

CATE
Explore More for potential CSE concerns

A. Introduction

This document is intended to support any practitioner working with children and young people to understand what sort of matters **may** indicate that a child or young person is being sexually exploited.

Whilst it is important to recognise that the presence of such factors may be observed in young people who are not being exploited and might be explained as “typical teenage behaviour”, it is important that this does not prevent practitioners from exercising professional curiosity to explore these matters further to ascertain whether a young person is at risk of exploitation.

This document can also be used by those who may make referrals to Family Connect, such as school nurses or Safeguarding Leads, to support them in presenting any matters of concern.

B. Factors/Indicators to explore more

1. Possessing unexplained items

Notes:-

This can be both items which have a value or non-valuable items.

It can encompass any items that are not provided by a parent or carer.

Explore More:-

Food, travel, drugs (including but not limited to cannabis, nitrous oxide, glue, other inhalants), alcohol, vapes, jewellery, clothes and shoes (some of which could be counterfeit), phones, phone top-up, religious items, weapons.

2. Change in routine/attendance at school, college or work.

Notes:-

This can be changes that are seen as either positive or negative.

It should not be assumed that an improvement in attendance, exam results, behaviour in class indicates that exploitation is not occurring.

Explore More:-

Reluctance to leave school/college/work, reluctance to leave home to attend school/college/work, change to school day routine either a positive change such as arriving early or a negative change such as leaving school during the day, change in behaviour at school, being tired/hungry/distracted, change in relationship with school staff including building a strong relationship with a particular staff member, change of route to school, a sudden desire to get to school earlier or later than usual, increased desire to perform well at school.

3. Bullying others.

Notes:-

Bullying can occur for a number of reasons but it is important to delve into the types of bullying and the circumstances in which it occurs to fully understand whether it might indicate a link to exploitation.

Explore More:-

Is the child/young person a victim of bullying, is the child/young person bullying others or displaying controlling behaviour towards others.

Take particular note of any bullying/controlling behaviour where there are concerns that either the 'bully' or the person who is being bullied is at risk of, or is being, exploited.

4. Increased conflict and erratic behaviour.

Notes:-

This is an area where there is a high risk that such behaviours are explained as "typical teenage experiences". Please ensure that probing questions are used so that the full circumstances are understood and any links to other factors contained in this document are known.

Explore more:-

Changes to usual behaviour, being in a rush, being anxious and/or irrational, having an extreme reaction to questions, being more destructive, acting in a way which suggests the child/young person is trying to take back control or power, being more argumentative/destructive in situations where there does not appear to be a trigger.

5. Irrational emotions and manic behaviour, ranging from extreme anger to extreme sadness.

Notes:-

Again, this is often an area which is seen as synonymous with the children growing into teenage years; practitioners need to ensure that they are sufficiently professionally curious so as to understand the reasons for any concerns, including any other factors that can be observed.

Explore more:-

Any changes to mental health, any highs and lows particularly where they might be unexplained, any extreme fluctuations in emotions.

6. Becoming emotional or moody.

Notes:-

This does not necessarily mean that a child/young person becomes very emotional. It could include circumstances where the child/young person hides their emotions.

Explore more:-

Any circumstances in which the young person becomes particularly emotional, has the young person become withdrawn, does the emotion match the situation, may be described as young person seeming 'glazed over' or numb, may not engage in activities/events that young person used to enjoy even if present e.g family gatherings, hobbies.

7. Going missing or returning home late

Notes:-

This could also include going out unexpectedly or leaving school during the school day, even if they later return or being located in an area that is unexplained/unexpected/not permitted.

Explore More:- leaving home/care without explanation, persistently going missing or returning late, being found out of area, travelling to locations that the young person has no connection with, being found with people who are not known to parent/carer, found in areas of concern or areas that intelligence suggests may be linked with exploitation, leaving during the school day, subtle changes in routine, are parents/carers able to confirm whereabouts?

8. Being picked up by unknown adults in unknown vehicles, including taxis and delivery vehicles.

Notes:-

As well as unknown adults, young person may be picked up by unknown friends of a similar age.

Explore More:-

Locations that young person has been seen at, any patterns to when young person is picked up (at home, school, in the community), any identifying details of the person/people, any identifying details of the vehicle, does intelligence suggest that the vehicle(s) may be linked to exploitation, have police been informed.

