



# Working with young people at risk of sexual exploitation

See, understand and respond to child sexual abuse.

Issued by FACS for use by Child Protection Practitioners.

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Family &  
Community  
Services



# Resources

A number of innovative and practical resources have been developed to help practitioners, parents and safe people (adults and friends) have discussions with young people about sexual exploitation. The links to these resources can be found on the Casework Practice site.



**WUD U? app:** An award winning app designed by Barnardos to educate young people about behaviours that could place them at risk of sexual exploitation.

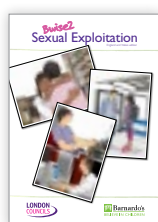


**Protect and Respect session plans:** An education package for young people developed by the NSPCC which can be found online in PDF format. The package provides ideas for talking to young people about exploitation and includes links to three brief videos. These videos can help begin a conversation about sexual exploitation with a young person and can help them identify it in their relationship.

'Jay' describes child sexual exploitation from a young woman's perspective.

'When someone cares' describes how children and young people should be treated and contrasts this with sexual exploitation.

'Losing control - my story is real' tells the story of the sexual trafficking of a young woman from Eritrea (a country in Africa) to Europe.



**The Barnardos Wheels of Power and Control and Equal, Consensual and Respectful Relationships:**<sup>1</sup> A resource adapted from the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. These wheels provide examples of behaviour in an exploitative relationship, contrasted with behaviour in an equal and respectful relationship.

<sup>1</sup> Download the Barnardos 'Bwise2 Sexual Exploitation' resource from [http://webfronter.com/hounslow/learningtorespect/menu0/Child\\_protection/Bwise2Sexual\\_Exploitation/images/Bwise2\\_Sexual\\_Exploitation.pdf](http://webfronter.com/hounslow/learningtorespect/menu0/Child_protection/Bwise2Sexual_Exploitation/images/Bwise2_Sexual_Exploitation.pdf)

# Working with young people at risk of sexual exploitation

## About this chapter

### About this chapter

Child sexual exploitation is the most common type of child sexual abuse perpetrated against young people. Young people who are exploited are targeted, groomed and gradually introduced into a 'relationship' that they think is normal but is actually abusive. Young people may be groomed and targeted in public places,<sup>2</sup> through their friendship groups or online. The offender may further reinforce their connection to the young person by offering them gifts and compliments.

It is common for young people to be deceived into believing that the offender is their 'friend', 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'. Once the young person is groomed they are then forced to have sex, often in 'exchange' for something such as alcohol, gifts, money, affection, drugs or somewhere safe to stay. These sexual activities can happen on- or offline.<sup>5</sup> The young person is then entrapped and their secrecy is maintained through threats of social isolation, public shame and other types of physical or emotional abuse.

As a society we accept that any sexual interaction with a child is illegal, harmful and morally wrong. When working with young people it can be very difficult to differentiate between a loving relationship and an exploitative one. Family members, professionals and the young person themselves may all have been deceived into believing that the young person is 'in love' and is engaging in consensual sexual activity.

This chapter provides you with practical guidance to help you identify the early stages of grooming and sexual exploitation and to have honest and purposeful conversations with young people, their parents and their community that help to keep them safe.



**Go to**

page 14-15 of **this chapter** for information on the stages of grooming.



### PLEASE NOTE

During this chapter we will use the term 'young person' to describe adolescents between 12 and 18 years old.



### In Practice

**We use the term grooming in this kit because it is widely understood by children, families and communities.**

It is important to remember that some academics and practitioners for example, Allan Wade<sup>3</sup> and Liz Kelly<sup>4</sup> have argued that the word entrapment more accurately describes the tactics that are used to manipulate and silence children.

Young people who are at serious risk of harm are deliberately targeted by offenders because their often very limited experiences of safety and care mean that they are more likely to respond to the offender's attention, less able to identify abusive dynamics, less likely to seek help and less likely to have their abuse noticed.



**Go to**



page 9-12 for information on understanding the difference between legal and illegal sexual activity. This information focuses on young people who are between the ages of 16 and 18 because we know that the boundaries between what is legal and illegal can be particularly blurry when working with this age group.

<sup>2</sup> We know that offenders target places where young people are known to 'hang out'. There is also evidence that offenders target places where marginalised young people are more likely to visit, for example parks opposite youth refuges or residential care services.

<sup>3</sup> Wade, A. (2014). *Skilled and Selective Empathy: Acknowledging Responses to Adversity and Resistance to Violence*, Family Violence Conference 14 November 2014, University of Technology, Sydney.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, L. (2015) *Key issues in sexual assault practice: Reflections and discussions from research*, Master class 9th February 2015, Australian Technology Park, Sydney.

<sup>5</sup> Online sexual exploitation may involve forcing the young person to provide sexually explicit images over the internet or in text messages.



## 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding

**This part of the chapter will help you recognise the warning signs and risk factors about sexual exploitation.**

**Key question:**

- How can I differentiate between a sexually exploitative relationship and a respectful relationship?



## 2 Part two: Responding

**This part of the chapter will help you to respond to young people who you believe are being exploited.**

**Key question:**

- How can I effectively support a young person who is experiencing sexual exploitation?





## ① Part one: Seeing and understanding

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**Key question:**

- How can I differentiate between a sexually exploitative relationship and a respectful relationship?

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Sexual exploitation

### Sexual exploitation is a child protection issue.

Marginalised young people who are sad, isolated, going missing from home, using alcohol and other drugs or experiencing mental health and behavioural issues are deliberately targeted by offenders. This is because of the belief that they are more likely to respond to grooming behaviour, less likely to report their sexual exploitation and less likely to be believed if they do report their abuse. They may also be targeted by offenders because their lack of connected relationships can make it more difficult for them to differentiate between a loving relationship and an abusive one. Some of our most marginalised young people may believe that the exploitation is the only way that they can get their basic needs met, and that any connection is better than nothing.

Professionals can also fall into the trap of minimising the harm caused by an exploitative relationship, particularly where the young person does not believe they are being harmed, the suspected offender is offering them support such as accommodation, food and 'care' and the age differences are minimal.

This part of the chapter will help you to recognise the early stages of exploitation and grooming. It will also help you to support young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and help them to be aware of these abusive dynamics before they take hold.



### Experts Say...

**'If offenders can spot a vulnerable young person and target them then why can't professionals notice vulnerable young people and equip them to recognise grooming and sexual exploitation?'**



Dr Jane Dodsworth is a Lecturer in Social Work at the University of East Anglia.

Professor Marion Brandon is a Professor in Social Work at the University of East Anglia and Director of the Centre of Research on Children and Families.





## Legal and illegal sexual activity

We know that sexual expression in young people is both normal and developmentally appropriate. We also know that young people, their parents and the community can find it difficult to distinguish between sex<sup>6</sup> and sexual activity<sup>7</sup> that is consensual<sup>8</sup> and sex that is exploitative or abusive. This is particularly true when the young person is over the age of legal consent (16 years). The table below is based on a review of contemporary sexual offence and child sexual abuse legislation in Australia by the Australian Institute of Criminology.<sup>9</sup> It states what sexual activity is legal and what is illegal for young people in NSW.



