

What is grooming and child sexual exploitation (CSE)?

Sexual exploitation is a type of child abuse. It puts a young person at huge risk of damage to their physical, emotional and psychological health.

CSE involves young people and children being 'groomed' and sexually exploited. Grooming is where a person builds trust with a young person under 16 in order to exploit them. The grooming can take place online or face-to-face.

Children in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money, alcohol or affection in return for performing sexual activities or having others perform sexual activities on them. They may be tricked into believing they are in a loving relationship.

Many young people who are being exploited do not realise they are at risk and will not ask for help. Some may see themselves as willing participants in such abuse, not realising that what is happening to them is illegal.

Signs that a young person is being sexually exploited or abused:

- Has the young person received unexplained gifts or money?
- Do they use their mobile phone excessively and/or secretively?
- Do they have significantly older friends?
- Have they been picked up from home or school by someone you don't know?
- Are they associating with other young people who are already known to be vulnerable or involved in exploitation?
- Have they started playing truant from school or regularly going missing from home?
- Have they suffered from a sexually-transmitted infection?
- Are they self-harming?
- Has their appearance changed?

The Police will investigate any report of a child being abused or sexually exploited and work with partner agencies to provide support and safety for any person at risk. They have specialist officers to investigate child abuse and sexual offences who are experienced in supporting children through the process.

You can report online child sexual abuse images and videos to the Internet Watch Foundation via the online reporting form. To prevent people removing images remotely – put the device in the fridge.

If you suspect a child is being groomed or sexually exploited, please follow the links to your local authority child protection and safeguarding team. If a child is in immediate danger, please dial 999 for the police.

People you may want to contact

- [CLEAR](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [Checkpoint](#)
- [Internet Watch Foundation](#)
- [Parents against Child Sexual Exploitation \(PACE\)](#)
- [Missing Kids](#)
- [Respond](#)
- [CEOP Command](#)
- [Say Something \(Stop CSE\)](#)
- [Safeline](#)
- [Internet Matters](#)

- [Get Safe Online](#)
- [Health and social care - children - Devon County Council](#)
- [Child sexual exploitation \(CSE\) - Devon & Cornwall Police](#)

I want to know how to help keep my child safe

[Keeping safe online](#)

The internet is great but it has its risks. A lot of Child Sexual Exploitation has an online element involving the sharing of images with peers (e.g. nude selfies) or making contacts with unknown people online who are actively seeking to groom and sexually exploit a child through image sharing or in person. Children also are also exposed to other risks when they are online including:

- Access to age-inappropriate content
- Bullying and cyberbullying
- Personal information falling into the wrong hands
- Talking to strangers or people who misrepresent themselves
- People hacking their accounts

To help protect your child it is really important to try to understand how children use the internet and what steps they can take to keep themselves safe. At the same time you can learn how to protect yourself and your own personal information from criminals that operate online.

Understanding the internet and the ever-changing social media that children use can seem daunting but thankfully there is **a lot** of great information out there to use and a range of organisations set up to help you.

Here are some of the resources we think are really great that you should check out.

[Thinkuknow](#)

Thinkuknow is an education programme from the National Crime Agency's CEOP Command – or the “Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre”. CEOP is part of what is sometimes called the UK's FBI. This part of it is dedicated to protecting children from exploitation and online abuse and they have developed a lot of really useful resources and videos for parents and children to help themselves keep safe online.

[Thinkuknow](#) is unique. It is underpinned by the latest intelligence about child sex offending and aims to ensure that everyone has access to this practical information – children, young people, their parents and carers and the professionals who work with them.

[Thinkuknow](#) provides a range of short films for parents and young people aged 4-18 and for those with special educational needs covering lots of different ways in which they can keep themselves safe both online and offline. You can use them to help start a discussion with your child. [Follow the link](#) to go straight to the videos to watch with your child.

If your child has a phone that can take and share pictures make sure you check out [Nude Selfies: What parents and carers need to know](#).

[Share Aware – From the NSPCC](#)

The NSPCC have joined force with O2 to develop [Share Aware](#), a campaign that brings straightforward, no-nonsense advice to help untangle the web, showing how you can be a great parent online.