9. Returning home with injuries or markings.

Notes:-

This may not necessarily be traditional injuries or marks and practitioners should be alert to this. It may also be the case that the young person provides an explanation for any injuries or marks.

Explore More:-

Any bruising particularly in locations that are not easily visible, any burns including those which look like they may be cigarette burns, any cuts and/or scars, tattoos, piercings or any other unexplained marks (these may be marks to indicate 'ownership' or 'belonging' to a particular gang or group).

10. Concerning online and phone usage

Notes:-

If concerns are raised around phone or online use, provide advice on how to impose parental controls where possible. Also, note that there are now many different online apps and platforms which can be used to exploit young people, these include Instagram, TikTok, Whatsapp, Snapchat, Twitter/X, Facebook, Gettr, LinkedIn, You Tube, We Chat, Reddit, Quora, dating sites.

Explore More:-

Excessive amounts of notifications and/or messages. Any use of webcam sites, dating sites and apps, blocking parents/carers/family, presence of images on phones, concerning internet history, escalation of incoming contact (eg unanswered messages leading to phone calls leading to video calls), panic if devices are taken off the young person or passwords are changed, leaving quickly after receiving messages/calls, multiple calls from unknown numbers, preparing appearance to go online e.g make up, eyelashes etc. Multiple sims or multiple phones or multiple social media accounts, being secretive about phones or other devices.

11. Signs of drug use or drug taking equipment

Notes:-

Possession of drugs and paraphernalia does not necessarily indicate that that young person is using drugs. It is important that practitioners and parents/carers maintain an open mind in this respect to ensure that parental/professional trust is maintained.

Explore More:-

Presence of drugs or drug paraphernalia such as gas canisters, rolled up notes, tissues, small polythene bags, broken pens, plastic bottles with holes, crushed/flattened drinks cans, small (around an inch large) pieces of card, rizlas, roaches, small pieces of tin foil, vapes, inhalers; missing cutlery, marks on fingers, feet, ankles, behind the knees; does the young person protect or hide school bags and/or clothing with pockets; strange odours' over reliance on perfumes/deodorant; items of value going missing, increased use of ATMs and cash rather than card/phone transactions; changes in behaviour/health/appearance such as clammy skin, dirty fingernails, looking dirty, persistent coughs and runny nose, stomach upsets, freeze burns around mouth, dental problems; loss of interest in appearance, personal hygiene and age-related fashion, burn marks or holes in clothes; slurred speech and/or twitchy movements; increased lethargy or increased energy; sleeping at unusual times; changes to eating patterns.

12. Sexual health concerns

Notes:-

Explore More:- unplanned pregnancy, terminations, use of emergency contraceptives, visits to multiple sexual health clinics/pharmacies/medical practitioners, repeat urinary tract infections, concerns about sexual health.

13. Significant changes in presentation.

Notes:-

It is important to note that young people will sometimes change their appearance due to wanting to fit in with their friendship group but it is important to explore the circumstances around any changes in presentation to establish if there may be other reasons.

Explore More:-

Wearing large, bulky clothing, wearing gang-related clothing or clothes relating to different cultures, concerns about the type of clothing, wearing more sexualised clothing, lots of make-up and different clothing.

14. Changes in personal hygiene

Notes:-

This could be either a lack of, or an increase in, personal hygiene.

Explore More:-

This could include looking presentable but not taking care of personal hygiene and cleanliness such as not cleaning teeth, not brushing or washing hair, applying make up on top of make up, caked eyelashes. It could also include a greater focus on personal hygiene such as having very frequent hot baths or showers, having sore skin from excessive washing/scrubbing, washing immediately after coming in, not speaking to parents/carers/family until the young person has washed/cleaned.

15. Becoming distant from family and friends or withdrawn from usual social networks

Notes:- Practitioners should be alert to the possibility that a child/young person may become withdrawn from family and friends as a result of the deliberate attempts on the part of a perpetrator to isolate them from their support network and, if there are reports of the child/young person becoming isolated as a result of family tension, should explore how these tensions have occurred and the source of them.