### In Practice

#### **It is illegal for anyone to have sex with anyone under the age of 16.**

For young people aged 16-18 the difference between consensual sex and exploitation can be more difficult to distinguish.

It is important to consider the power imbalance between the young person and the suspected offender when deciding if the young person is at risk of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation of young people aged between 16 and 18 is just as serious as sexual exploitation of young people under the age of 16.

<sup>6</sup> Under the *Crimes Act 1900* s 61H (1) sexual intercourse is defined as:

- a) The penetration to any extent of the genitalia (including a surgically constructed vagina) of a female person or the anus of any person by:
  - i. any part of the body of another person; or
  - ii. any object manipulated by another person, except where the penetration is carried out for proper medical purposes;
- b) sexual connection occasioned by the introduction of any part of the penis of a person into the mouth of another person;
- c) cunnilingus; or
- d) the continuation of sexual intercourse as defined in paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

<sup>7</sup> Sexual activity is any activity that does not involve sexual penetration for example, kissing or touching.

<sup>8</sup> Sexual consent: 'Whenever you have sex, you need to make sure that your partner is just as enthusiastic about having sex. In other words, that they give their full **consent**. It's important that you are 100% sure that the person you're with is happy and willing because non-consensual sexual activity (even kissing and touching) is actually against the law. If someone is really drunk or high, they cannot give consent. Being with them in a sexual way when they don't know what's going on is equal to rape, because they cannot give informed consent'. (*Reachout: What is sexual consent?* Retrieved from <http://au.reachout.com/what-is-sexual-consent>).

<sup>9</sup> Boxall, H., & Fuller, G. (2014). *Brief review of contemporary sexual offence and child sexual abuse legislation in Australia*. Australian Institute of Criminology.

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Legal and illegal sexual activity

continued...

QUESTION:	ANSWER:	LEGISLATION:
Can a child who is 15 years or under consent to sex with a similarly aged peer?	<b>No.</b> In NSW, if you are under 16, no one is allowed to have sex with you. There is no allowance made for the age of either person.	Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s 66C Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s 77
Can a young person who is 16 years old legally consent to sex with a person who is significantly (more than five years) older?	<b>Yes.</b> In NSW a 16 year-old can legally have consensual sex with any individual. The only exceptions are if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>the 16 year-old has a cognitive impairment, or other disability that means they cannot consent to sex</li><li>the person having sex with the 16 year-old is in a position of care, supervision or authority over them. See below for details.</li></ul>	See definition of consent s 61HA (4) (a): no consent if 'cognitive incapacity'  Crimes Act 1900 s 73
Can a young person over 16 with an intellectual disability consent to sex?	<b>It depends.</b> The young person must have the 'cognitive capacity' to give consent. If they do not have this capacity, then it is illegal for them to have sex.  If the young person is capable of consent but has a cognitive impairment, they would still be unable to give consent in the following circumstances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>If a person responsible for their care has sexual intercourse with them</li><li>If a person intends to take advantage of their cognitive impairment to have sexual intercourse with them.</li></ul>	Crimes Act 1900 s 61J (2)(g)  s 66F 'cognitive impairment'

QUESTION:	ANSWER:	LEGISLATION:
<p>Can a professional who works with children and young people legally have consensual sex with a young person aged between 16 and 18?</p>	<p><b>No.</b></p> <p>In NSW, it is illegal for any individual to have sex with a young person under the age of 18 years old if at the time of the offence they were responsible for their special care or supervision, or had authority over them. This is true even if the young person believes they are consenting to sex.</p> <p>Examples of roles that involve care / supervision or authority include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ step-parent, guardian or foster carer, de facto partner of a parent</li> <li>■ teacher</li> <li>■ religious official</li> <li>■ youth worker/social worker</li> <li>■ someone who has an established relationship with the young person as a teacher or instructor (teacher/coach/music teacher)</li> <li>■ counsellor/psychologist/doctor</li> <li>■ police officer</li> <li>■ custodial officer of an institution where the young person is living.</li> </ul>	<p>Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s 73 Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s 77</p>
<p>Can a child under the age of 18 agree to have sexual pictures taken or distributed? This could include 'sexting' nude pictures to an individual.</p>	<p><b>No.</b><sup>10</sup></p> <p>The Commonwealth law applies when sexual images are distributed via mobile phone. It is illegal for any child under the age of 18 to have sexual images taken or distributed (even if they consent) and it is considered to be child pornography.</p> <p>Child pornography is a picture of any person under the age of 18:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ showing their private parts (genital area, anal area or female breasts)</li> <li>■ posing in a sexual way</li> <li>■ doing a sexual act</li> <li>■ in the presence of someone who is doing a sexual act or pose.</li> </ul>	<p>Cth: Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) s 474.19</p>

<sup>10</sup> In NSW child pornography laws only apply to images of young people under the age of 16 (*Crimes Act 1900* s 91FA). However, the Commonwealth law overrides NSW Law.

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Legal and illegal sexual activity

continued...

QUESTION:	ANSWER:	LEGISLATION:
<p><b>Is it legal to send a young person aged 16-18 sexual images?</b></p>	<p><b>It depends.</b></p> <p>If the images are of a child or young person under the age of 18, it is illegal.</p> <p>Under NSW law, it is illegal to ask for, create or distribute the image of a person under the age of 16.</p> <p>Under Commonwealth law, a person under 18 can't consent to have sexual images of themselves taken or distributed. It is an offence for a young person under 18 to produce and distribute sexualised photos or videos, even of themselves.</p> <p>If the image does not contain a child or young person under the age of 18 but is of a sexual nature, whether or not it is illegal would depend on whether 'right minded persons would consider it to be contrary to community standards of decency'. Indecency laws have lower penalties attached to them than child pornography laws and are sometimes used by police in sexting cases.</p> <p>It is also illegal to repeatedly send any person sexual images that they do not want or ask for. This behaviour could be defined as stalking or harassment under the Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 if it is repeated and continues after the person asks them to stop. A court may grant an APVO if a person has a reasonable fear that someone will harm them, intimidate them or stalk them.</p>	<p>Crimes Act 1900, Division 15A</p> <p>Cth: Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth) s 474.19 Crimes Act s.61N; s.61O.</p> <p>Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 ss. 7, 13 and 19</p>
<p><b>What is grooming and when is it illegal?</b></p>	<p>In NSW the term 'grooming' applies only to offences against children under the age of 16 years. Grooming is illegal even if physical contact never takes place. Grooming could be defined as a 'facilitation offence' that makes it possible for child sexual abuse to occur. Under NSW law, it is considered to be grooming when an adult person engages in conduct that exposes the child to indecent material.</p>	<p>Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) s 66EB (2)</p>

## Recognising the early stages of grooming and sexual exploitation

Offenders use a variety of tactics to access and entrap young people. These tactics are sophisticated and deliberately target young people's inexperience, their need for belonging and their desire to be seen as adult. As with all grooming, the key is to be aware of common tactics and notice them. If you are aware, you can educate the young people, families and communities you work with.

