

01 Background: Child Sexual Exploitation

is a terrible crime with destructive and far reaching consequences for victims, their families, and society. It is not limited to any particular geography, ethnic or social background. Having a shared definition of CSE is critical to identification, monitoring & effective multi-agency responses. The government issued the following definition in 2017. "CSE is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. CSE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."

02 Why it matters:

The impacts of CSE are wide-ranging, & can be profound & long lasting. This is particularly true when victims do not receive appropriate support. Victims can suffer a range of health impacts including physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections & longer-term gynaecological consequences for females. They can experience emotional trauma/mental illness such as depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorder & drug/alcohol problems. CSE also impacts longer-term, being associated with higher rates of youth offending, poor educational prospects, involvement in adult sex work, isolation from family & friends, negative future relationships & increased risk of other forms of violence or abuse. CSE can also create strong ripple effects on friendship circles, family networks & the wider community.

Information:

Like any other form of child sexual abuse, CSE:

- Can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16/17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex.
- Is abuse - even if sexual activity appears consensual
- Can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance & may/may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence.
- May occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (e.g. through others creating videos/ images & posting on social media)
- Can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, & children or adults. The abuse can be a one- off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, & range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse.
- Involves a power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. This power imbalance can be due to a range of factors including age, gender, intellect, physical strength, status, & access to economic or other resources.

07 What to do?

Those affected by CSE say that professionals need to prioritise them, to be visibly attentive, responsive and reliable, sticking with them even when this might be difficult.

Further reading:

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Safeguarding/Safeguarding-Children-Information-regarding-Sexu.aspx>

Questions:

Am I confident in my understanding of the signs and indicators of CSE?

How can I build trust with children and young people who have been exploited by adults?

How can I create opportunities for disclosure without pressuring victims to disclose before they are ready?

How can supervision help me to develop my practice?



Information:

The fact that children & young people often see themselves as making a choice can prevent them from seeking support. Understanding the context within which 'choices' are made by victims is critical to our ability to respond effectively to CSE. The response to CSE requires a shift to viewing parents/carers as partners in the safeguarding process (rather than a source of risk). Safe and consistent relationships are paramount to the promotion of resilience in children & young people

