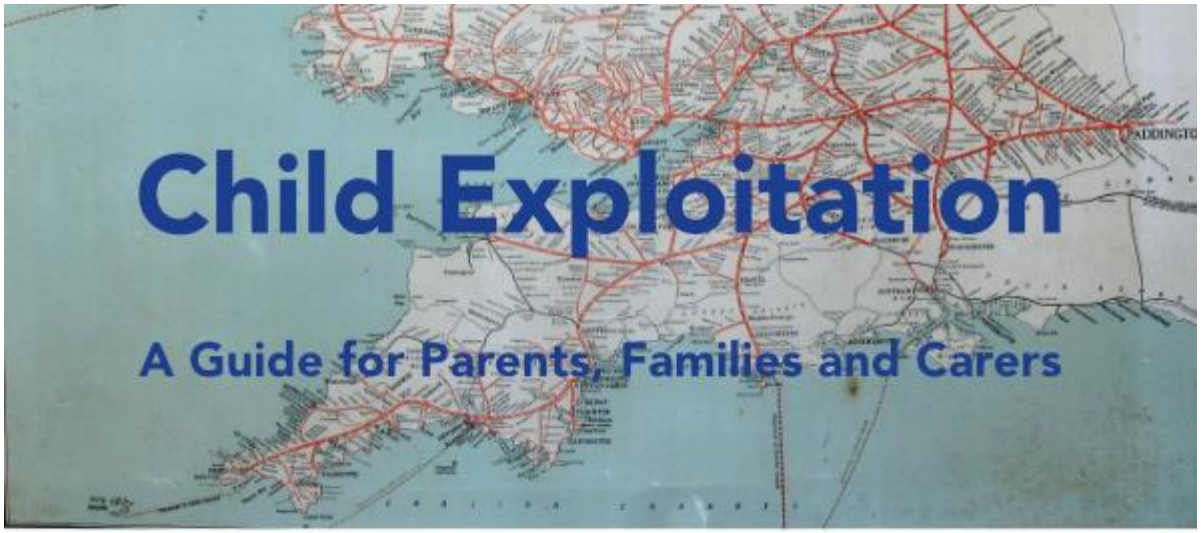
Advice for Parents, Families and Carers

Our guide has been developed for those who suspect their child or a child in their care is being groomed or exploited and has been produced by professionals with expertise in exploitation and by experts-by-experience. If you wish to purchase copies, please email enquiries@escapeline.org.uk



Child Exploitation

A Guide for Parents, Families and Carers

What is child exploitation?

Child exploitation is the criminal and sexual exploitation of children for profit or gain and is predominantly associated with the drug trade known as county lines. Criminals groom and use children to move and supply drugs, carry weapons and carry out other criminal acts such as burglary, violence and anti-social behaviour. Sexual exploitation occurs when children are coerced into performing sexual acts as a means of intimidation and control, to pay off debts and when they are forced into relationships with perpetrators.

The Facts

Child exploitation is taking place in towns and villages across the country, irrespective of wealth and location. It isn't confined to big cities or deprived areas.

Perpetrators targeting a child will pinpoint their vulnerabilities. Any boy or girl from around the age of 10 may be targeted. Some children may be more vulnerable than others.

Exploited children are not making a lifestyle choice. Methods of exploitation are sophisticated, manipulative and violent. Exploited children and their families are victims.

Exploited children are often not able to step away by choice. They are trapped and may see no way out. They may be threatened and experience extreme violence and their families may also be intimidated.

If you suspect your child or a child in your care is being exploited this guide will help you to:

- Spot the signs your child is being exploited.
- Know the strategies that may limit the risk to your child.
- Work with the police, school and other services to protect your child.
- Seek support and understand it is not your fault.

If you are concerned about exploitation in your community contact Crimestoppers 0800 555111 Police 101 Childline 0844 8920220

ESCAPELINE
Preventing Child Exploitation

educate | empower | prevent | www.escapeline.org.uk

Registered Charity no. 1184475

Copyright © 2020 Escapeline

Parenting Strategies

Perpetrators seek to groom, control and exploit children for their own gain. Exploited children are used to transport and sell drugs within towns and villages and across the country. The benefits such as payment and a sense of excitement and belonging may be initially attractive to children but the realities of exploitation are enslavement, trafficking, violence, mutilation and sexual abuse. The hold that perpetrators have over children, through brain-washing and extreme intimidation can be very powerful and it may appear as though children are willing participants rather than victims.

