

HAVING  
OUR  
Say  
TOO

**NWG Network**

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation

# Myth-Busting

## Who needs to know?

This fact sheet is primarily aimed at Councilors but will be relevant to all those working in the field of safeguarding children including frontline and strategic practitioners from both statutory and voluntary organisations.

**Myth:** It only happens to girls and young women **X**

**Reality:** Gender. It happens to boys and young men too. Boys are just as likely to be targeted as victims of CSE by perpetrators. However they may be less likely to disclose offences or seek support, often due to stigma, prejudice or embarrassment or the fear that they will not be believed. They may see themselves as able to protect themselves but in cases of CSE physical stature is irrelevant due to the coercion and manipulation used.

**Myth:** It is only perpetrated by men **X**

**Reality:** Women are known to be perpetrators of this crime too, they may use different grooming methods but are known to target both boys and girls. The imbalance of power and control is still present in these cases.

**Myth:** There are very few forms it can take **X**

**Reality:** Young people, both boys and girls, are groomed in sexually exploited in many different forms, e.g. online, street, gangs, leisure industry, religion, position of authority, celebrity. The common theme in all cases is the imbalance of power and the control exerted on young people.

## Child Sexual Exploitation involves:

Young people under the age of 18 who are encouraged/forced into a sexual relationship or situation by an adult. It often (but not always) involves young people being offered something in return for performing sexual acts for example alcohol, cigarettes, mobile phones, gifts, money, drugs, love.

## Common Myths

**Myth:** It only happens in certain ethnic/cultural communities **X**

**Reality:** Both perpetrators and victims are known to come from a variety of ethnic/cultural backgrounds and is not restricted to British Pakistani Muslim males or young white British girls, despite the extensive media focus on these particular high profile cases. We must not be restricted to looking for this particular model in isolation, as there is a risk that we will fail to identify CSE occurring in other communities.

**Myth:** It just happens to teenagers **X**

**Reality:** Age. Peer-on-peer happens too. Young people are known to invite other young people to locations for parties where they will then be introduced to adults or forced to perform sexual acts on adults. Young people are also known to use 'sexting' as a way of communicating/distributing images etc.

**Myth:** Some people can be both victims and perpetrators **X**

**Reality:** Victims may appear to be willing accomplices, however this should be seen in the context of the controls exerted by the perpetrator, and the submission of the victim to them.

**Myth:** It only happens to 'looked after' children/children in local authority care **X**

**Reality:** Despite media focus, the majority of victims are not 'looked after' children. It is estimated that only 20-25% of victims are 'looked after'. Children and young people living at home can be just as vulnerable, if not more vulnerable as they may not be known to services therefore less likely to be identified.

**Myth:** It only happens in large town and cities **X**

**Reality:** Evidence shows that CSE can and does happen in all parts of our country. CSE is not restricted to urban areas such as large towns and cities but does in fact happen in rural areas such as villages and coastal areas. Young people are transported between towns, cities, villages etc., for the purpose of being sexually exploited and this is known as trafficking within the UK (an offence punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment).

**Myth:** Parents should know what is happening and should be able to stop it **X**

**Reality:** Parents are unlikely to be able to identify what is happening, they may suspect that something is not right but may not be in a position to stop it due to the controls/threats/fear of the perpetrators.

# Recognise the Warning Signs

Children are groomed and exploited in different ways. It may be difficult for parents, carers and frontline professionals to differentiate between ordinary teenage behaviour and the risk of or involvement in sexual exploitation but there are some signs that may signify that children or young people are being groomed for sexual exploitation or actually being sexually exploited.

## Home, Family, and Relationships

- Being secretive or withdrawn
- Being hostile or physically aggressive in their relationship with parents/carers or other family members
- Becoming disruptive at home or school or using offensive language
- Associating/developing a sexual relationship with older men or women
- Associating with other sexually exploited children
- Older 'boyfriend/girlfriend' or relationship with a controlling adult
- Physical or emotional abuse by that 'boyfriend/girlfriend' or controlling adult.
- Unsuitable or inappropriate accommodation (including street homelessness, staying with adults known to be involved in CSE and living in a place where needs are not met)
- Regularly coming home late or going missing overnight or longer
- Returning home after long intervals but appearing well cared for
- Isolated from peers and social networks; not mixing with their usual friends
- Lack of positive relationship with a protective, nurturing adult
- Living independently and failing to respond to attempts by workers to keep in touch.
- Breakdown of residential placements due to behaviour
- Unusual association with taxi drivers/firms

## Appearance

- Having money, mobile phones, credit for mobile phones, sim cards, cloths, jewellery or other items without plausible explanation and not given by parents/carers
- Overtly sexualised dress
- Having multiple mobile phones, sim cards or use of a mobile phone that causes concern; multiple callers, more texts than usual
- Having possession of hotel keys/key cards or keys to unknown premises

## Incidences

- Receiving rewards of money or goods for recruiting peers into CSE or just introducing peers to known adults
- Disclosure of physical/ sexual assault and then refusing to make or withdrawing a complaint
- Receiving rewards of money or goods for recruiting peers into CSE or just introducing peers to known adults
- Knowledge of towns and cities they have no previous connection with.
- Being taken to clubs and hotels by adults and engaging in sexual activity
- Abduction and forced imprisonment
- Disappearing from the 'system' with no contact or support
- Being bought/sold for sexual acts
- Frequent use of public transport
- Being taken abroad by family members (forced marriage)
- Being a victim of honour based violence
- Being involved in witchcraft
- Being taken to brothels/massage parlours

## Health and Mental Health

- Change in physical appearance- new clothes, more/less make up, poor self image, weight gain/loss
- Having increased health/sexual health related problems
- Having marks or scars on their body which they try to conceal by refusing to undress or uncover parts of their body
- Expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression, appearing drunk or under the influence of drugs/alcohol, suicidal tendencies, looking tired or ill, sleeping during the day.)
- Sexually transmitted infections/ pregnancy
- Multiple miscarriages or terminations
- Indicators of CSE in conjunction with chronic alcohol and drug use
- Indicators of CSE alongside serious self harming

## Behaviour

- Being defensive about where they have been and what they have been doing
- Becoming involved in criminality/repeat offending
- Volatile/criminal behaviour
- Use of the internet that causes concern including possible use of web cam
- Increased use of online gaming including Xbox
- Exclusion and/or unexplained absences from school or not engaged in education or training. Non school attendance or excluded due to behaviour
- Sexualised risk taking including on Internet and mobile phone
- 'Sexting' (the act of sending sexually explicit messages or photographs, primarily between mobile phones)
- Experimenting with drugs and/or alcohol
- Association with gangs
- Getting into cars with unknown adults or associating with known CSE adults
- Child under 16 meeting different adults and exchanging or selling sexual activity
- Removed from known 'red light' district by professionals due to suspected CSE
- Reports of being involved in CSE through being seen in hotspots (i.e. in certain flats, recruiting grounds, cars or houses and maybe in company of known CSE adults)
- Child under 13 engaging in penetrative sex with another over 15 years

For more information  
[www.NWGNetwork.org](http://www.NWGNetwork.org)