- Children's Services (including out of hours) on 0300 123 4043
- Herts Constabulary non-emergency Tel: 101

If you fear a child is in immediate danger, call 999 or contact your local police.

For further guidance on sexual exploitation please visit:

www.hertssafeguarding.org.uk

