

Child exploitation

"The first time he made me do it, it felt horrible, but he's been really nice to me, he says he is my special friend. I'm not supposed to tell anyone, it's a secret - or something bad will happen to me. I think my mum would be upset or angry with me if I told her."

- Often starts out with apparently innocent activity
- Child exploitation has devastating effects on children, both physical and mental
- Exploitative adults are very sophisticated and well practised in how they approach children
- Children are sometimes abused by people they know
- Often children will not talk about incidents of sexual exploitation
- Be sensitive to changes in your child's behaviour. It is up to attentive adults to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation
- It is important that your child feels that you believe what they are telling you. Help and support your child, no matter what

New technology, old problem

Child exploitation takes many forms, including child prostitution, child pornography and pornography on the Internet. The vast majority of children do not get involved voluntarily; they are coerced, enticed or are utterly desperate.

Sadly, children are sometimes abused by people they know within their own family or wider network. As a parent you need to be able to recognise the signs that your child might be a victim of child pornography or any other form of sexual exploitation.

Child pornography has devastating effects on children, both on those who are exploited in the actual pictures and those who view it. Exploitative adults will encourage children to view child pornography, which leads them to see pornographic acts as acceptable and normal. This acceptance can make them more susceptible to being the subject of future sexual involvement.

Be cautious about allowing your child to be photographed. Child pornography places the children depicted in extremely harmful situations, both sexually and physically. It causes a sense of shame and guilt in the child and a fear that family and friends might find out and blame them. This fear often makes it difficult for a child who has been exploited to testify against a molester in court.

Preventing children from being photographed or portrayed as the subject of pornography is difficult. Because abusers have no distinguishing characteristics, it is difficult to warn children about what an abuser is or looks like. But you can warn children about the abnormal actions of abusers and make sure that children know that they have the right to say NO.

Children abused through prostitution are victims of sexual abuse. Unfortunately these victims often become offenders themselves, as in order to support themselves or to escape from the life they lead, they get involved in drugs and petty crime.

Internet-related child exploitation is now also a major cause for concern. Remember that as you or your child move through the Internet, you leave information about yourself. Become computer literate and get to know the services your child uses. Establish some Internet safety rules with your child.

You should be aware of the indicators of sexual and physical abuse and exploitation, such as those listed under 'Warning Signs', left. Obviously there could be other explanations, but it is important to help your child no matter what the cause of the symptoms or the behaviour. For instance, you might become aware of and concerned about your child's relationship with an older person (whom your child might describe as a friend, whether male or female) and/or frequent absences from home or school.

Local police and social services have small specialist teams who are specially trained to interview children with the support of their parents.

WARNING SIGNS

Changes in behaviour or mood, inappropriate sexual activity, sleep disturbances, bed-wetting and soiling, unexplained marks, problems at school, going missing, self harm. Indirect clues, like asking about sexual experiences or leaving pornographic material, diaries, or letters where they can be found.

ACTION

If your child confides in you, support them and tell Social Services or the Police. If you think your child has been physically injured, seek medical help. Talk to your child about what is happening.

WHAT TO SAY

It is important that your child feels that you believe what she or he is telling you. Make it clear that telling what happened was the right thing to do and that you will protect him or her from further harm.

PREVENTION

Know where your child is; be familiar with their friends and daily activities. Teach your child to trust their own feelings and assure them that they have a right to say NO to what they sense is wrong. Listen carefully to your child's fears and be supportive.

CONTACTS

- Social Services
Children's Advice
01274 437500
- West Yorkshire Police
0845 60 60 606
Emergency 999
- Chat Danger
www.chatdanger.com
- Childnet International
www.childnet-int.org
- NSPCC 0808 800 5000
- Streets and Lanes Project
(Barnardos) 01274 481183
- Alma Street Project
- Sexual abuse (5-17 yr olds)
01274 651652

*Check the Bradford ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:
www.bradford-acpc.com*