



Child Exploitation - The Signs

Good afternoon,

Would you know how to spot the signs that your child or a child you know or care for, is being exploited by criminals?

Child criminal exploitation can involve bribery, intimidation, violence and/or threats. The child does not need to have met whoever is exploiting them - children can be exploited via the internet or using mobile phones. They can also be targeted via social media platforms and gaming forums.

Sexual exploitation of children can start through the use of technology, without them immediately realising. For example, they might be persuaded to post images on the internet or via mobile phone without immediate payment or personal gain. Their abusers then groom the child, often convincing them that they are in a “proper relationship” with them, when in fact they are exploiting them for their own greed or sexual gratification.

Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, with a particular vulnerability of the child being used against them. This can make the victim feel as though they have no choice but to continue.

Many young people do not see themselves as victims and it is vital that the adults around them are aware of the signs.

Some of the signs to look out for include:

- often going missing from home or school and being found away from their normal area
- unexplained money, clothes, designer wear, jewellery, gadgets or mobile phones
- having multiple mobile phones
- getting lots of phone calls or texts
- use and/or possession of drugs and/or alcohol
- relationships with older people
- unexplained injuries
- carrying weapons
- abandoning friends and their social circle

- school performance getting worse
- self-harm
- changes in well-being
- significant emotional changes (like becoming angry or sad), or becoming fearful, withdrawn or isolated
- using different language/terminology
- new peer groups and/or relationships with unknown associates

A child who is being sexually exploited may also

- have repeated sexually-transmitted infections, pregnancies or terminations
- a deterioration in physical appearance
- evidence of online sexual bullying
- evidence of vulnerability on social networking sites

Please see the links in the comment section below for useful resources to support parents, carers and children.

➡ To report a crime that has already happened and you are not in immediate danger, please call 101 or report online via our website.

☎ If you or a child is in immediate danger, always call 999.