

Practice Consideration:

Although the ways in which we respond to child sexual exploitation need to reflect the complexities of this particular form of abuse, **victims of child sexual exploitation are due the same degree of protection and support as any other victim of sexual abuse.**

Address misconceptions about who perpetrates and experiences child sexual exploitation. We need to talk openly with all children and young people about these issues if we are to properly protect them from harm.

Recognise that the receipt of something by the child or young person does not negate the abusive nature of the act. Taking advantage of this need or desire, and making the child/young person think they are in control or somehow responsible because they are getting something, can be part of the perpetrator's strategy.

Challenge any perception of victims being in some way responsible for what has happened to them. Any sense of judgement or blame must be eradicated for children and young people to share what is happening to them and seek support. This includes avoiding 'victim-blaming' words and actions, and thinking about the unintended consequences of what we say or do.

Become better at identifying vulnerability and harm in adolescence. We need to exercise professional curiosity and consider what might be behind the presenting behaviours.

Understand that not all sexual activity that appears consensual is necessarily so. Abusive contexts undermine capacity to give consent (see section 4).

Locate child sexual exploitation within a wider understanding of harm and vulnerability. This involves making connections with other vulnerabilities and forms of abuse and ensuring our response addresses those related concerns.

Recognise that a child or young person's vulnerability is not the reason they are sexually exploited. The reason is that someone is willing to take advantage of this vulnerability and the absence of adequate protective structures around the child and their family (see section 3.2).

Recognise and support continuity of professional relationships. Positive consistent relationships are needed to offer a sense of care, safety and commitment, to develop trust and to counter-balance the negative 'relationships' often associated with child sexual exploitation.

Recognise that many children and young people will not see themselves as victims, nor want our support or intervention. Balancing safeguarding responsibilities with a child-centred approach is challenging. If we do not approach this with sensitivity and understand the victim's viewpoint, we may further isolate them from the help they need (see section 8 and annex B).

Adopt a 'whole child' approach. This should: (a) consider the wider needs, vulnerabilities, strengths and resources of the child or young person; and (b) focus

on their wider life circumstances and recognise them as more than 'victims of child sexual exploitation'.

Consider the needs of young people 18 and over. Sexual exploitation does not cease just because a young person turns 18. We know that many young people, including those with additional vulnerabilities such as learning disabilities or being in care, require support after they turn 18. Professionals should ensure they are familiar with the guidance and legislation relating to transitions and safeguarding adults in need of care and support, and liaise with adult services at the earliest opportunity.