

Exploitation...

**IS IT  
HAPPENING  
TO ME?**



**Rose**  
Project



## WHAT IS EXPLOITATION?

Exploitation is a tricky subject; it's often hidden and hard to identify. It can happen to anybody and can take place over minutes, months or years. This can happen online or in person.

Exploitation is when an individual (or a group of people) takes advantage of a person for their own gain. When one person has more power than someone else, because of their age, gender, social status or wealth for example, they might be able to force or manipulate someone into doing things for them. This could be performing, arranging or taking part in sexual or criminal activities.

It can be hard to see this as exploitation because the abuser will try to make it seem as if it's a normal part of a relationship, playing on feelings of love, friendship and acceptance. They might also give the young person gifts, money or drugs for engaging in these activities. This is also known as grooming and is never the young person's fault even if they believe they've consented.

## SO WHAT IS...?

### CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)

This refers to when anyone under the age of 18 is coerced, exploited or forced into performing, arranging or taking part in sexual activities.

### CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION (CCE)

This refers to when anyone under the age of 18 is coerced, exploited or forced into performing, arranging or taking part in criminal activities. This is often linked to the phrase 'county lines' which refers to the mobile lines used to manage the selling and distribution of drugs such as cocaine and heroin.

## SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF EXPLOITATION

- Has someone given you something you wanted like money or a gift and then asked you to do something for them in return?
- Do you get in trouble if you're not always available to answer texts or receive calls from certain people? Or has someone given you a phone so they can be in touch with you 24/7?
- Have you been reported missing from home or school?
- Are you encouraged to keep your friendship or relationship secret?
- Has someone threatened to hurt you or your family if you tell anyone what's happening to you or refuse to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable?
- Have you been asked to deliver a parcel in exchange for money or drugs?
- Are you experiencing anxiety or mental health difficulties because of what's been happening to you?
- Are you in a sexual relationship that you feel worried about?
- Do you only feel safe out and about if you're carrying a weapon?

## HOW MIGHT EXPLOITATION AFFECT YOU?

Every young person's experience is different, but if you think you might have been or are being exploited then these are some of the ways it could affect you...

### You might be:

- Isolated from family, friends and other people who care about you
- Struggling at school, failing exams, or considering dropping out of education altogether
- Experiencing poor mental health, feeling suicidal or self-harming
- Addicted to drugs or alcohol
- Feeling angry or becoming aggressive
- Having flashbacks or nightmares
- Feeling shame and guilt about what's happened to you
- Feeling like it's all your fault and that you've done something wrong
- Wanting for it all to stop and to hide away

**Always remember it's not your fault, even if you felt you were agreeing or giving consent at the time. Tell someone that you trust; this might be a parent, teacher, a support worker or social worker, or your extended family.**

## MYTHS ABOUT EXPLOITATION

– **“Someone who loves me would never exploit me!”**

Often people who want to exploit or abuse young people play on feelings of love, trust and friendship to make the exploitation feel like a normal part of a relationship.

– **“It’s only old men who exploit young people.”**

Anyone can take advantage of a power imbalance to exploit young people. They might be adults or young people, male or female, a stranger or a friend. When a young person exploits another young person this is called ‘peer-on-peer exploitation’.

– **“People who contact me on the internet just want to be friends.”**

People on the internet can pretend to be people they aren’t – you never know who the ‘friend’ might really be. Keep your privacy settings updated and don’t share personal information over the internet.

– **“Sending nudes is totally normal, it’s just something people do and it’s not dangerous.”**

If someone is exploiting you they might try and use images to hurt or threaten you. You should never feel pressured to send images to somebody. You may not have any control over who that picture or video is shared with, and it could be dangerous if an explicit image of you falls into the wrong hands.

– **“No one will believe me if I speak out.”**

Those who exploit young people try hard to keep them quiet and isolated by convincing them no one will listen. Approach your school’s safeguarding lead or another trusted adult.



## MIA'S STORY

**"When I was 15 a mate of mine introduced me to a guy called Callum at a party. He was older than me, about 22 I guess, and I fancied him straight away. He liked me too; we spent the whole evening together drinking and chatting and arranged to meet up later that week.**

A few days later I told my mum I was staying over at a friend's and went to meet Callum at his place. We watched a film and had a few drinks, then some of his mates came over. They all started smoking weed, and Callum offered me some - we stayed up most of the night smoking and drinking. He told me that he really liked me and asked if I would be his girlfriend. It felt amazing; he could have had anyone, but I was the one he wanted.

Before long I was spending all my time with Callum and his mates. He was so nice to me, and it didn't really matter to me that I didn't see my friends anymore.

I felt safe with him and didn't want anyone else interfering, so I didn't tell my mum or anyone else where I was staying every night.

We partied a lot, and he always made sure there were drugs for both of us. He would give me loads of pills; we even started smoking crack together towards the end. He never asked for money or nothing - he said I didn't need to worry about anything, he would look after me.

A lot of Callum's mates were about my age. He would often text and call them in the middle of the night and give them parcels to deliver. He said he was just helping them earn some extra cash, that he wasn't hurting anyone, and I should just keep quiet about it.

Callum was good to me and I thought we really loved each other, but things started to get weird between us after a few months.

We'd been having sex pretty much from the start and I'd always felt comfortable with it; it had always felt like it was my choice to sleep with him. But he started to demand sex from me any time of day or night, telling me that I owed him for rent and the drugs he'd given me. He told me sex was the only thing I was good for now, and he was going to get what he was owed."

