



Staffordshire
Together for Carers
Service

Young Carers and Child Exploitation

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Child Exploitation

12 720 children in England were identified by social services as being at risk of criminal exploitation by gangs in 2020/21 and 24 800 child abuse offences were recorded in England & Wales in the same period.

But we also know that these figures give an incomplete picture of risk to children as a significant proportion of child exploitation is never recorded. The internet has made it easier for abusers to reach children and the pandemic has affected some children's mental health, making them feel more isolated or depressed, and more vulnerable as a result.

Here's a brief explanation of child exploitation, a checklist of signs to look out for and some places you can find support if you are worried about a child or young person.

Definition

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into sexual activity. Often a child is given something (money, drink, drugs, fake affection) in return.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is where an individual or group takes advantage of their power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into criminal activity using the same methods. They may also be trapped through debt bondage.

The victim may have been exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur online.

Young carers can be susceptible to grooming and exploitation because they are sometimes more isolated from friends due to their responsibilities and because perpetrators might offer them goods, attention, 'affection' or access to substances that they wouldn't otherwise get. Parents are not always able to support and monitor a child as much as they would like to, and children may withhold concerns from a parent in order to protect them.

Signs and Indicators to look out for:

- Going missing from home or staying out late.
- Secretive behaviour.
- Sudden, dramatic changes in behaviour.
- Physical injuries.
- Drug or alcohol misuse.
- Involvement in offending.
- STIs, pregnancy and terminations.
- Absent from school.
- Change in physical appearance.
- Greatly increased use of mobile phone.
- Wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours; getting tattoos.
- Using new slang words.
- Increasingly distant from family and former friends.
- Receipt of gifts from unknown sources.
- Poor mental health.
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Child exploitation can have a devastating impact on children's physical and mental health, confidence and self-esteem, family relationships, friendships, education and future prospects.

There were 73,518 recorded offences including rape, online grooming and sexual assault against children in the UK in 2019/20



Further support for children at risk of exploitation

Often, young people don't recognise the signs of exploitation. If they do, they can feel that it is their fault for making poor choices. They can often feel foolish, afraid or ashamed. If you're concerned a young person may be at risk, have an open, supportive conversation with them and make them aware there is support available.



Exploitation support in Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire

Referral information, contact details and resources for a child living in Staffordshire can be found on the Safeguarding Children Partnership website: www.staffssc.org.uk/child-exploitation-partner-referral-information-and-resources/

If you want to refer a child for support, you need to complete the risk factor matrix (RFM), preferably with the child themselves, and send it to:

 CSEInbox@staffordshire.gov.uk & catch22cse@catch-22.org.uk for sexual exploitation concerns

 CSEInbox@staffordshire.gov.uk & catch22cce@catch-22.org.uk for criminal exploitation concerns.

 Documents and guidance [available here](#).

If you are in doubt or need further advice and support, please call 01782 237106 or leave a message if it is out of office hours.

Look at the Catch22 [Child Exploitation and Missing Awareness poster hub](#) for further information about the issues.

Catch22 provide a range of services for children who have been reported missing or children who are at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation.

Further details at: catch-22.org.uk/offers/missing-and-cse/

Young Carers

Definition

A Young Carer is a child and/or young person who provides care for family member/s who have a physical or mental illness, a disability, or substance misuse.



1 in 5 young people are Young Carers, with 1 in 12 taking on mid-to high-level care. (Joseph et al., 2019)

The tasks and level of caring undertaken by a Young Carer can vary according to the nature of the illness or disability, the level and frequency of need for care, and the structure of the family as a whole.

These tasks can include:

- Household chores – including washing, cooking and cleaning on behalf of the whole family.
- Personal/nursing care – giving medication, changing dressings, assisting with mobility.
- Intimate care – washing, dressing and assisting with toilet requirements.
- Emotional support – Comforting, listening, translating, monitoring and meeting the emotional needs of the person.
- Childcare – helping to care for younger siblings, taking them to school, helping with homework, bathing and emotional support.
- Other – household administration such as paying bills, accompanying the cared-for person to hospital, or acting as an interpreter for non-speaking sensory impaired, or those whose first language is not English.

“Children should not undertake inappropriate or excessive caring roles that may have an impact on their development. A young carer becomes vulnerable when their caring role risks impacting upon their emotional or physical well-being and their prospects in education and life.”

Care and Support Statutory Guidance issued under the Care Act 2014

Signs and indicators to look out for:

Providing care can have an impact on a young person in many different ways, both physically and emotionally, and professionals may recognise different signs dependent upon what capacity they are working with the young person.

Professionals may observe that the child/young person is:

- Secretive about home life, doesn't like to go into detail about their weekend/evening activities
- Often low in mood
- Appears to be tired
- Becomes anxious or stressed – this can be particularly about the person they care for and manifest itself in feeling anxious to leave them.
- Isolated and missing out social activities
- “Old” before their time – Young Carers often have an increased level of responsibility for others and themselves leading them to have an increased maturity.
- Lacking parental supervision
- Lower than expected attention and lacks motivation

Education professionals may:

- Notice regular patterns of arriving late to school
- Notice young person's attendance is low and includes ad hoc days which may not be attributed to sickness
- Have to repeatedly ask for schoolwork or homework to be handed in on time
- Feel that the child/young person is under achieving/not fulfilling their potential
- Be aware of child being/feeling isolated from their peers with possible instances of bullying

Further support for Young Carers

Many young people with caring responsibilities aren't known to professionals and don't see themselves as being Young Carers or feel too worried or embarrassed to ask for help. Early identification is vital as often Young Carers don't get identified until a crisis. If you suspect that a young person may be carrying out a caring role, speak to that young person. Asking a few simple questions can help identify a Young Carer and make them aware there is support for them available.

Support in Staffordshire

Staffordshire County Council can undertake an assessment of needs called a 'Statutory Carers Assessment' and develop a support plan based on a Young Carers needs. Staffordshire Together for Carers Service work closely with the Young Carers Advisors, who provide this service. Professionals can refer Carers for an assessment (providing consent has been given) to Staffordshire County Council.

Staffordshire Together for Carers Service helps to ensure that Young Carers between the ages of 5 and 18 years old are identified and provided with support in their caring role.

Please see here for further information about Staffordshire County Council support for Young carers
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Care-for-all-ages/Carers/Young-carers.aspx

To contact Staffordshire Together for Carers:
Call us: 0300 303 0621
Email: enquiries@staffordshiretogetherforcarers.org.uk



Tia* was 14. She lived with her dad and younger brother in a loving, stable household. However, Tia's dad had a range of health conditions that meant he was seriously incapacitated and relied on Tia to provide a lot of his care as well as take responsibility for basic household tasks. One day after the young carer's support group, Tia disclosed to her support worker that she had been sexually abused by an older boy she had met through mutual friends. He had noticed her and given her the kind of attention that young carers with limited scope for social interactions seldom get. The support worker recognised immediately that she had been exploited and made a referral into the specialist child exploitation team.

Her CSE case worker helped Tia to understand that she had been groomed and exploited and supported Tia and her family to recover from the impact of the abuse.

Case study



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