Explore More:-

Avoiding large family events or attending but not participating, ignoring calls/texts from people that the young person has previously been happy to speak to, disinterest in after school clubs/activities that they have previously been involved with, avoiding conversation at home (e.g. hiding in bedroom), pretending to friends that they are not home, not wanting to go to school discos/social events/trips, pretending to be unwell to avoid social activity or events, eating separately or at different times, existing friends disapproving of new friends, absenteeism from events – present in person but not there in spirit, disconnecting or creating distance from family and friends, new and unexplained friends or all friends being online, a change in engagement with social networks compared to baseline; lack of empathy, interest in or feeling for others. Another person (young person or adult) may also attempt to build relationships with other friends or family members before deliberately creating tension in the family dynamics to increase isolation on the part of the child/young person.

16. Concerns and changes in peer relationships.

Notes:-

Explore More:-

Friends may seem older and/or more streetwise; family and friends may not know the parents or family of new friends, young person may be vague about the new friends, where they live, what they are like, what they are interested in etc; new friends may not attend the same school or be from a different locality/area to the young person; new friends may be the subject of concerns.

17. Self-harm, threatening suicide or suicide attempts

Notes:-

There are many forms of self-harm some of which are not well-known. Practitioners should ensure that they consider all circumstances and whether or not the matters observed could be a form of self-harm or, alternatively, a method of maintaining control. It should also be noted that most suicide attempts are planned rather than impulsive.

Explore More:-

Cuts, scratches on arms, thighs, face or neck; signs of anorexia or excessive eating; signs of excessive substance abuse; medicines going missing, keeping their own supply of paracetamol or similar over counter medicines in their bedroom or hidden in drawers; hiding signs of self-harm, cutting, pulling/plucking out hair, pulling out eyelashes, picking fingers scabs or scars, swallowing sharp objects, household items such as bleach, razors or knives going missing, concerning notes/messages being sent to family/friends or being found, indications of young person taking steps to 'finalise' their life.

18. Concerns raised by friends, neighbours or the local community

Notes:-

It is important to bear in mind that it can be very challenging to report concerns and some people reporting concerns may be putting themselves (or their families) at risk particularly if a perpetrator seeks revenge or the young person becomes hostile towards family/friends.

Explore More:-

Have concerns been raised before by this person or by somebody else. Compare what has been reported in this referral with what has been reported by others to ensure as full a picture as possible; does any known intelligence have any bearing on the concerns raised

19. Possessing weapons

Notes:-

What may be used as a weapon is incredibly diverse and so an open mind needs to be maintained when exploring the concerns raised. The use of weapons may, initially, lead to concerns around CCE but CSE should not be ruled out. The presence/use of weapons around those involved with a young person should also be considered (perpetrators may use weapons to assert control).

Explore More:-

Things such as pen knives, kitchen knives, baton/cosh, CS spray, knuckle duster, liquids such as acids, makeshift weapons such as snooker balls in socks, plastic items sharpened into a blade/point, gloves, dogs, baseball bats. Although things such as shotguns hidden (such as under the bed) or screwdrivers are more associated with CCE but there are overlaps between CCE and CSE so must still be taken into account

20. Getting arrested

Notes:-

Whilst being arrested is more associated with CCE than CSE, it may still indicate that CSE is a concern. It may be possible that the young person is intentionally attempting to get arrested as a means to stay safe or of getting attention. The arrest could be for any type of offence from minor offences such as shoplifting or serious offences such as GBH or murder

Explore More:-

Frequency of arrests, circumstances of arrest, is there a pattern to the timing of arrests

21. Expressions around invincibility or not caring about what happens

Notes:-

This may be expressed as the young person seeming to feel that others have their back

Explore More:-

Young person acting as if they are saying "there is nothing you can do can hurt me now/the worst has already happened" or that the young person is giving a "f..k you" to the world, appearing not to care about consequences typically associated with things that others would consider risky. Young person may give the impression that they have some sort of protection from the people that they are with

22. A sudden and over-use of street language

Notes:-

A young person may adopt different languages as a way of trying to fit in with a new friendship group or others that are known to them.

It should also be noted that young people sometimes adopt "street" words but, when it becomes embedded or they do not revert to usual style of speaking with family, then it may indicate concerns

Explore More:-

Has the young person changed their accent, is there a change in dialect, the young person may even use a different language, the changes are embedded and become a 'way of being', use of gang language