### Common grooming tactics include:

1. **Online grooming:** the young person is enticed into an online 'relationship' with an offender. The young person may never meet the offender but may establish what they believe is a loving relationship or friendship with the offender online and may share intimate details of their life with them.
2. **Peer-to-peer grooming:** the young person is groomed by friends or peers that they know through their school or neighbourhood.
3. **Grooming through friendship networks:** the young person is introduced to the offender (or groups of offenders) by their friend. The young person and their friends are offered gifts, car rides or other types of attention by the offender.
4. **The 'boyfriend' model of grooming:** the young person believes the offender is their boyfriend or girlfriend. The offender may offer them attention, gifts and a 'loving relationship'.
5. **The party model of grooming:** groups of young people are invited to parties where they are given alcohol and other drugs and where sexual activities and violence are normalised. The young person is encouraged to invite their friends. The parties may be held a long way from home, making it difficult to leave.



**Go to**



While each of these methods of grooming are different, offenders tend to use a similar pattern of behaviour that progresses through targeting, friendship-forming, a loving relationship phase and an abusive relationship stage.

Go to page 14-15 of **this chapter** for a detailed explanation of these stages of grooming.



### In Practice

#### As you know, language shapes the way we work with young people, families and communities and the way we see risk.

Be alert to language used by colleagues in FACS and other agencies and be prepared to challenge language that:

- minimises or ignores sexual exploitation, for example, '[young person] is in a relationship with the suspected offender'
- sexualises young people, for example, '[young person] is sexually promiscuous'
- makes it appear that the exploitation is the young person's fault, for example, '[young person] is acting out sexually'.



### In Practice

#### Online grooming and sexual exploitation

Online grooming is being recognised increasingly as a pathway to sexual exploitation. Online offenders will typically send out messages to hundreds of young people and see who responds.

Grooming of young people under the age of 16 is an offence in NSW. Offenders commonly use social media sites, instant messaging apps, teen dating apps, or online gaming platforms to connect with a young person. This approach means that they can learn about the young person's interests, friends and family and use this knowledge to build a connection with the young person. Online offenders are able to hide their identity. They may pretend to be the same age as the young person to build a trusting relationship with them.

Current technology means that offenders are able to persuade young people to send sexual videos or images or take part in online sexual activity without ever meeting them face to face.


National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> NSPCC (2015). *Always there when I need you: ChildLine review: what's affected children in April 2014 - March 2015*. London: NSPCC. Visit <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/> to download.

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Recognising the stages of grooming

This diagram is based on the Barnardos resource called **'the grooming line'** . This resource was developed in consultation with young people who have been sexually exploited and reflects their experiences. It is used to educate young people and service providers about common patterns of behaviour that are used to groom and entrap young people into a sexually exploitative relationship. By being aware of the grooming line you may be able to recognise sexual exploitation in the early stages and respond before the young person becomes entrapped. You can also use this information to talk to young people about their relationship and help them distinguish between a loving and respectful relationship and one that is exploitative.

### Diagram One

The stages of grooming

#### Targeting stage:

During this stage the offender is looking for young people who may already be vulnerable. For example, young people who are sad, lonely, acting out sexually or using alcohol or other drugs. The offender may also try to understand the young person and identify their interests.

#### The offender may be:

- watching and targeting the young person
- becoming friends with the young person and showing care for them, giving gifts or giving compliments
- gaining trust
- sharing the young person's information with other abusive adults.



#### Friendship-forming stage:

During this stage the offender puts a great deal of effort into becoming someone the young person can trust and rely on.

#### The offender may be:

- making the young person feel special
- skilled at understanding the young person in a way others do not
- giving them gifts and rewards
- listening to and valuing the young person
- asking the young person to keep secrets about what they are doing together
- supporting the young person and being their 'best friend'
- testing out physical contact by accidentally touching them
- offering the young person protection from bullying by their peers or abusive adults.





### Loving relationship stage:

Once they have established trust, the most common method that offenders use to entrap young people is to become their 'boyfriend or girlfriend'. They will often isolate the young person from their friends and family so that they feel dependent on them (and their network) for friendship and social connection. For young people who critically value social connection and acceptance, the threat of rejection by the offender and further social isolation can be a powerful tool to ensure their compliance.

#### The offender may be:

- identifying themselves as the young person's 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'
- establishing a sexual relationship
- lowering the young person's inhibitions, for example showing them pornography
- engaging the young person in illegal activities, for example drinking alcohol or taking drugs
- being inconsistent in their affection, for example, making promises they don't keep or being loving one day and distant the next
- asking the young person to keep secrets about what they are doing together
- supporting the young person and being their 'best friend'
- testing out physical contact by accidentally touching them
- offering the young person protection from bullying by their peers or abusive adults.

### Abusive relationship stage:

By this stage the techniques of coercive power and control become more obvious, and the young person has become effectively entrapped. They are often isolated, frightened and dependent on the offender and it is very difficult for them to leave.

#### The offender may be:

- withdrawing friendship and love
- demanding sex
- reinforcing dependency by lowering the young person's self-esteem, verbally abusing or degrading them
- isolating the young person from friends and family
- tricking the young person into remaining in the relationship by claiming they 'owe' them money or making other threats.



# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Identifying the early stages of grooming

### Gathering information to identify the early stages of grooming before the young person becomes entrapped in a cycle of sexual exploitation.

The sophisticated tactics used by offenders to groom and silence young people may make it challenging to identify the early stages of grooming where abusive dynamics have not taken hold. This table will help you to work sensitively with the young person to understand their relationship and identify sexual exploitation, before the young person becomes entrapped.

<b>PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:</b> Identifying grooming	<b>CONVERSATION IDEAS:</b> Talking with young people and parents
<p><b>Talk to the young person about online grooming.</b></p> <p><b>Ask about:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ usernames or comments that are flirtatious or have a sexual meaning</li> <li>■ public comments that suggest a young person has low self-esteem or is vulnerable.</li> </ul> <p>Remember that some offenders do not target particular young people. Instead they may send hundreds of messages out to social media, internet dating sites or messaging apps and see who responds. Lonely young people who have limited positive social experiences are particularly susceptible to online grooming and may find it very difficult to give up a 'relationship' with an online offender who they feel understands and supports them.</p>	<p><b>Talking with young people:</b></p> <p><b>'What do you call yourself online?'</b></p> <p><b>'Have you got any friends online that you haven't met in person? How did you become friends with them?'</b></p> <p><b>Do you have any plans to meet them?'</b></p> <p><b>'Do you ever write posts about having a tough time? Who talks to you online about this?'</b></p> <p><b>'Do any of your friend's sext? Who do they sext? Have you sexted anyone?'</b></p> <p><b>Talking with parents:</b></p> <p><b>'Who does [young person] like talking with online?'</b></p> <p><b>'What do you know about online safety? What do you think [young person] knows?'</b></p>
<p><b>Talk to the young person about grooming.</b></p> <p>Many young people are not aware of the risk of sexual exploitation. Talking to them about sexual exploitation will help them to identify abusive relationship dynamics early, and help them to make informed decisions about their relationships.</p> <p><b>Consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ explaining what grooming is</li> <li>■ explaining that sexual exploitation and grooming can happen to anyone (boys and girls), and that it can be hard to identify.</li> </ul> <p>Using the following video and online resources can be very helpful in engaging young people and helping them to identify the early warning signs of exploitation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the WUD U? app</li> <li>■ online video resources ('Jay' and 'When Someone Cares')</li> <li>■ the Barnardos power and control wheel</li> <li>■ diagram one, the stages of grooming (page 14-15)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Talking with young people:</b></p> <p><b>'Grooming is when someone with more power makes someone think they are in a good relationship. Then when they have their trust later they can make them do things they don't want to do.'</b></p> <p><b>'What do you think would happen if [suspected offender] wanted to do something you didn't want to do?'</b></p> <p><b>'Were you surprised about what happened to the girl in that video ('Jay')? Do you know anyone who you think might be in a situation like that?'</b></p> <p><b>'What do you think might make it hard to know whether someone is grooming you? Can you think of any warning signs that someone who is being nice to you has bad intentions?'</b></p>



