Safeguarding vulnerable students from grooming and sexual exploitation

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Safeguarding - Legal Framework

• S157 Education Act 2002
• The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
• Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
• The Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2010
• Dealing with allegations of abuse against teachers and other staff (2011)
• Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010) - consultation currently out on streamlined version
• What to do if You’re Worried a Child is Being Abused 2006
Definition of sexual exploitation

‘Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (eg food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person’s limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.’

DCSF (2009) Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary Guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children
Abuse through sexual exploitation involves young people in sexual activity with many adults and is also often associated with gang culture. The young people who are subjected to sexual exploitation may also be involved with criminal behaviour and are often described as difficult to engage with helping agencies.
Derby's review highlights the difficulties professionals have in being able to keep the exploited young person's status as a victim of abuse intact when faced with out-of-control behaviour and an apparent unwillingness to seek help. The risk for such young people is that people give up on them. They are simply too hard to help - or worse people decide that they are not deserving of help.
Three main types of sexual exploitation

1. *Inappropriate relationships*
   Usually involving one perpetrator who has inappropriate power or control over a young person (physical, emotional or financial). One indicator may be a significant age gap. The young person may believe they are in a loving relationship.

2. *‘Boyfriend' model of exploitation and peer exploitation*
   The perpetrator befriends and grooms a young person into a ‘relationship' and then coerces or forces them to have sex with friends or associates.
3. Organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking

Young people (often connected) are passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities where they may be forced or coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. Often this occurs at ‘sex parties', and young people who are involved may be used as agents to recruit others into the network. Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised ‘buying and selling' of young people by perpetrators.
Signs and indicators of sexual exploitation

- Going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late. The periods of time away from home and the frequency of going missing may increase and this may become such a pattern that professionals lose patience and stop looking for them. Any child who goes missing is vulnerable to abuse and may be easily tricked by promises of affection and a place to stay.

- Disengagement from education: the young person may start skipping lessons or whole days and this behaviour is likely to escalate.

- Appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions: children who appear to have new clothes, jewellery, mobile phones or money that cannot plausibly be accounted for.

- Peers and friends: association with other young people involved in exploitation and with older boyfriends/girlfriends.

- Sexual health issues: a history of unprotected sex leading to sexually transmitted infections or inappropriate sexual behaviour.
Changes in temperament/depression: mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing. The young person may become aggressive and disruptive or extremely quiet and withdrawn.

Drug and alcohol misuse: young people may be introduced to drugs and alcohol by the abuser/s to create a dependency in order to control them.

Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviours, such as being over-familiar with strangers or sending sexualised images via the internet or mobile phones.

Involvement in exploitative relationships or association with known risky adults.

Talk of being taken to parties in distant towns or talk of being in cars with older men or a number of men.
Children in care

- Vulnerability of children in care
- Who are vulnerable children?
- Depends on the School community
- Equality Act 2010 – protected characteristics – must not treat a person less favourably because of a protected characteristic
- Isolation of children in care and mistaking grooming for genuine love and affection
Children in care

- Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s early report from the inquiry into children who go missing from care
- Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care
- Reforms to protect children in care from sexual exploitation
• Gang-associated and group associated sexual exploitation
• Girls in harmful, controlling relationships in gangs
• Commercial sexual exploitation
Abuse in the family

Triggers for concerns of sexual abuse:

• child missing school
• behaviour changes
• pupil losing or gaining weight
• reluctance to go home
Abuse in the family

- Making a referral
- Child protection procedures – notify family referral being made first?
- Threshold for local authority action – s17 assessment to determine whether child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm
- Threshold for policy action – beyond reasonable doubt
Abuse in the family

• What if police decide not to prosecute?
• What if social services decide not to take any action?
• Parental complaint – confidentiality, should have consulted family first
• Guidance on disclosing information
Barnardo's reports that sexual exploitation is increasing. The young people caught up in it are getting younger, the more organised form of sexual exploitation is increasing and abusers are becoming more sophisticated in their grooming techniques. The charity is calling for a minister to be given responsibility for the issue of sexual exploitation.
What should schools do?

• Offer sex and relationship teaching that covers sexual exploitation.
• Invite in local specialist services to talk to whole year groups or smaller groups of targeted young people.
• Find out about local multi-agency information-sharing forums. This information should be available on the local safeguarding children website.
• Display and distribute posters and leaflets about sexual exploitation and where a young person can seek help.
• Make child protection referrals as well as referring to specialist services that are most often voluntary agencies.
• Talk to parents and refer to education welfare when children start missing schools.
• Signpost parents to specialist services.
• Listen to young people and take their disclosures seriously.
• Do not give up on young people if they start to disengage with school.
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