



Child sexual exploitation

Myth buster

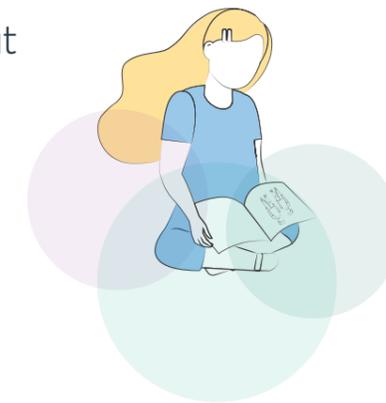
Inspiring learning for all

Child sexual exploitation Myth buster

All professionals should have an awareness of the sexual exploitation and, when abuse is suspected, an appropriately trained professional should be consulted to support and help that child or young person.

There are many misconceptions, or myths, about child sexual exploitation (CSE). Professionals working with children have to understand them and be able to challenge them.

This guide will help expose and explain these misconceptions, ensuring you have a greater understanding of sexual exploitation.



Boys are not affected by sexual exploitation

MYTH

Boys and young men can be sexually exploited, yet their exploitation is often overlooked and underestimated. Evidence indicates that boys who are sexually exploited are more likely to present with behaviours that may come to the attention of the criminal justice system. It is also important to recognise that boys find it more difficult to disclose abuse. There is growing research from those working with sexually exploited boys and young men, and more can be learnt from the NWG Boys and Young Men forum: www.nwgnetwork.org

(source: www.paceuk.info)



There are things a professional can do even if a child doesn't want to engage

FACT

There are different reasons why a child may not engage. They may not understand the exploitation or recognise that what they are experiencing is abuse. Or they may be aware but find it difficult to come forward and disclose the abuse. All professionals should have an awareness of the signs of sexual exploitation and, when abuse is suspected, an appropriately trained professional should be consulted to support and help that child or young person.

FACT

Child sexual exploitation affects boys and girls from all ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds

CSE has no prejudices; it can happen anywhere, in any neighbourhood, in every religion, covering all racial boundaries or ethnic groups, and within any culture.

MYTH

Trafficking only happens to foreign children

Child trafficking and modern slavery are child abuse. Children are recruited, moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Many children are trafficked into the UK from abroad, but children can also be trafficked from within or across cities in the UK.

Children are trafficked for:

- Child sexual exploitation
- Benefit fraud
- Forced marriage
- Domestic servitude, such as cleaning, childcare, cooking
- Forced labour in factories or agriculture
- Criminal activity, such as pickpocketing, begging, transporting drugs, working on cannabis farms, and bag theft

MYTH

Sexual exploitation only happens to children over the age of 15

A child is a person under the age of 18. Typically, the perpetrators target children aged between 11 and 15, but sexual exploitation can happen to any child at any age. Barnardo's has worked with victims of CSE as young as 10, with the average age being 13, and The Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups identified victims between ages 4 and 19.

The age of consent in England and Wales is 16, and sex with a child under the age of consent is an offence. Legislation and guidance clearly state that all children under the age of 18 must be safeguarded from sexual exploitation.

(source: www.paceuk.info)



FACT

Everyone is equally at risk from online grooming

Today's environment is becoming increasingly digital as children are now more exposed than ever to the internet, and it has been acknowledged that social networking sites enable information-gathering on a child and grooming to take place in a single online environment.

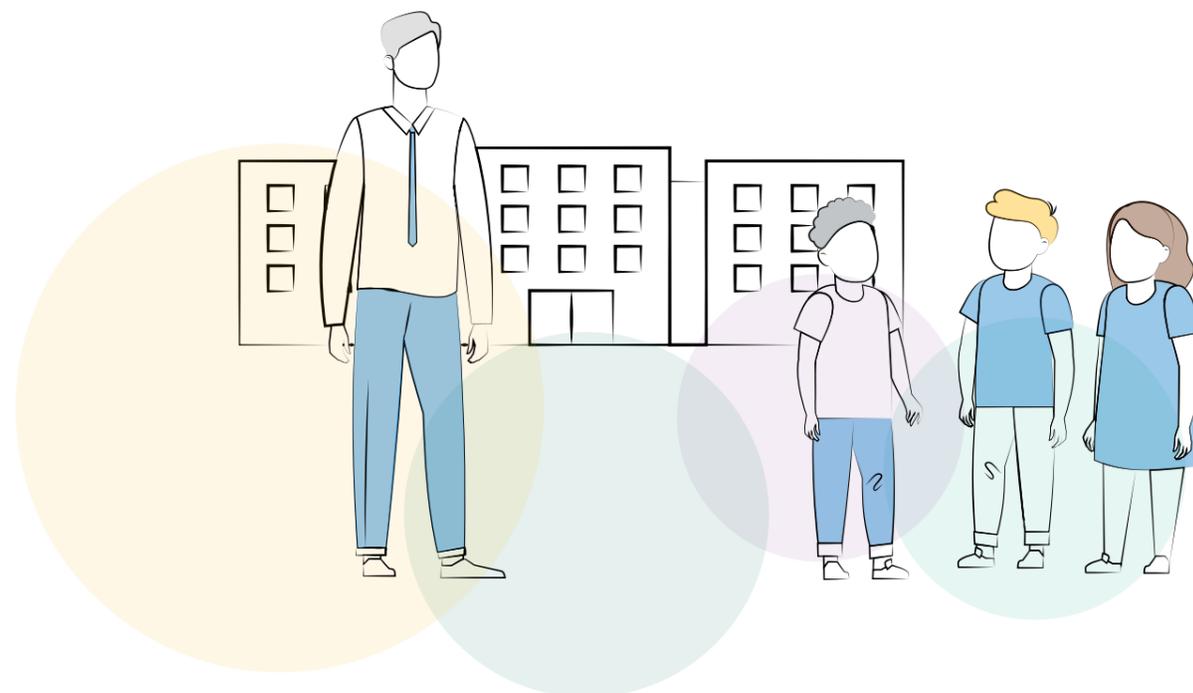
The National Crime Agency (NCA) assessment analysis in 2017 highlights the continued rise of social media for perpetrators, resulting in an increase in CSE referrals to the police. All children and young people should be educated on how to keep themselves safe and protected from online grooming.

