Somerset Youth and Community Service

Keeping your son / daughter safe – sample guide for parents and carers

**<Name of Youth Club>**

**Keeping your son / daughter safe**

**A guide for parents & carers**

**Abuse can happen anywhere, but we can all help our children and young people stay safe**

**Introduction**

All parents and carers want to protect their children from abuse. This booklet will help, by explaining the different types of abuse and other things to look out for.

**What is child abuse?**

Most people want children and young people to be safe, but there are some who wish them harm. These people can be in the family, friends of the family, at school or at clubs and activities that young people attend.

In most cases, children are abused in the family home or by someone known to the family, but not always. It’s good to know who is in your son / daughter’s life.

The process by which a young person is prepared for sexual abuse is called grooming and this can happen over days, months or years. Parents may be groomed too, so that the abuser can get easier access to the child or young person. A young person with good self-esteem, confidence and awareness may be able to protect themselves from this process.

Any adult (aged over 18) who works with a child or young person is in a ‘position of trust’ and it is an offence for them to have any sexual contact with that young person, whether or not the young person feels that they have given consent.

You should always pay attention to any adult who give too much attention to your child – for example giving gifts, favours or money, taking them on outings or looking for ways to be alone with your son / daughter.

There are four main categories of abuse:

**Sexual Abuse**

Sexual offenders come from all levels of society and all backgrounds. They may try to take up positions that give them access to children and young people (e.g. coach, teacher, teaching assistant, youth worker, carer).*Both boys and girls can be sexually abused in the following ways:*

* Full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex and groping
* Showing young people pornographic images
* Asking or encouraging young people to take part in the creation of images (taking photos and selfies)
* Grooming in preparation for abuse

*What to look for:*

* Unexplained or untreated bruising or injuries
* Stomach pains
* Discomfort when walking
* Unexplained sources of money
* Inappropriate drawings, language or behaviour
* Aggressive, withdrawn behaviour or fear of one person
* Unaccounted-for presents or money

**Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse can be through hitting, shaking, poisoning, biting or burning in ways which cause injury. In certain situations, abuse may occur when the nature and intensity of training exceeds the capacity of the young person’s body. Physical abuse includes giving young people alcohol or drugs and can take the form of peer to peer bullying.

*What to look for:*

* Unexplained or untreated injuries
* Injuries on unlikely parts of the body
* Cigarette burns, bite or belt marks, scalds
* Fear of going home, receiving medical advice or parents being contacted
* Flinching when touched
* Refusal to discuss injury, covering arms or legs
* Frightened or withdrawn

**Neglect**

Where adults:

* Fail to meet a young person’s basic needs (e.g. food, warmth and clothing)
* Constantly and inappropriately leave a young person alone or unsupervised
* Fail or refuse to give love, affection or attention
* Fail to prevent harm – for example, missed doctor or dentist appointments or allowing someone else to abuse a child or young person

Neglect might also occur during organised activities if young people are placed in an unsafe environment, are exposed to extreme weather conditions or are at unreasonable risk of being injured.

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| *What to look for:* |  |
| * Lonely, no friends | * Poor personal hygiene |
| * Constantly hungry | * Underweight |
| * Inappropriate clothing | * No parental support or interest |
| * Constantly tired | * Dishevelled appearance |

**Emotional abuse**

This includes persistently subjection of a child or young person to emotional ill-treatment, bullying or deliberate rejection. It may also affect young people who live in households where there is domestic abuse or inappropriate parental expectation. It also includes:

• Persistent lack of love and affection

• Frequently shouting at young people

• Taunting young people

• Over-protection leading to poor social skills

Other behaviour is categorised under headings such as belittling, humiliating, shouting, scapegoating, rejecting, isolating, threatening and ignoring

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| *What to look for:* |  |
| * Over-reaction to mistakes | * Extremes of emotion |
| * Sudden speech disorders | * Self-harm |

**Other things to be aware of:**

These are types of abuse that often involve two or more of the above categories.

