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The Achieve and Learn Trust believes that nothing is more important than safeguarding the young people in our schools.

This half term we are looking at exploitation of young people, and how as parents we can be alert to the signs that our children could be falling victim. Exploitation affects all types of families from all backgrounds. It is important to act early to seek support

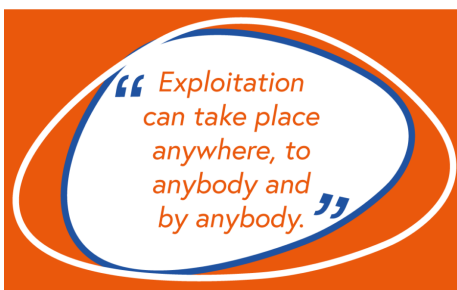
What is Exploitation?

Exploitation is taking advantage of someone for your own benefit. The exploited person may feel they are consenting to this, but in fact there is a power imbalance and they are being manipulated, coerced or controlled.

Exploitation of children can take many forms, for example, using a child to distribute drugs or to handle money or weapons to avoid these being found.

It can also mean persuading a child to do something sexual, even if they feel that they are willingly taking part.

Exploitation is a form of abuse. It can be emotional, sexual, financial or physical abuse or a combination of these. It can happen online or in person. It can be perpetrated by a single individual or by a group. Sometimes young people are exploited by other young people of a similar age but often the exploiter is older than the child.



Finding out that your child or a child you know is being or has been exploited is distressing. Parents might find themselves in shock or in denial. They may feel angry, embarrassed, guilty or depressed. Adults around the child may blame themselves and feel they didn't do enough to protect them. They may feel angry with the child for 'allowing' this to happen. However, children are never to blame for their own exploitation.

How grooming works



Targeting

A groomer will notice the child and find out more about them. They will get to know them and build trust by seeming to take an interest in the child, giving compliments or noticing things they do.



Befriending

The groomer then intensifies the contact. They will make a child feel special, understood and protected. They will spend a lot of time talking to the child and give them gifts and attention. They may begin gently to drive a wedge between the child and their family and friends. They will encourage secrecy between themselves and the child. All the time, they will be noting the child's vulnerabilities and finding out their needs and wants.



Hooking In

The groomer will now establish a firm relationship with a child, who will believe this is genuine and mutual. They will make the child dependent on them (for example: for protection, drugs, support- whatever the child needs) and take advantage of any vulnerabilities they have noticed. The groomer will begin to test the child out and desensitise them. This is to see how compliant the child is and to normalise poor treatment. By now, the child may feel they 'owe' the groomer in some way.



Controlling

At this stage, all pretence of genuine concern for the child will usually be dropped. The child will be manipulated and controlled through threats to themselves and others, physical and sexual violence, trickery and debt-bondage (where a child is told they 'owe' money to the groomer for things they have been given). The child may feel shame, fear and isolation so they don't think they can get help. They will often feel **trapped**.



Social Media



Social media has made it much easier for exploiters to reach children and young people. Some children are groomed very quickly on social media but don't understand who or what they are dealing with. They may never have any face-to-face contact with the person exploiting them. They may never realise they have been a victim of exploitation.

How do I know that my child is being exploited?

Child exploitation can be difficult to identify. Children may not recognise what is happening. They may believe the exploiter is a friend who cares about them and looks after them.

Exploiters are adopting increasingly sophisticated techniques to 'groom' their victims. Professionals and parents don't always recognise grooming. They may believe that the child is making their own choices without understanding the psychological or physical pressure the child may be under. They sometimes regard the child's actions as 'normal teenage behaviour'

Signs of grooming and exploitation

	<p>BELONGINGS</p> <p>Unexplained mobile phone, games console, money, clothes, bike, sweets, jewellery, cigarettes.</p>	<p>Multiple mobile phones and SIM cards, occasional money that can't be accounted for, belongings disappear or get sold.</p> <p>Criminals groom children with gifts. They use phones to control and send instructions.</p>
	<p>APPEARANCE AND TASTES</p> <p>Exaggerated gang style, intense interest in money and expensive items, taking a keen interest in music that glorifies violence, misogyny and drug use.</p>	<p>Unkempt and dirty, poor self-care, not bothered about appearance.</p> <p>Children work hard to fit in with perpetrators by mimicking their behaviour, clothing and tastes in music.</p>
	<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p> <p>New friendships with controlling older children, or girl or boyfriend, secrecy about friends, existing relationships are dropped, relationships at home become strained, problems at school.</p>	<p>Cut off from family and friends, significant problems at school including missing days and exclusions, not appearing to care about anyone else, occasionally seeking comfort.</p> <p>Criminals seek to isolate children from family, friends and supportive network.</p>
	<p>BEHAVIOUR</p> <p>Confrontational, controlling, brittle over-confidence, secretive and furtive, unexplained absences, language is changed and seems out of place, some anti-social behaviour.</p>	<p>Distant, violent, out of control, hypervigilant, frequently missing, sometimes for long periods, constantly monitoring phone and disappearing in response to messages, in trouble with police.</p> <p>Once trapped, children are controlled through extreme threats and violence.</p>
	<p>WELLBEING</p> <p>A sense that something isn't right, disorganised sleep, tiredness, excessive time spent online, unusual smell.</p>	<p>Bruises and cuts, moving around awkwardly or painfully, depressed and lost, disorganised sleep and lack of appetite, being under the influence of drugs.</p> <p>Exploited children are traumatised through violence, control and enforced drug addiction.</p>

If you have an hour to learn more....

Access some free training:

[Iverson Trust: Criminal and Sexual Exploitation Training.](#)

“BeAware: Lets talk about language” - Learn about how parents and carers can be aware of the risks and how they can have conversations with their children about it.

