

## What can I do as a parent or a carer?

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

There are also a number of practical steps you can take to protect children such as:

- 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.

If you are concerned that a child is at risk of sexual exploitation, you may want to contact one of our specialist sexual exploitation projects for advice: [www.barnardos.org.uk/specialist\\_sexual\\_exploitation\\_projects](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/specialist_sexual_exploitation_projects).

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

Barnardo's has launched its Cut them free campaign to reduce the number of children experiencing the horror of sexual exploitation in the UK.

You can find out further information about sexual exploitation and show your support at:  
[www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree).

**Believe in children**  
**Barnardo's**



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Nos. 216250 and SC037605



# Are you a parent or a carer?

## Believe in children



## Barnardo's

Help cut children and young people free from sexual exploitation



Sexual exploitation affects thousands of children and young people across the UK every year. As a parent or carer, you could have an important role to play in protecting children from exploitation, helping to cut them free 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 seemingly consensual relationship, or in return for attention, affection, money, drugs, alcohol or somewhere to stay.

The young person may think that their abuser is their friend, or even a boyfriend or girlfriend. But they will put them into dangerous situations, forcing the young person to do things they don't want to do. The abuser may physically or verbally threaten the young person or be violent towards them. They will control and manipulate them, and try to isolate them from friends and family.

### **Who does it affect?**

This type of abuse could happen to any young person from any background. It happens to boys and young men as well as girls and young women.

The victims of abuse are not at fault. Abusers are very clever in the way they manipulate and take advantage of the young people they abuse.



### **How does it happen?**

Many young people Barnardo's work with have been 'groomed' by an abusing adult who befriends the young person and makes them feel special by buying them gifts or giving them lots of attention. Young people may be targeted online or in person. Sexual exploitation can also occur between young people of a similar age.

In most cases, the abuser will have power of some kind over the young person. It may be that the abuser is older or more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or that they are in a position where they are able to control the young person.

There are some situations that can make young people more vulnerable to exploitation; by becoming distant from the people who would usually look after them. Young people who are having difficulties at home, regularly go missing or have experienced care may be particularly vulnerable.

### **What are the signs?**

Children and young people that are the victims of sexual exploitation often do not recognise that they are being exploited. However, there are a number of telltale signs that a child may be being groomed for sexual exploitation. These include:

- going missing for periods of time or regularly returning 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.

