



Be aware

So be aware, stay alert and keep safe – use our top tips to protect yourself from exploitation.

Three top tips to keep safe

1 Trust yourself to know when something is wrong. If someone makes you feel unsafe, pressured or frightened, follow your instincts and seek help.

2 Don't trust people you don't know, even if they seem friendly – and make sure you know who you are talking to online. Never give away personal details or agree to meet someone who you have only talked to online.

3 Don't be tricked into doing things that are unsafe, even if they seem like fun. What might look exciting at first could be more dangerous than you realise.

If you are worried about a situation that you or a friend is in, talk to an adult that you trust as soon as you can. People who can help you include teachers, parents, carers and social workers.

You may also want to contact one of Barnardo's specialist sexual exploitation projects for advice, or to talk to someone about what you've been through:

www.barnardos.org.uk/specialist_sexual_exploitation_projects

If you, or a friend, are in immediate danger or want urgent help, call 999 or contact your local police.

Be aware,
stay alert,
keep safe!

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Barnardo's

How to keep you and
your friends safe
from exploitation



Keep
safe

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Think about all your different relationships.

They could be with close friends, a boyfriend or girlfriend – and maybe groups of friends from school or the area you live in.

As we grow up, we develop relationships with lots of different people. It's how we learn to enjoy healthy relationships, and that's a great skill to have.

But things can go wrong along the way, and people might try to take advantage of you, forcing you into dangerous situations before you know it.

That's why you need to be aware of warning signs that someone may want to exploit you – and to be very careful who you trust.

Sexual exploitation – how much do you know?

Sexual exploitation can be hard to recognise because you often believe you're in a good relationship with the person – or people – who want to abuse your trust in them.

It could be a friend, or group of friends. It could be someone you think of as a boyfriend or girlfriend. It could be a person or a new group of people you've only just got to know. It could be someone you've talked to online.

But whoever it is, they could use clever ways to take advantage of your relationship – and that means you can be harmed almost before you know what's going on. For example, someone might give you money, drugs, alcohol, gifts or somewhere to stay and then force you to do one or more of these things in return:

- Have sex with them
- Do something sexual to them
- Be touched inappropriately, in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable
- Look at sexual images – including films or pictures
- Watch them do something sexual, including having sex or touching themselves sexually.

That's why it's so important to look out for the warning signs that someone's behaviour towards you may not be all it seems.

Who can you trust?

It's not always easy to tell.

Sexual exploitation can happen to you, no matter what your gender, age or background – so you need to be careful who you trust.

And that means looking out for warning signs that someone might want to take advantage of you, whether you've recently met them or they belong to an existing group of friends.

One warning sign is when someone tries to get to know you better by giving you lots of attention and making you feel really special. They might buy you gifts or involve you in activities that seem exciting or fun.

It becomes a problem if that person starts to try ways of controlling you, such as making promises they can't keep, threatening you, or even becoming violent if you don't do what they want.

They might also try and isolate you from your friends, family and other people who care for you. When that happens, it's easier for an abuser to put you in dangerous situations or force you to do things you don't want to do – with them or other people they know.

That's not doing you a favour – that's exploitation.

Sadly, individuals who have fewer people looking out for them are even more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Jessica was one of them.

Jessica's Story

'My mum wasn't around any more, my dad was drinking and my sister was skipping school. I was 15 and got involved with a group of friends outside school – they were older. At first I thought it was really cool to have older friends, I didn't think there was anything wrong with it – they were drinking and there was a lot of drugs around.

'I thought, if they were doing it – then it must be okay. There was a lot of peer pressure to get involved. But nothing told me it was wrong. Anyway, at first it was okay – I could get the money from my dad. But after a couple of weeks, I was getting hooked and there wasn't enough money.

'My new friends said that it was fine and introduced me to a new male friend. They said he fancied me, they said that I should go out with him. I didn't realise what was happening – I was being set up. After I had slept with him – I realised that I'd been used but it was too late, I was hooked on drugs. The need and the want became more and more.'

Barnardo's now works with Jessica to help her recover her confidence and break free from the cycle of abuse.

But her story shows how difficulties at home and the excitement of older 'friends' meant she was quickly drawn into an abusive situation.



Stay
alert