

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

**Information and advice for
parents and carers**



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 parent or carer, you could play an important role in protecting your 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 that 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.

However, there are a number of telltale signs that you should look out for in your child and their friends.



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 parent or a carer?

As a parent or carer, it is important to talk to your children about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships and help highlight potential risks to them.

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

- being aware that sometimes even family members, close family friends or a new partner that you may have, could pose a threat to your children
- staying alert to changes in behaviour or any physical signs of abuse such as bruising
- being aware of new, unexplained gifts or possessions and carefully monitoring any episodes of staying out late or not returning home
- exercising caution around older friends your child may have, or relationships with other young people where there appears to be a power imbalance
- making sure you understand the risks associated with your child being online and putting measures in place to minimise these risks

www.hertssafeguarding.org.uk



If in doubt, seek advice or or get help 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