One of the main aims of the grooming process is to separate the child from the protective adults around them. Parenting strategies alone are not a solution to child exploitation however parental awareness and presence are protective factors.

Get informed and educate your child. Understand how the grooming process works and the signs to look out for. Encourage your child's school to engage an organisation such as Escapeline to train staff, children and parents.

Encourage engagement in activities that your child enjoys and that divert them away from risky individuals and places.

Organise family time to reaffirm that you enjoy spending time with your child. Have fun. 'I enjoy spending time with you' is a good message to deliver.

Show an interest in your child's friendship group and know who their friends are.

Monitor social media use. Grooming takes place online as well as face-to-face.

Alert the police and your child's school or college, if you suspect your child has been approached or is being groomed or exploited. The earlier the intervention, the greater the chance your child will be protected.

Take care if you find illicit items in your child's possession. Perpetrators may ask children to hide items as a test of their compliancy. If your child is being tested you may be able to remove the items and protect your child. If they are being actively exploited then removing drugs or money will put them in debt to the perpetrators and may put them in extreme danger.

Lock away valuables and money, if you think there is a risk your child will take these from you to repay a debt.

Stay connected even if your child is being exploited. Maintain regular contact and keep communications low pressure and light touch. Show them you are there for them. Children who have been groomed may find connection with you dangerous but may share information and seek comfort when they are ready.

Listen with empathy and curiosity when your child shares information with you. Responses such as 'that must have been frightening' and 'tell me about it' may open up conversation and demonstrate you are not judging them and you are on their side..

Welcome them home if they have been missing**.** Exploited children may return in a state of extreme fear. In addition they may worry about the welcome they will receive at home. Remember they may have been prevented from returning and kept against their will. 'I'm relieved to see you safe' and 'I've missed you' are good responses as well as providing unspoken nurture through food and comfort.

Remember that if your child is being exploited it is not your fault. Perpetrators are organised and use sophisticated methods to groom children.

Seek support if your child is being exploited. Work with supportive services.Telling a trusted friend can ease the burden and help with problem-solving.

Take care of yourself. Advocating and caring for an exploited child can take a great physical and emotional toll.

Working with services

If your child is being groomed or exploited you will probably have contact with services such as school, police and social services. Some services and regions are further forward in developing ways of working together and understanding exploitation than others.

Remember that you are the key member of the team around your child advocating to keep them safe. Working with services can be frustrating but always try to be polite and calm, but firm.

Report your child missing each and every time they do not come home when you expect them to and when you don't know their whereabouts. You do not have to wait 24 hours before doing this. Tell the police that you suspect your child is being exploited and trafficked.

Record notable incidents such as dates and times when your child goes missing, injuries, police involvement, the locations you suspect your child is being trafficked to, the names of those they are associated with and the car registration numbers of any suspicious individuals who give them lifts. Record incidences of intimidation and threats towards other family members.

Keep screenshots of any messages that may contain important information and that provide evidence your child is being exploited. Share this with relevant professionals.

Secure your child's passport and other important documents.

Gather together a photograph of your child as they look now and how they looked before they were exploited (this can help services to see the child behind the abuse and control), details of their social media accounts, mobile phone number and bank details. These can help police if your child goes missing.

Team up with services, particularly school and with safe adults and friends in your child's life to maintain safety around your child.

Share written resources with professionals. This can be easier than having to explain. We have free resources available on our website.

This guide has been produced by Escapeline, a charity that educates children, families and professionals, empowers communities with knowledge and strategies and prevents exploitation.

Please support our work.

enquiries@escapeline.org.uk @escapeline2 justgiving.com/escapeline

ESCAPELINE
Preventing Child Exploitation

educate | empower | prevent | www.escapeline.org.uk