



What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child abuse affecting children and young people under the age of 18. The nationally agreed definition of CSE from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is that it ‘involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, attention, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, or others performing on them, sexual acts or activities’.

The young person may have been groomed (when someone builds a relationship with a child to gain their trust), and believe they are in a loving consensual relationship with the perpetrator. Grooming can take place online or in the real world by a stranger or someone they know. Sexual exploitation can occur online or by telephone and does not require physical contact.

Once trust and power is gained the ‘relationship’ may involve violence and intimidation to continue to exploit the young person. The young person often does not report the abuse due to feelings of shame, fear of harm to themselves or others, fear that they will not be believed, not wanting to give something up e.g. drugs or gifts, or because they are manipulated into thinking that they want to remain in the relationship and have loyalties to the perpetrator.

Who is most at risk of CSE?

Child sexual exploitation can happen to any child or young person. However, some may be more vulnerable as shown in the diagram. Some of these factors can also be signs of CSE taking place and are cause for concern. Children under the influence of substances are at increased risk due to a lack of control and putting themselves in risky situations to access drugs and alcohol. Certain groups are more susceptible to using substances including those experiencing abuse and neglect, children living in care or having left care, those who are missing from home and care, those with mental health issues and those disengaged from education.



Key signs of CSE

- Absence from school
 - Missing from home / care
 - Drug and / or alcohol use
 - Involvement in crime
 - Change in physical appearance
 - Physical injuries
 - Shows sexualised behaviour (inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age)
 - Treated for sexually transmitted infections
 - Treated for pregnancy and terminations
 - Thoughts or attempts of suicide and self-harm
 - Older boyfriend/girlfriend
 - Tired in school
 - Unknown friends on social networking sites
 - Mental health issues including depression
 - Secretive phone calls and internet use
 - Unknown vehicles dropping them off
 - Arguments at home with their families
 - Behaving differently
 - Appears frightened of a particular person
 - Have new things that they can't explain
- (From Pan Cheshire website 'Know and See' and NSPCC)



Between March 2014-March 2015, there were 52 children and young people in Cheshire West and Chester assessed as being at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) by the Cheshire West and Chester CSE operational group. All children were aged 12 to 17 years and the majority were girls. 11 were children in care. Two in five cases were considered high risk and investigated by Cheshire Police.

Between 2013-14, all suspects in CSE cases were male except for one female. In just under half of cases investigated, the investigation was raised in response to concerns about young people who had been reported missing to the police.

There are strong links between children and young people who go missing and CSE. Between 2013-14, there were 299 missing child notifications received by the organisation Catch 22, the Cheshire West and Chester commissioned service that supports children and young people who have been missing from home or care. The missing notifications involved 155 children, indicating repeat missing episodes by the same child is significant. The link between CSE and children going missing is strong, with some forced to stay in harmful environments and engaging in risky activities such as using drugs and alcohol. Children missing from home in Cheshire West and Chester gave socialising and boredom as the main reasons for going missing followed by family conflict. For children going missing from care, the most common reasons were a placement issue of a contact issue.

There are different types of CSE including single perpetrator, and multiple perpetrator CSE which includes group-associated, gang associated and within a gang or group. Not exclusively, but the type of CSE evident in Cheshire West and Chester is predominately against a single child with one male perpetrator with whom the child feels they are in a legitimate relationship. There are a number of repeat perpetrators responsible for the exploitation of more than one child.

Areas of interest to Police in Cheshire West and Chester or considered 'hotspots' include licensed premises suspected of selling alcohol and cigarettes to underage children, places children are known to frequent when skipping school and locations identified as meeting places of children at risk.

Difficulties faced by victims of CSE can include:

- Isolation from family and friends
- Teenage parenthood
- Failing examinations or dropping out of education altogether
- Unemployment
- Mental health problems
- Suicide attempts and self harm
- Alcohol and drug addiction
- Aggressive behaviour
- Criminal activity

CSE also has long term impacts on the whole family with parents/carers feeling anger, guilt, shame and confusion. This can lead to strain on relationships with parent and child expressing symptoms of poor mental health. Siblings may become remote not fully understanding the situation.

Evidence of What Works

- Multi-agency working
- An approach, strategy and protocol for dealing with and tackling CSE
- Raising awareness of CSE with organisations, those who work with or encounter children and young people and parents
- Raising awareness with children and young people about the risks that can lead to CSE such as losing control when under the influence of drugs and / or alcohol

Actions undertaken in Cheshire West

- County wide multi-agency CSE sub group and CSE operational group setup by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)
- Have a CSE strategy and multi-agency operating protocol, a lead person to co-ordinate a multi-agency response and multi-agency support for victims and families during court cases
- Represented on Pan Cheshire CSE Strategic Group
- Commissioned Catch 22 to support young people notified as missing from home or care including conducting return interviews
- Multi-agency audit on sexualised behaviour to scrutinise approach
- CSE screening tool kit developed and used by local practitioners to assess a young persons vulnerability to CSE
- Devised a one minute guide to help to identify potential signs of CSE
- Delivery of a safer schools conference and roll out of guidance on how to support children and manage risks particularly around sexualised behaviour
- 'Risking it all' performance and workshops with year 10 pupils to raise awareness of CSE
- Development of dedicated CSE website called 'Know and See'.