**" I DIDN'T WANT TO BE WITH HIM ANYMORE, BUT I COULDN'T SEE A WAY OUT. I WAS TRAPPED. "**





## **ARE YOU IN A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?**

**A healthy relationship is based on trust and respect. You should feel safe and able to be yourself around the other person. Everyone's relationship is different, but anyone can be affected by abuse.**

### ***SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP MIGHT INCLUDE:***

- Always being made to feel guilty and having to apologise
- Being isolated from family and friends
- Having to tell them where you are all the time
- Being threatened
- Feeling pressured to do things you don't want to
- Being called names and being put down

### ***SIGNS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP MIGHT INCLUDE:***

- Feeling respected and listened to
- Trusting the other person, even when you are not with them
- Being able to express affection
- Enjoying each other's company
- Spending time with your family and friends
- Feeling good about yourself

## WHAT IS CONSENT?

**If you give consent to someone, you are agreeing to do something with them. Consent is only truly given if you are happy with the situation. If you feel forced or unsure about doing something, this is not consent.**

Consent is based on communication (both verbal and body language) at every step of the way. Never just assume that consent is given. If someone seems unsure, stays silent, doesn't respond, or says "maybe...", then they aren't saying "yes".

If a person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, even if they say yes (or nothing), they are not able to give their consent.

Saying yes or giving in to something because you feel pressured or too afraid to say no, is not consent.

## KEEPING SAFE ONLINE

Exploitation can happen online as well as in person. Here are some tips to help you stay safe:

1. Be careful when using messenger apps, they can be a really easy way for people you don't know to contact you. You can't control what people show you and you could be exposed to something you didn't want to see.
2. Make sure your accounts and security settings are on private – the internet is a great place to share with friends but be aware of accepting requests or messages from strangers.
3. Be careful about your personal information – have you ever googled yourself? How much did you find out about yourself online? Be sure to keep your personal information private; such as your full name, home address or school.
4. Think before you post! If in doubt, talk to someone who cares. They could see a danger you have missed.
5. It can be a good idea to cover up your webcam because people are able to hack into them remotely.



## SEXTING - WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?



**Sexting is sending or receiving a sexually explicit text message, image or video. This includes nude selfies or underwear pics.**

No one should ever feel pressured into sending or receiving these kinds of pictures or videos, even if you are in a relationship. You always have the right to say no to sending these images, even if you have sent one in the past.

Once you have sent a picture or video, you lose control over it. Images can be shared quickly and widely across the internet beyond the person who you originally sent it to. Think before you click send; would I want my friends, family, teachers or strangers to see this image if it got out?

Sometimes people might try and use these explicit photos or selfies to blackmail people.

For example, they might use the sext to threaten a young person into sending more or doing something for them.

If you are under 18, it is illegal to send or receive these images and it could lead to a police investigation. It could also affect your education and future employment opportunities.



## WHAT IS A "MISSING EPISODE"?

**You can be reported missing if your whereabouts is not known and you might be at risk of harm or exploitation.**

Missing episodes can happen during the day or night and can be for any length of time. Your teacher, carer or parent might be worried about where you are and raise their concerns.

When a young person returns home or to care they will be offered a session to speak with an independent person i.e. not parents, carers or the police. Therefore, it is the young person's choice if they want to have this chat or not.

This catch-up is a time for the young person to talk about their missing episode: for example, what led to them going missing, what happened during that time and any support they feel they might need.

Your voice is important and the purpose of these sessions is to listen to you and what you need in order to stay safe and reduce the risk of further missing episodes.

## STAYING SAFE WHEN OUT AND ABOUT

1. Tell your parents or carers where you are going, who you will be with and agree a time you will be back by.
2. Make sure your phone is charged and you have your parents or carers numbers saved.
3. Make sure you have enough money for public transport to get home.
4. Try to meet in light public places and be alert when going to unknown places.
5. Don't accept food, drink or drugs from people you don't know.
6. If in doubt, don't go out!





## SEXUAL HEALTH

### TRUTHS AND MYTHS

There are various myths that people get told about sex, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and pregnancy.

– **Girls cannot get pregnant during their period?**

**MYTH:** There is a chance a girl can get pregnant when they are on their period. Once sperm is in the vagina it can stay alive for several days. Any time you have unprotected sex without contraception there IS a chance you can get pregnant.

– **I will always be able to tell if someone has an STI**

**MYTH:** Not all STIs have symptoms or are visible so you cannot always tell if someone has an STI.

– **You can get rid of all STIs if you catch them?**

**MYTH:** If you catch a bacterial STI it can be treated with antibiotics and the infection will leave your body, however if you catch a viral STI it is treatable but cannot be cured therefore you cannot get rid of all STIs once you catch them.

– **You can take the Morning After Pill (Emergency Contraception) up to five days after having unprotected sex?**

**TRUTH:** Yes, the Morning After Pill can be taken up to five days after unprotected sex, however the longer it is left the less effective it is.

– **You cannot catch an STI if you are on the pill?**

**MYTH:** The pill will only protect you from pregnancy, it will not protect you from STIs.

– **I can only go to my doctors for an STI check?**

**MYTH:** You can also go to the iCaSH for a full sexual health check, or you can order a postal express test online from iCaSH.

– **You can get pregnant if you have never had a period?**

**TRUTH:** You may ovulate 14 days before your first period, so it is possible to get pregnant before you have started your period.

# HELP IS AVAILABLE

There are lots of organisations that can help you with things that you may be worried about....You are not alone!!

Please visit our website [www.magdalengroup.org/rose-project](http://www.magdalengroup.org/rose-project) or call **0808 800 1037** to get help.

The  
Magdalene  
Group