## Recognising the signs of sexual exploitation

Noticing the warning signs of sexual exploitation will help you to respond promptly in assessing risk and protecting young people. This diagram is based on material from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).<sup>12</sup> It will provide you with some known signs of child sexual exploitation, based on the characteristics of the young person, parents, community and the suspected offender. As you would know, connection to friends is a critical aspect of healthy adolescent development and you will need to develop an understanding of the young person's friendship networks as you begin to gather information to form your risk assessment.

### Diagram Two

Signs of sexual exploitation

#### The suspected offender may:

- hold a position of power because of their: age, sexuality, intellect, physical strength, powerful role in the community, friendship networks, economic or other resources
- not be known to the young person's social network
- be connected to people in the young person's network who are also victims of sexual exploitation
- be associated with other people who are known to have sexually exploited young people.

#### Parents and community (including friends) may be:

- disconnected from the young person
- disconnected from the young person's friends
- labelling the young person as a 'slut' or 'promiscuous' or a 'problem'
- known to also be a victim of sexual exploitation (applies to friends only)
- not aware of the young person's whereabouts.

#### The young person may have characteristics that put them at greater risk of exploitation. They may be:

- involved in petty crime such as shoplifting or stealing
- experiencing hostile relationships with parents and other family members
- experiencing an unexpected loss or bereavement
- isolated from their friends
- detached from services including education, child protection residential care and youth services
- running away from home
- experiencing low self esteem, self harm, anxiety or depression
- using substances.

#### The young person may show signs of sexual exploitation. Such as:

- going missing for a period of time and returning home looking 'well kept'
- secrecy about their online activity / mobile phone use
- a significant increase in the amount of time spent online / on their mobile phone
- a change in temperament or increase in volatile behaviour, including an extreme array of mood swings or use of abusive language
- overtly adult sexual behaviour
- bruising, bite marks, or sexually transmitted infections
- being seen entering or leaving cars driven by unknown adults
- acquiring items such as money, clothes or mobile phones without an explanation.

<sup>12</sup> CEOP (2011). *Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Breaking Down the Barriers to Understanding Child Sexual Exploitation. Thematic Assessment.* London: CEOP. Visit <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Publications/> to download.

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Recognising the signs of sexual exploitation

continued...



### Evidence

The NSPCC website<sup>13</sup> has published summaries of UK research into child sexual exploitation. The following information is taken from these summaries.

#### Victimised young people

- The majority of victims were girls. It is likely that male victims are under-represented because they are less likely to be identified.
- 14 and 15 year old victims were most likely to be identified as experiencing sexual exploitation.
- Some victims of sexual exploitation were younger than ten years of age, however most came to the attention of statutory and non-statutory authorities aged 14 or 15.<sup>14</sup>

#### Offenders

- 72 per cent of offenders were male.
- 10 per cent of offenders were female.
- In 18 per cent of cases the gender was not disclosed.
- While offenders can range in age from 12-75, almost half of the offenders were under the age of 25.

#### Sexual exploitation by peers

- The United Kingdom Children's Commissioner Inquiry found that of the 2,409 victims reported to them, 155 had also sexually exploited their peers.<sup>15</sup>
- We know that peer relationships are incredibly important for young people. Offenders can use the victim's friendship groups to gain access to potential other victims. They can threaten victims with isolation from their friends if they try to break free.<sup>16</sup>



### Children Say...

**'Now I get it. If kids are on the streets, if they run away or their parents kick them out, there are men out there who will take advantage of them and 'cos you've got nowhere else to go, you'll do it [have sex with them]. ... It's better than sleeping out and getting raped by someone you don't know who could do anything to you. ... There's always someone who will take advantage of you. When you're a kid, it's hard to say no to an adult who says they want to help you and offers you a place to stay 'cos what other choice do you have?'**<sup>17</sup>



A young person in the Barnardos report (2013)

<sup>13</sup> National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is a UK charity that stands up for children, demanding that laws change and action is taken to better protect them. Visit <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation>.

<sup>14</sup> CEOP (2011). *Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Breaking Down the Barriers to Understanding Child Sexual Exploitation*. Thematic Assessment. London: CEOP. Visit <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Publications/> to download.

<sup>15</sup> Berelowitz, S., Firmin, C., Edwards, G., & Gulyurtlu, S. (2012). I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world. *The Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry in to child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups: interim report* (PDF). London: Office of the Children's Commissioner. Visit <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publications/> to download.

<sup>16</sup> CEOP (2011). *Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Breaking Down the Barriers to Understanding Child Sexual Exploitation*. Thematic Assessment.

<sup>17</sup> Barnardos (2013) Working with children and young people who experience running away and child sexual exploitation: an evidence-based guide for practitioners.' UK: Smeaton, E.

## Gathering information to understand the young person's relationships and identify sexual exploitation

### Talking with the young person to identify sexual exploitation

Being open and curious about the young person's friendships and relationships is critical when attempting to identify sexual exploitation. This table will help you to be aware of risk factors for the young person and open up a conversation about what is happening for them. Remember, these kinds of conversations are very sensitive and require empathy and connection. You will be far more likely to retain a relationship with the young person by working slowly alongside them to identify any abusive dynamic in their relationship than by telling them that they are being exploited.



### In Practice

**Running away from home (including residential and foster care) is a significant risk factor for sexual exploitation.**

This is because young people who run away from home are often more marginalised and isolated from family and community supports. Offenders also have more opportunity to groom, entrap and abuse young people who are not supervised at home.

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:	CONVERSATION IDEAS:
<p><b>Be aware of the risk factors for sexual exploitation and be curious about the young person's relationships and friendships.</b></p> <p><b>Does the young person have any of the following risk factors for sexual exploitation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ has had a history of abuse, particularly sexual abuse</li> <li>■ is in care or has recently left care</li> <li>■ homelessness</li> <li>■ has experienced the unexpected death of someone close to them</li> <li>■ is linked to gangs through their peers, relatives, intimate relationships or neighbourhood</li> <li>■ is socially isolated?</li> </ul>	<p><b>'There has been a lot happening for you since I last saw you- what's that been like for you? Has anyone been helping you?'</b></p> <p><b>'Talk me through your plans for the week. What will you be doing on [Monday-Sunday]? Who will you be doing that with?'</b></p> <p><b>'Your mum said you are hanging out with [suspected offender]. Tell me about them. What do you like about hanging out with them? Are there some things you don't you like so much?'</b></p> <p><b>'How did you meet [suspected offender]?''</b></p>

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Gathering information to understand the young person's relationships and identify sexual exploitation continued...

