

**Be aware
Stay alert
Keep safe**

**Believe in
children**



Barnardo's

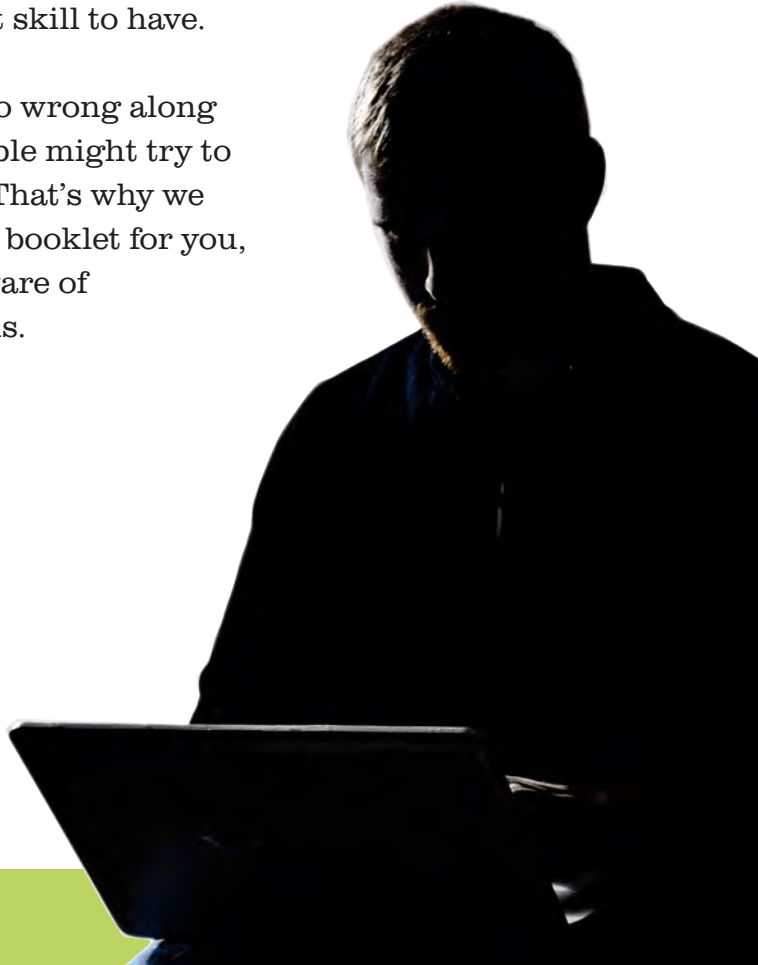


How to keep you and your friends free from exploitation

Think about all your different relationships – they may be with close friends, a boyfriend or girlfriend, or 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. That's why we have created this booklet for you, to help you be aware of the warning signs.



Sexual exploitation – how much do you know?

Sexual exploitation can be hard to recognise because you can believe you're in a good relationship with those 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 might use clever ways to take advantage of your relationship – and that means you can be harmed almost before you know what's going on. Someone might give you money, drugs, alcohol, gifts or somewhere to stay, for example, 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
- Ask you to have sex or do something sexual with another person, sometimes telling you that they will hurt you if you don't



This is why it's important to look out for the warning signs that someone's behaviour towards you may not be all it seems. Read on to learn more.

Who can you trust?

It's not always easy to tell.

You need to be careful who you trust, because sexual exploitation can happen to you no matter what your gender, age or background.

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



One warning sign is that 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.

This can become a problem if that person starts to try and control or threaten you. They might also try to isolate you from your friends, family and other people who care for you, or even become violent if you don't do what they want.

When that happens, it becomes 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 with other people they know.

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

Sadly, children and young people 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 is now working 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.



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

1

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.

2

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

3

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

If you are worried about sexual exploitation, or you believe that someone is trying to take advantage of you, talk to a trusted adult 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:

If you call our supporter care number 0800 008 7005 they will be able to give you the contact details of your nearest Barnardo's sexual exploitation service.

You can also call ChildLine on 0800 1111 any time you need to talk. Calls are free and confidential and they are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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



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Email: Supportercare@barnardos.org.uk

To protect the identities of those we work with, names have been changed
and models have been used.

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