MYTH

Sexual exploitation only happens to promiscuous girls

A child's capacity to consent or their willingness to be involved in sexual activities is irrelevant where exploitation is involved. Being sexually active does not demonstrate consent, and judgements about promiscuity reinforce the cycle of abuse and increase barriers for children and young people to disclose their experiences.

In 2011, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) study found that the majority of victims were girls. However, in 31% of cases, gender was unknown. It is likely that male victims are under-represented due to difficulties in identifying sexual exploitation in boys and young men.



MYTH

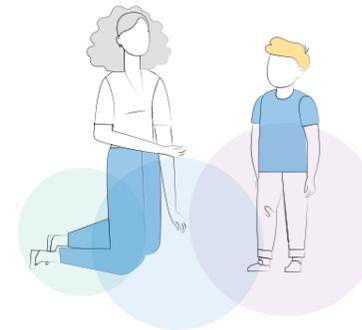
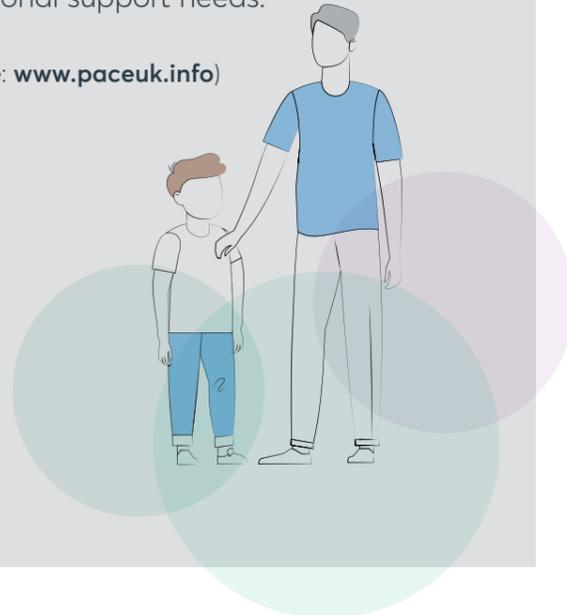
Sexual exploitation only happens to 'dysfunctional' families

Sexual exploitation can happen to any young person. However, children from families where there may be problems could be additionally vulnerable and risk factors can include:

- A history of abuse, particularly sexual abuse
- Disrupted family life/domestic violence
- Parental drug/alcohol abuse
- Recent bereavement or loss
- Homelessness, being in, or leaving, care
- Poor mental health
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence
- Being a young carer
- Links to a gang through family and friends or living in gang-affected communities
- Lacking friends from the same age group

Assuming the child's family background is the root cause of their abuse puts the focus of intervention in the wrong place and disempowers family members who often struggle to protect their child from exploitation. It is vital to remember that the specific support needs of all families around exploitation of their child are not dissimilar, even though some may have additional support needs.

(source: www.paceuk.info)



Sexual exploitation is not a lifestyle choice

FACT

It is, in fact, child abuse. Professionals must remember this, and challenge anyone who believes it is a lifestyle choice.

MYTH

When child sexual exploitation occurs, the parents are to blame

Effects of child sexual exploitation, such as changes in a child's behaviour, attitude and relationships, put a strain on the parent-child relationship. For example, truanting, going missing, use of substances and aggression often lead to confrontation between the parent and the exploited child; such strained relationships are sometimes seen to be at the core of the problem. However, it is the grooming process that leads to the breakdown of those relationships.

Perpetrators are highly manipulative, and they exert power over young people through physical violence, emotional

blackmail or financial pressure. To maintain control or to distance children and young people from those who may be able to protect them, abusers create and exploit weaknesses, such as:

- Isolation from friends and family
- Disengagement from services such as education or health
- Challenging or criminal behaviour

The focus on manipulation and control has similarities with domestic violence.

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