More information about possible signs of child sexual exploitation can be found at: **www.paceuk.info/about-cse/spotting-the-signs/**

Child sexual exploitation – mobile phones and the internet

Many children with learning disabilities spend much of their time on their mobile phones or on the internet. An important part of this is looking to connect online with friends and contacts on social media.

However, child sexual exploitation on the internet and through social media is increasing. Parents and families should be aware that:

- Adults may pretend that they are a child to trick children into talking to them.
- Adults may pretend to be a child's friend to encourage them to do something like agreeing to send a photo of themselves or to meet them offline.
- Children with learning disabilities may not understand the consequences of sharing personal information, sending photos or arranging to meet strangers online.

Children should be helped to understand that:

- You can say "no" if someone asks to be your friend
- You should never meet with people you don't know or are not sure about

Why don't children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation tell their parents or families?

- They may not understand that they are being abused
- They may not know that it is illegal for an adult to have sex with someone under 16
- They may feel that something that is not right is happening but worry about what will happen if they tell someone.
- They may feel embarrassment and shame.
- They may have been told to keep it a secret or been threatened or blackmailed to believe that they must not tell anyone.
- They may feel there is no one that they can trust or who would believe them.
- They may feel that others will think it is their fault.

Remember that child sexual exploitation is never a child's fault – no matter how or why it happened.

What can parents and families do to help keep their child safe?

- Learn about child sexual exploitation and what they can do to keep their children safe.
- Develop open and trusting relationships with children so it is possible to talk about sex and relationships and how to say "no".
- Talk to children about child sexual exploitation and how to keep safe
- Make sure that young people know where and how to get help including speaking to family members and other trusted adults.
- Help your child to understand the possible consequences of sharing personal information, sending photos or arranging to meet a stranger

Who should be contacted if you believe a child is being sexually exploited

If the child is in immediate danger, call the **police** on **999**.

You can get help and support from:

- Your local council's children's services (also known as social services)
- **NSPCC free 24 hour Child Protection line** on **0808 800 5000**
- **PACE free helpline** on **0113 2405226**

Children and young people can talk to someone in confidence on **Childline** on **0800 1111** (free helpline and it's for young people up to the age of 19) or phone or text the **'Say Something' helpline** on: **116 000.** This helpline is for children to report any worries they have about themselves or other children being sexually exploited.

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Unprotected, Overprotected

An information leaflet about child sexual exploitation for parents and carers of children with learning disabilities

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This leaflet is for parents and carers to help them understand child sexual exploitation and how it can affect children with learning disabilities.

It provides information about why children with learning disabilities are at risk from sexual exploitation and what parents and carers can do to keep children safe.

Child sexual exploitation (sometimes called CSE):

- Is a type of sexual abuse that can happen to boys and girls under the age of 18 years old
- Is where children are used for sex by adults or other children

Child sexual exploitation can happen in lots of different ways:

- Children can be sexually exploited by an adult they know. This could be a family friend or someone who is trusted in the local community.
- Children can be sexually exploited by a stranger.
- Children may be sexually exploited by other children
- Be really nice and make them feel special
- Tell them that they are their boy/girlfriend
- Tell them that they love them
- Give them money, alcohol, food, mobile phones or other gifts
- Tell them that they will be their friend or boyfriend/ girlfriend if the child does what they tell them.
- These ways in which people prepare children for child sexual exploitation is called 'grooming'; some professionals describe it as 'brain washing'
- Children can be sexually exploited when they use the internet where they may be tricked or forced to:
  - send or post sexual pictures
  - take part in sexual activities on a webcam or video
  - have sexual conversations by text or online
  - arrange to meet a stranger in the real world.

Why are children with learning disabilities at greater risk of child sexual exploitation?

- They are not provided with knowledge or information about sex and relationships
- They are falsely assumed to lack sexual feelings or any desire for relationships.
- They may have a limited capacity to consent to sex
- They may have difficulties with communication and not understand what is being said or done

- Professionals, parents and carers may not know that children with learning disabilities can be sexually exploited and need to know about risks and keeping safe
- Children with learning disabilities may be lonely and isolated with few friends. Wanting to have friendships and relationships can leave them vulnerable to abusers.
- They may not recognise that they are being abused. They are also less likely to understand the consequences of what is happening.
- Many children with learning disabilities may not realise that anyone would lie to them or cause them harm.

Possible signs that your child may be sexually exploited

It can be difficult to identify that your child is being sexually exploited or groomed. This is because some of the possible 'signs' are the same as normal teenage behaviour. In addition, people who sexually exploit children will encourage them to hide what they are doing from you.

PACE, the national charity working with parents and carers of sexually exploited children, suggests that the following may be signs that sexual exploitation or grooming is taking place:

- Your child may become especially secretive and stop spending time with their usual friends
- They may not want to tell you where they have been or what they have been doing whilst they were from home
- They may spend time with older men, women or unknown people their own age
- They may become sexually involved with an older man or woman
- They may have mood swings
- They may go missing from home, return home late at night or stay out all night
- Children may receive odd calls and messages on their mobiles, social media pages or gaming account from unknown and possibly older people
- They may have new and expensive items that they can't afford such as mobile phones, iPods or jewellery
- They may make sudden changes in how they dress
- They make look tired and unwell
- They may have marks or scars on their body which they try to hide.
- They may have sexually transmitted infections or pregnancies