

# How to know if a child is being criminally exploited?

**It can be hard to tell if a child is being exploited as there are different forms of child exploitation, and young people respond differently depending on their individual experiences and circumstances.**

**Which is why for many parents and professionals understanding what signs of exploitation can look like is key.**

## Spotting the signs that may indicate that a young person is being criminally exploited:

- Comes into possession of money, clothes, jewellery, mobile phones, etc without plausible explanation
- Has new friends – particularly older people (young people or adults)
- Starts to not see their “usual” group of friends
- Starts missing school
- Their behaviour in school deteriorates
- Their mood changes, their behaviour at home changes – usually for the worse
- Spends excessive amount of time on their phone, receiving lots of messages – but are very secretive about who is messaging them
- Stays out late
- Comes home under the influence of drugs and / or alcohol

# How to help your child?

**The main way you can help your child is to talk to them. Contrary to what we might think, children see their parents as their main source of information and rely on them for help to navigate difficult subjects and issues. Make sure your child knows they can talk to you about anything.**

**Spend time with your child:** know who their friends are, take an interest in their interests, their friends, what they are doing online. This makes it easier to know if something changes.

**Talk to your child about exploitation:** this will vary depending on their age and understanding – but talking about not accepting gifts, the importance of parents knowing where they are and being able to talk to you if something doesn't feel right are all areas that can be spoken about no matter what age the child.

**Try and find a time to have a conversation uninterrupted,** this could be in the car when driving as some people find difficult conversations easier when not face to face. Just make sure there is enough time for any questions. Always reassure your child they can talk to you, no matter what.

## Want further help?

**If you are worried your child is a victim of exploitation then talk to someone – their school, NSPCC helpline, another parent – are all good places to start.**

If you think your child is in danger, then contact Essex police. Children who are being criminally exploited are not criminals, they are victims and need support to escape their exploiters.

CEOP (child exploitation and online protection) has lots of resources for parents and children which explain exploitation, particularly online exploitation.

**NSPCC**