

Child Sexual Exploitation: Spotting the Signs

The following list of indicators is not exhaustive or definitive but does highlight some common signs which can assist professionals in identifying children or young people who may be victims of sexual exploitation. Signs include:

- Unexplained gifts
- Unaffordable new things (clothes, mobile) or expensive habits (alcohol, drugs)
- Drug use, alcohol abuse
- Going missing, running away, homelessness
- Disengagement with school, not in school, truancy, exclusion
- Repeat sexually transmitted infections; in girls repeat pregnancy, abortions, miscarriage
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Sexually risky behaviour, 'swapping' sex
- Association with older men, older boyfriend
- Hanging out with groups of older people, anti-social groups, other vulnerable peers
- Unexplained changes in behaviour or personality (chaotic, aggressive, sexual, withdrawn)
- Involved in abusive relationships, intimidated and fearful of certain people or situations
- Contact with known perpetrators
- Self-harming, suicide ideation, suicide attempts, overdosing, eating disorders
- Injuries from physical assault, physical restraint, sexual assault
- Getting into/out of different cars
- Seen at known places of concern, or 'hot spots'
- Moving around local areas, appearing in new towns or cities, not knowing where they are
- Involvement in gang fights, gang membership, abused by perpetrator groups or networks
- Engagement in offending, criminal activity
- Police involvement, holding a police record

NB: It is not the case that a set number of signs mean definitively that a child or young person is a victim of sexual exploitation. However, the more signs the greater the risk.