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:	CONVERSATION IDEAS:
<p><b>Is the young person demonstrating any of the following warning signs of sexual exploitation? Are they:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ running away from home, leaving home without permission or persistently returning home late (including residential care and youth refuges)</li> <li>■ returning home distressed/dishevelled or under the influence of substances</li> <li>■ requesting the morning after pill upon return home</li> <li>■ looking clean and well cared for on their return home, in spite of a long absence</li> <li>■ being labelled by family members, community members or other professionals in a way that sexualises them and makes it hard for you to assess the risk of sexual exploitation? <b>For example:</b> 'promiscuous', 'attention-seeking', 'sexually advanced'?</li> </ul>	<p><b>'What would need to happen for you to want to spend more time at home? What would your [parent/siblings/workers] be doing?'</b></p> <p><b>'What is good about being away from home?'</b></p> <p><b>'What happens when you stay out all night with [suspected offender]? Is anyone else there? What are they doing?'</b></p> <p><b>'What happens if [suspected offender] wants you to do something you don't want to do? Can you say no to them?'</b></p> <p><b>'Sometimes young people may hang out with older guys and have sex with them. Is this happening for you? Are there things that are good about sex? Are there things that are not so good?'</b></p>
<p><b>Can the young person identify friends who are in relationships that are sexually exploitative?</b></p>	<p><b>'What do you think of your friend's boyfriends? What kind of things do they do with them?'</b></p> <p><b>'Are your friends having sex? Do you think they like having sex? Are there things they do to stay safe when they are having sex?'</b></p> <p><b>'Do you ever worry about your friends' relationships? What kind of things make you worried? What would you do if you thought a friend was in an unhappy relationship?'</b></p>




### In Practice

**We know that friends of young people that have been sexually exploited can be targeted by offenders.**

When you are working with a young person who you believe has been sexually exploited, consider undertaking preventative strategies such as education and raising awareness with their friends and any young people who have been living with them for example, in a residential care setting.

We also know that young people are loyal and highly sensitive to any perceived criticism of their friends. Tread carefully and steer clear of statements that may be seen as judgmental.

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:	CONVERSATION IDEAS:
<p>Is the suspected offender being labelled by family members, community members or professionals in a way that makes it hard for you to see the risk they pose? For example, is the suspected offender referred to as ‘supportive’, or as the young person’s ‘boyfriend’ or ‘girlfriend’?</p>	<p><b>‘I know you said [suspected offender] is your boyfriend but I am worried because you seem really stressed out about the idea of saying no to them. Can you tell me about that?’</b></p>
<p>Does the suspected offender have power over the young person? How do the following factors impact on the young person’s ability to say no to their demands or requests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ age</li> <li>■ gender</li> <li>■ sexuality</li> <li>■ intellect</li> <li>■ physical strength</li> <li>■ role in the community</li> <li>■ friendship networks</li> <li>■ economic or other resources?</li> </ul>	<p><b>‘Your mum said [suspected offender] has given you some new stuff. Why do you think they have you these things? What would happen if you gave them back?’</b></p> <p><b>‘Its normal to have arguments. What happens when you and [suspected offender] argue or want to do something different?’</b></p> <p><b>‘What do you like to do when you’re out? Who do you like to hang out with? Has that changed since you have been with [suspected offender]?’</b></p> <p><b>‘Has [suspected offender] introduced you to any of their friends? What are they like? What do you do when you are all together?’</b></p> <p><b>‘Has [suspected offender] met any of your other friends? What do they think of them?’</b></p>

 **Go to** 

the **‘Working with children’** chapter responding section for ideas to help children to talk about sexual abuse. Many of these ideas can be adapted to use with young people who are being sexually exploited.

# 1 Part one: Seeing and understanding



## Gathering information to understand the young person's relationships and identify sexual exploitation continued...

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:	CONVERSATION IDEAS:
<p>Is the suspected offender using violence, coercion or intimidation to maintain power over the young person?</p> <p>This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ threats to make their sexual exploitation known through texts or emails to their friends or family</li> <li>■ threats to withdraw financial and emotional support, housing or goods</li> <li>■ threats to isolate the young person from their friendship networks</li> <li>■ use of grooming to entrap the young person and prevent them from seeing that they are experiencing abuse.</li> </ul>	<p><b>'What do you think would happen if you told [suspected offender] you didn't want to do something they wanted you to do?'</b></p> <p><b>'What was it like when you first started hanging out with [suspected offender]? What are things like now?'</b></p> <p><b>'Some young people get caught up in relationships that seem really caring at first and then become scary. What do you think you would do if this happened to you?'</b></p>
<p>Can the young person identify areas in their community that are targeted by offenders or where young people tend to gather and get drunk/intoxicated?</p>	<p><b>'What do you like to do with your friends?'</b></p> <p><b>'Are there places around here where you get drunk/do drugs? Who hangs out there? Have you made any friends there?'</b></p> <p><b>'Where did your friends meet their [boyfriends/girlfriends]?'</b></p>



### In Practice

The Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse, 2007 found that Aboriginal children in some remote communities were vulnerable to being sexually exploited. This exploitation was being perpetrated by people inside and outside the community. Certain communities were targeted due to the perception that children living there were vulnerable.



Go to



the **'Working with Aboriginal children, families and communities'** chapter, page 22 for more information on sexual exploitation in Aboriginal communities.

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## ② Part two: Responding

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**This part of the chapter will help you to respond to young people who you believe are being exploited.**

**Key question:**

- How can I effectively support a young person who is experiencing sexual exploitation?

## 2 Part two: Responding



### Responding to young people at risk of sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation has an impact on every aspect of a young person's life. Young people who are sexually exploited may be raped, sexually assaulted, physically assaulted, trafficked or pressured to use drugs and alcohol. While any young person may be sexually exploited, offenders often target young people who are already experiencing multiple life stresses. Their exploitation then further isolates the young person from supportive family and friends and disrupts their ability to finish their education and gain employment. Young people who have been sexually exploited are more likely to experience teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, attempt suicide, have difficulty with aggressive or criminal behaviour, and experience substance misuse and mental health issues.

We also know that the parents of young people who are being sexually exploited can struggle to identify sexual exploitation and respond supportively.

This part of the chapter will help you to develop case planning approaches to increase the safety of young people who are experiencing exploitation. This work is sensitive. Take the time to build a trusting relationship slowly with the young person, and seek support and supervision.



#### In Practice

##### Safe friends

As you would know, a young person's friendship group is central to their social, emotional and physical well being. Friends can be central to building safety and providing emotional support to a young person experiencing sexual exploitation. It is important to connect with the friend and assess their capacity to support the young person before assuming they can be part of the young person's safety network. It is also important to make sure they are not placed at risk of sexual exploitation by their friendship with the young person. Friends may be experiencing a range of emotions in response to the young person's experiences of sexual exploitation and are likely to need guidance to help them support their friend.

The CEOP resource pack, 'Exploited',<sup>18</sup> provides the following suggestions for friends:

- do not judge the young person, just listen and support them
- tell them they are in danger and let them know you are going to ask for help, do not make promises to keep secrets
- tell an adult that you trust what has happened
- get some support for yourself, remember it is not your fault your friend is in danger and you have done your best to get them help
- if there is something wrong but your friend hasn't said anything yet, let them know you are worried and that you will listen to them.