The campaign includes areas where you can keep up to date on what's new in social networking, how to help your child stay safe online and a helpline (0808 8005002) staffed by experts from the O2 & NSPCC you can call whether you want to set up parental controls, adjust privacy settings or get advice on social networks.

Talking to your child is one of the best way to help keep children safe and the NSPCC have some [good resources here](#) to help you have conversations with your child.

Reporting inappropriate online activity

Has someone acted inappropriately towards your child online? If your child has experienced sexual or offensive chat that has made them feel uncomfortable or someone is trying to meet up with them, you can report this directly to the **Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre**.

This may have happened in a chat room, message board, instant messenger or on a social networking site. It could be on a mobile phone, games console or computer. It could be messages, images or conversations over webcam. The important thing is that if an adult is making sexual advances to your child on the internet you should report it to CEOP. [Follow this link](#) to complete the on-line reporting tool.

Keeping safe – out and about.

Some of the following information has been taken from the [PACE website](#) (Parents against Child Sexual exploitation) and [Parents Protect](#).

Getting the right balance

It's important our children feel safe and protected. It's also important for them to learn skills in independence to help them keep themselves safe as they get older. Support your children to take risks appropriate for their age and level of maturity.

Agree reasonable boundaries

It is normal behaviour for children to test your limits and boundaries. As they approach teenage years they need freedom and independence but also need to know that you mean what you say about staying out. Think about the time limits you are setting, maybe check them out with other parents and negotiate them with your child. It will help if the times you suggest are fair. If the times you are setting are reasonable then you can explain that there will be consequences for them if they break them. For example, you will collect them or the next time they go out they will have to be home earlier. Make sure you stick to any consequences that you lay down.

The 3 W's!

Even as children get older, make sure you know **who** they are going out with, **where** they are going, and **when** they'll be back. Whenever possible have a phone number to make contact too.

Practical safety tips

You can help your child develop a plan for what to do in case they are lost or scared about something. Have a discussion about the following:

- Where would they go? A public building, a shop or garage?
- Who could they approach for help and advice if they felt threatened? Which friends and family members could they go and see or call that you both think are safe.
- When and how to call the police and other emergency services
- Do they remember their address and telephone numbers of some family and friends off by heart – they may not always have their phone!

Ensure lines of communication are open

Children and young people need to know they can talk to you about anything that is bothering them – even if they think you will be upset or cross. Abusers often rely on the victim feeling shame or guilt to keep them silent. Be in the habit of talking to your child about their experiences, their friends and what they get up to. As children grow up conversations should include topics such as what are healthy/unhealthy relationships. Encourage them to tell you if anyone they know or have met makes them feel strange or uncomfortable for whatever reason.

Get to know what they know

At the onset of puberty children can find it difficult to talk to adults, particularly their parents, about sex and relationships. Parents can find it equally hard to talk to their child. Know what sex and relationship education your child is getting at school so that you can reinforce positive messages and fill any gaps. Useful resources for young people include: - www.brook.org.uk and www.bishuk.com. You could look these up together so your child knows where to go if they want to.

Know their friends

Knowing your children's friends enables you to monitor who is likely to be a positive influence on them and we can encourage them to take care of each other. Strong friendships also mean your child's friends are more likely to tell someone if your child is getting into trouble. Secrecy around friends could indicate unsuitability.

Listen to children and young people

Listen to children and young people and look out for things they may be showing, rather than telling. Off-hand comments could trigger a concern and difficult behaviour could be an indicator that something is wrong.

Take time

Children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation if their emotional needs are not being met and they feel they have no one they can talk to. Regular conversations give children the opportunity to talk about concerns they have sooner rather than later. You can use story lines on popular soap operas or news items to talk about sexual abuse and give your child the message they can talk to you about anything.

Useful resources

The Underwear Rule

The NSPCC have developed an initiative called [The Underwear Rule](#). It helps parents who have children between 5 and 11 years of age to have conversations about how to keep themselves safe.

Running Away

The Children's Society have developed [a guide](#) for parents whose children go missing.