<sup>18</sup> The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) is a command of the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA). Visit <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/> to download the 'Exploited' resource.

## Case planning approaches

We know that the key to responding to exploitation is to support the young person to establish and maintain as many trusting and safe relationships as possible. These relationships begin to erode the power of the offender, provide the young person with a contrast to the abusive relationship and allow them to seek help.

Flexible and focused service delivery is crucial in developing a relationship with the young person and meeting their immediate needs.



### In Practice

**We know that placing restrictions on young people, for example restricting them from leaving the house or imposing strict curfews, doesn't work. Instead, help parents and safe people to identify how they can encourage the young person to want to be at home.**

<b>PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:</b> Case planning in response to sexual exploitation	<b>CONVERSATION IDEAS:</b> Talking with the young person, parents and other safe people
<p><b>Work with parents and safe people (adults and friends) to focus on meeting the young person's basic needs for sleep, housing, food and connection.</b></p> <p><b>Encourage them to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>resist the urge to lecture them about their sexual safety, especially when the young person is tired, hungry or physically hurt</li> <li>accept and acknowledge that the young person may struggle to talk about what is happening for them</li> <li>provide a safe place for them to rest and clean themselves</li> <li>let them know that you care about them and you are worried about them</li> <li>allow the young person some time to tell you about their experiences. Do not pressure them to give you information.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Talking with the young person:</b></p> <p>'I can see you are really tired and I can also see that you have been hurt. I am so worried about you but right now you need to sleep. Let's meet up and talk later today about what we can do together.'</p> <p>'Sometimes kids get caught up in relationships that seem really caring at first, but then turn scary. It can be really hard to talk about what's going on.'</p> <p><b>Talking with parents and safe people:</b></p> <p>'I know it is probably really hard not to ask [young person] lots of questions as soon as they walk through the door. But by concentrating on giving them a calm quiet space to come home to, they might want to be at home and tell you more about what is going on for them.'</p> <p>'[Young person] needs as many people as possible to care for them. You can make a big difference just by telling them that you care.'</p>
<p><b>Provide the young person with information about sexual exploitation. It can be helpful to provide the young person with new information at different points during your work with them. Their thoughts and feelings are likely to change as their relationship with the suspected offender changes.</b></p> <p><b>Consider showing them resources or asking them to look at things a different way (a friend's perspective or sibling's perspective).</b></p>	<p>'This video is not exactly about your situation, but I wonder if you would mind watching it with me so we can both figure out if any of these things could be happening for you?'</p> <p>'Let's pretend that your best mate was going out with [suspected offender]. Would you be worried about them? Would you have any advice for them?'</p>



Go to



resources section, (page 3) diagram one, the stages of grooming diagram (page 14-15).

## 2 Part two: Responding



### Case planning approaches continued...

<b>PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:</b> Case planning in response to sexual exploitation	<b>CONVERSATION IDEAS:</b> Talking with the young person, parents and other safe people
<p>Help the young person to develop a 'staying safe plan'. This plan should build on things the young person is already doing and should provide them with as many strategies as possible.</p> <p><b>Some ideas include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ knowing the first and last names of people they are hanging out with</li> <li>■ having a small amount of money hidden somewhere in case they need to make a phone call or get a taxi</li> <li>■ having a list of emergency numbers (including a taxi number) hidden in a few places such as in their pocket and mobile phone</li> <li>■ having credit on their phone</li> <li>■ making sure someone knows where they are going and who they are with</li> <li>■ carrying condoms and making sure they know how to use them</li> <li>■ making sure the young person knows where they are going</li> <li>■ avoiding alcohol if possible</li> <li>■ avoiding all drugs if possible, or else making sure a trusted friend is with them</li> <li>■ checking in with a friend before deciding to go with someone.</li> </ul> <p>Consider writing these ideas down with the young person and ask the safe person (adults and friends) to reinforce these steps.</p>	<p><b>Talking with the young person:</b></p> <p>'I am really worried about you. How are you keeping yourself safe? What do you do? What do your friends do?'</p> <p>'You said you stay safe by always telling your friends where you are? What else could you do? Do you think you could let me know where you are staying at night also?'</p> <p>'If you do go off with someone and you're not sure where you are, look for places such as parks, shops, churches. If you're on a bus or train are you able to remember where you are going and the nearest stops?'</p>



### In Practice

**Sexual exploitation can be difficult to identify and respond to, especially when the young person believes they are in a consensual relationship.**

It is important to work with your management team, specialist, psychologist, JIRT and the clinical issues unit to recognise sexual exploitation and develop consistent responses to the risk of sexual exploitation. We know that consistent responses between parents, safe people and practitioners will help the young person to develop the trusting and connected relationships needed to keep them safe.

<b>PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:</b> Case planning in response to sexual exploitation	<b>CONVERSATION IDEAS:</b> Talking with the young person, parents and other safe people
<p><b>Talk to as many supportive family and friends as possible.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Be upfront about your worries for the young person.</li> <li>■ Understand what they can offer the young person.</li> <li>■ Give them responsibility for engaging the young person in safe activities that they enjoy.</li> <li>■ Help them develop ideas for how they can talk to the young person about their worries.</li> <li>■ If the young person cannot identify anyone who can support them ask their parents, teachers, youth workers and friends to nominate anyone who cares about them.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Talking to the young person:</b></p> <p><b>'I am really worried that [suspected offender] is hurting you. I can't keep you safe on my own. Who else do you trust? What will they do? Let's call them now.'</b></p> <p><b>Talking to safe people (adults and friends):</b></p> <p><b>'I am really worried that [young person] is being forced to have sex. I know you are really committed to [young person]. What can you do to support them?'</b></p> <p><b>'We know that [young person] is feeling very scared and very alone right now. What do you think might happen for them if they keep going down this road? What can you do to keep them safe?'</b></p>



### In Practice

**You may come across some young people who are unable to identify safe or supportive family or friends.**

This is a clear indication that they are very isolated. Continue to be curious about people who could become part of their safety network.

Ask the young person's parents, siblings, extended family, teachers and youth workers to identify possible supports for the young person as well as asking the young person to identify these people themselves. Remember to be curious about past relationships as it may be possible for the young person to reconnect with these people.



## 2 Part two: Responding



### Responding to sexual exploitation - case planning approaches continued...

<b>PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:</b> Case planning in response to sexual exploitation	<b>CONVERSATION IDEAS:</b> Talking with the young person, parents and other safe people
<p><b>Develop strong relationships with youth services. Understand how they work with young people, get to know the office and develop a detailed knowledge of the steps the young person will need to take in order to receive a service.</b></p> <p>Ask the young person what they would like in a youth service and work with services to understand their capacity to meet the young person's needs.</p> <p><b>Suggested questions include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Are they are able to meet the young person somewhere that they are comfortable?</li> <li>■ Are they are able to provide education to a group of young people who have been identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation?</li> <li>■ Are they able to meet the young person with a friend?</li> <li>■ Are they able to facilitate a casual 'drop in' visit from the young person and their friend?</li> </ul>	<p><b>'Sometime youth workers can really help when you are having a confusing time. Have you ever been to a youth service? What did you like? What didn't you like? Would you mind if I called around some of the good services to see if one could work for you?'</b></p>
<p><b>Work with the community to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ help them identify the warning signs for sexual exploitation by showing them tools such as the stages of grooming (page 14-15), the <b>Barnardos Wheels of Power and Control and Equal, Consensual and Respectful Relationships</b><sup>19</sup> or the videos described in the resources section (page 3)</li> <li>■ find out where sexual exploitation is/might be occurring. Develop a plan for monitoring these locations and preventing sexual exploitation</li> <li>■ encourage community members to speak out about sexual exploitation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>'Where do the teenagers who are not in school/in refuges/drinking hang out? Are there ever any older guys hanging out there? What are they doing?'</b></p>

<sup>19</sup> Barnardos 'Bwise2 Sexual Exploitation' resource. Visit [http://webfronter.com/hounslow/learningtorespect/menu0/Child\\_protection/BWise2Sexual\\_Exploitation/images/Bwise2\\_Sexual\\_Exploitation.pdf](http://webfronter.com/hounslow/learningtorespect/menu0/Child_protection/BWise2Sexual_Exploitation/images/Bwise2_Sexual_Exploitation.pdf) to download.

## In Practice



### Working in partnership to support young people at risk of sexual exploitation

#### Youth services can:

- provide activities for young people, foster strong relationships and provide a safe place for them to have their basic needs met
- provide education about sexual health and respectful relationships
- identify patterns in offenders' behaviour, for example, targeting other young people in the area.

#### Youth health services can:

- run informal education sessions about healthy and respectful relationships
- review and address any substance misuse/mental health concerns
- provide the young person with sexual health information
- provide the young person with free services to prevent STDs and pregnancy.

#### Education services can:

- foster strong relationships with the young person and provide you with information about the young person's whereabouts.

### Working with police to address sexual exploitation:

Share your concerns with the police. Police can do a number of things to make it difficult for the suspected offender to access the child. Youth Liaison Officers are often well placed to work effectively with children, and have an understanding of current trends among groups of young people and suspected offenders. Together, you can build a better picture of the suspected offender's activities and any other offences.

When you believe a criminal offence has occurred you can ask police to:

- have a strong presence where the young person and the suspected offender meet
- conduct a welfare check on the young person (at places they frequent)
- conduct a criminal record check on the suspected offender to see if they have any outstanding warrants or other matters
- follow the suspected offender to where you believe they are planning to meet with the young person
- investigate and gather information on whether or not an offence has occurred
- discuss the appropriateness of issuing a Personal Violence Order (PVO) on behalf of a young person.





## Case Study

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**Toby's (16) story**

# Toby's Story



Toby is 16 years old. He lives with his dad, Allan and four sisters (April, 10; Evie, 8; Maddison, 5 and Jasmin, 4) in a small three bedroom house. There have been four reports about Tony and his sisters over the past year since the girls' mother, Anne, died of a sudden stroke. FACS does not have any information about Toby's mum and it isn't clear whether Toby knows her or has a relationship with her. Two of the reports were about the girls' poor school attendance and concerns about their supervision. One report was about Toby going to hospital for alcohol poisoning, and the final report was from police after Allan reported Toby as a missing person (Toby returned home the next day with a friend, Reece). The reporters all noted that Toby is expected to be responsible for the girls while Allan works casual night shifts. The reports were all closed without further assessment.

Michelle, a caseworker at Uptown CSC, is responding to a report from a neighbour, Alison, that the four girls were left at home alone on Sunday night. It is now Monday morning. Alison is not sure where Allan and Toby are and does not have any contact details for them. Alison says that she has been caring for the children since Sunday night and they have told her there is no food in the house. Alison says she will make sure the children get on the school bus but that she can't look after them any longer. Alison says that Allan 'has been trying his best to cope since the kids' mother passed away, but things are very hard'. Alison also reports that Toby normally looks after the children while Allan is at work but she has not seen him this weekend.

Michelle talks to the Uptown Primary School Principal who tells her that the girls are at school and appear happy and settled today. He says that Toby has not shown up at school today but that is 'not unusual'.

When Michelle arrives at the family's home on Monday afternoon, Toby answers the door. The younger children are at school and Allan is not there. Toby looks worried and nervous. He says that he has talked to the neighbour and he knows why Michelle is here and that his dad will be home in the next hour. Toby explains that he was left in charge of his sisters while Allan worked a double shift. He tells Michelle that he gave the kids some pizza and left April in charge at 7pm last night while he went out with his friend, Reece, for the night. Michelle asks Toby what he got up to last night. Toby tells her that Reece picks him up in his car and they drive around with Reece's friends. He says 'Reece is kind of a boyfriend and the only person who has really been there for me since Mum died'. When Michelle asks Toby what he means by boyfriend, Toby becomes defensive, and mumbles that he doesn't want to talk about it anymore. Michelle acknowledges that it has been a tough day and Toby has only just met her and asks if they can have a chat another day. Toby agrees.



## Further information

When the girls arrive home on the school bus, they run to Toby and seem very happy to see him. April tells him 'the little kids got scared of the dark and so we ran next door to the neighbour'. Michelle asks the children about what happened last night. They are happy to chat, they tell her that 'we had pizza then we all got scared and we all went to the neighbour's house and we slept on mattresses in the lounge room'.

Michelle waits until Allan arrives home. She talks to Allan and Toby while the girls watch TV in their bedroom. Allan appears tired and sad. He tells Michelle 'Toby and I have been fighting all the time. Toby wants to be out with Reece and I need him at home. That's what you do in a family - you help each other out.' Allan says that 'Reece seems to be a nice enough guy. He has been really good to Toby since Anne died.' Allan also says that 'I do get worried because Reece is much older, has a car and picks up Toby at any hour of the day or night. But whenever I mention that stuff, Toby gets angry and threatens to leave home. Toby seems to really love him; I haven't seen him this happy for a long time. I don't want to push Toby away.' Michelle asks Allan how old Reece is, Allan says 'I am not sure but at least in his mid-twenties judging by the look of him. He has money, looking at the car he drives'. Michelle asks Allan what he thinks Toby does with Reece. Allan says that they drive around a lot and he thinks they might be having sex because he found condoms in Toby's wallet. Allan says he has known Toby was gay since he was 14 years old and that 'I have no problem with that. I just want Toby to be happy and be part of this family.' Michelle says that it sounds like there are some 'good things about Reece and some things you are worried about'. Allan nods his head. Michelle says 'I also feel worried when young people are having sex with people who are much older - it can be hard for them to say no if they are feeling uncomfortable'. Allan tells her 'I worry about that too, but I also want Toby to be happy. I don't want to mess this up for him.'

A safety plan is put in place and Allan agrees to be at home with the girls from 4pm in the afternoon until 8am in the morning for the next two days. Allan agrees that Toby can go out with Reece tonight and Toby agrees that he will come home by 10pm. Michelle asks Allan about the best time to visit to see how the safety plan is going and discuss the next steps. Allan says that everyone will be up and awake by 7am and they are all better first thing in the morning. Michelle agrees to meet with Allan, Toby and the girls on Wednesday morning and suggests that she can drive Toby to school afterwards.

### Identifying sexual exploitation – a group supervision

In this case study we will focus on the way in which two caseworkers, Lucy and Michelle, see the risk factors for the children in this family.

Lucy and Michelle bring their concerns for the family to a reflective case discussion. Lucy describes the risk factors for the children and raises concerns about inadequate supervision, financial stress and the risk of relationship breakdown between Allan and Toby. She describes Toby as a strength and resource for the family and suggests that Reece could be a potential protective factor. Lucy acknowledges that Toby is only 16 years old but states that he appears to have a strong relationship with the girls and has supervised them for the last year. Lucy also suggests that Toby appears to be getting support from Reece and that this helps him to cope with the family stressors. Lucy suggests that Reece could also be a potential supervisor for the girls.

Lucy suggests that the next step with the family should be to try to understand the relationship between Allan and Toby and the family's informal support systems. She recommends Michelle finds out who else can look after the kids while Allan is at work and come up with a daily roster so that everyone knows what their roles and responsibilities are. Joanne asks the team if these actions can be added as next steps on the board. The team agree.

Michelle says she has the same concerns for the younger children and agrees with the next steps on the board. Michelle says she is worried about Toby and doesn't feel comfortable with him being listed as a strength or resource for his family. She says that Toby should not be taking on the role of supervising his sisters, especially as he doesn't seem to want this role.

Lucy argues that both Allan and Toby have spoken about how Reece has been supportive of Toby and that should be enough to list him as a potential protective factor. Michelle says she is uncomfortable listing Reece as a potential protective factor because there is not enough information about him. Michelle explains that in

# Toby's story continued...



her experience it can be very hard for young people to notice the signs that a relationship might be exploitative. Michelle says that family members can also find it very hard to challenge the young person's positive view of their 'boyfriend or girlfriend' especially if they seem 'happy and in love'. Michelle says that she would like more time to work with Toby and understand more about his relationship with Reece.

Joanne, the manager casework, asks the group whether talking to Toby and understanding his relationship with Reece can be added as next steps. The team agree.

Lindsay, the casework specialist, asks Michelle to share her worries about Reece with the group.

Michelle explains that Toby is experiencing a number of factors that increase his risk of being sexually exploited. He has experienced a recent bereavement, stress at home, and alcohol poisoning (which may indicate that Toby is being given alcohol by Reece). He is not going to school regularly and he has recently gone missing for one day (returning home with Reece).

Joanne asks Michelle if Reece and Toby are having sex and if it is legal for them to have sex. Michelle says that Allan is not sure if Toby is having sex but that the condoms in his room suggest he might be. She tells the team that because Toby is 16 he is able to have sex with anyone he chooses. Michelle explains that even though Toby can legally have sex she is worried that the power imbalance between him and Reece could make it difficult for Toby to say no to him. Reece has been described as an older man, who has access to money and a car. Allan has also suggested that Toby likes to please Reece. The team agree that Michelle will give Toby some information about sexual exploitation and help him to identify warning signs that his relationship with Reece is becoming more exploitative. Another team member suggests that the local youth service does fantastic work with young people about respectful relationships and that she has seen how these conversations 'can open a window so that kids feel more confident to speak

out if the relationship becomes abusive'. Michelle and the team agree that it is often easier for young people to go to a service if they know what to expect. The team put down Michelle visiting the youth service and understanding how they might work with Toby as next steps on the board.

Another team member comments that 'exploitation sounds a bit like domestic violence, it can be difficult to identify dynamics early on, but you can see subtle warning signs'. Michelle shows the team **Barnardos Wheels of Power and Control**<sup>20</sup> which describes the dynamics of sexual exploitation and the dynamics of a healthy relationship. Michelle explains that this tool is used to help young people identify abusive dynamics in the early stages of their relationship before they take hold.

Joanne asks how the team want to record these concerns about Reece in the Minnesota Model. Michelle suggests that he is put down as a complicating factor until more is known about him. Lucy agrees with Michelle's suggestion and acknowledges that she feels more confident assessing risk to younger children than young people. Michelle acknowledges Lucy's expertise in working with younger children and Joanne suggests that Michelle and Lucy continue to work with this family together. The team agree to review the progress with the family in group supervision in one month's time.



<sup>20</sup> See p. 82 of the The Barnardos 'B Wise to Sexual Exploitation' resource. Visit [http://webfronter.com/hounslow/learningtorespect/menu0/Child\\_protection/BWise2Sexual\\_Exploitation/images/Bwise2\\_Sexual\\_Exploitation.pdf](http://webfronter.com/hounslow/learningtorespect/menu0/Child_protection/BWise2Sexual_Exploitation/images/Bwise2_Sexual_Exploitation.pdf) to download.

### Case reflection

Toby's family is under stress in several ways. There are indications that the children's physical and educational needs are not being met, and they were recently placed at significant risk of harm by being left unsupervised at home. Toby's alcohol use, poor school attendance and going missing for 24 hours could demonstrate a pattern of growing distress and risk of harm. Going missing is consistently cited in the research as a warning sign of sexual exploitation<sup>21</sup> and Toby's relationship with Reece also raises several other concerns. Toby is known to go out with Reece and his friends, in his car for long periods of time. There is some suggestion that Reece may be giving Toby alcohol. Toby's age, lack of access to money and likely sexual inexperience mean he is much less powerful than Reece; this power imbalance is likely to be magnified when he is surrounded by Reece's friends. The sudden death of Anne is an ongoing and devastating loss which also leaves him vulnerable to exploitation.

Many of the families we work with experience significant and multiple causes of stress and it can be tempting to focus on areas that can be addressed through formal service delivery rather than those that are less obvious, such as indicators of sexual exploitation. This case study shows how difficult it can be to identify sexual exploitation, especially when young people, family and even professionals view the suspected offender as a support person. While Michelle's past experience with young people helped her to identify the risk of sexual exploitation, many professionals may have struggled to delve deeper into Toby's relationship with Reece. They may have been worried that Toby would be offended by the conversation or that they would be seen as intrusive or homophobic. A reflective case discussion was a very useful process when unpacking Michelle's worries about Toby. It allowed Michelle and the team to reflect on their view of Reece, check on their assumptions, be clear about their worries and make robust decisions.



Go to



diagram two, signs of sexual exploitation (page 17) for risk factors and signs of sexual exploitation.



<sup>21</sup> CEOP (2011). *Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Breaking Down the Barriers to Understanding Child Sexual Exploitation*. Thematic Assessment. London: CEOP. Visit <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Publications/> to download.



Be aware of the law around what sexual acts are legal for young people.

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Be aware of the risk factors and signs of a sexually exploitative relationship to make sure it is not mistaken for a consensual sexual relationship.

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Talking to young people about sexual exploitation and grooming can help them to identify abusive dynamics in their relationship before they take hold.

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Connecting the young person to safe people (adults and friends) is a critical aspect of building safety.

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Don't assume people know as much as they would like you to think. Advice about sex, puberty, menstruation, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases is critical. Young people may present as worldly and confident when really they have limited understanding and need clear information.

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