**Child Sexual Exploitation**

* CSE is a form of sexual abuse
* Children and young people are forced or manipulated into sexual activity in exchange for something – e.g. money, gifts, drugs and alcohol, accommodation, affection, status
* It may be seen by the young person as consensual, but its based on power imbalance and limiting the victim’s options

*What to look for*

* Staying out late and no-one knowing where they are
* Going missing for short periods or days at a time
* Starting to miss school, college or work
* Distancing themselves from family and friends
* Changes in behaviour / appearance
* Increase in drug or alcohol use
* Change in academic performance
* Being secretive about where they’re going or who with
* Sexualised behaviour
* Being collected by a stranger
* Having many new things they can’t explain

**Child Exploitation (also known as ‘County Lines)**

This is where gangs and organised crime networks exploit children to sell drugs. They use dedicated mobile phone ‘lines’ to supply drugs. ‘What to look for’ is similar to that mentioned in ‘Child Sexual Exploitation’

**Domestic Abuse**

* Can be physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, financial or sexual
* Domestic abuse happens between adults, but affects the child
* Witnessing domestic abuse is recognised as ‘significant harm’ and can be emotional abuse
* 62% of children and young people in households where domestic violence happens are also harmed
* The perpetrator may also be physically or sexually abusive to the child or young person
* Being involved can adversely affect the ability to parent

**Online Abuse**

Text, email and all sorts of social media used against young people for:

• Bullying

• Sexual activity

• Grooming in preparation for abuse

For most young people, it’s not an option to switch off their phone

**Modern Slavery**

The most commonly seen forms of this are:

• Sexual

• Labour

• Domestic servitude

About 33% of cases involve under-18s.

**Female Genital Mutilation**

* A procedure where the female genital organs are injured or changed and there is no medical reason for it.
* It’s frequently a very traumatic, painful and violent act that can cause long term health problems
* It can be carried out shortly after birth, during childhood or adolescence, just before marriage or during a woman’s first pregnancy
* It is illegal to subject a girl or woman to FGM or transport them so it can happen
* 10,000 girls under 15, and 125,000 women, are living with the consequences in the UK
* It can be done for cultural reasons (hygiene, purity and control) where families believe it to be beneficial

**How can you help keep your son or daughter safe?**

* Talk them about their lives, listen carefully to their concerns and reassure them they’ll always be listened to.
* Get to know their friends
* Talk about healthy and unhealthy relationships and check they know all they need to about sex
* Discuss what are good and bad secrets to keep
* Talk about child abuse in an age appropriate manner, including appropriate and inappropriate touching
* Have a family code word in case your son or daughter gets into a bad situation and needs you to collect them, without letting those they’re with know you’re coming
* Take an active interest in what they do on the internet
* discuss the importance of not giving personal information
* talk about the dangers of sending sexually explicit messages and photos
* Ask if they really know who they’re talking to and the problems around meeting people on line
* Encourage them to feel confident about saying ‘no’ and refusing to do anything that feels wrong or frightens them.
* Tell them to make a fuss loudly and run away if they’re approached inappropriately.
* Encourage them to tell you if someone (even someone you know) does something they are uncomfortable with. **Most abusers are not strangers**.
* Make sure they know that, even if they’ve been breaking family rules, they can tell you and you’ll sort it out. Young people often conceal abuse for fear of getting into trouble.
* Know where your son or daughter is, who they are with and when they will be home. Ensure they know where you are and how to contact you
* Take time to listen to them and show you care

**Check out the clubs and groups that your son or daughter attends**

Things to think about, before your son or daughter joins a club or group,

* Talk to other parents about the group – do they trust it?
* Ask the staff or volunteers if they’ve been DBS checked and how long they’ve been involved with the group
* Ask for the group’s child protection and staff vetting policy – they should have one.
* Do they take references for staff and volunteers?
* What training have staff and volunteers had?
* Ask the police or local council if they know of the group
* Is the club or group – and the people who run it - well known in the community? Has it been running long?
* Is the club known to other clubs or services, or affiliated to any larger organisation?
* How are the young people supervised? Are individual young people ever alone with adults?
* What are the toilet arrangements?
* Are parents encouraged to get involved?
* What are the first aid arrangements?

If you have any doubts about the group, contact Somerset Direct.

Once they’ve joined the group, drop-in from time to time to see what’s going on. Talk to your son or daughter about the activities and listen carefully to see if they’re reluctant to attend. Keep talking to other parents.

**What do I do if my son or daughter tells me they’ve been abused?**

* Most importantly, stay calm and listen to your child
* Believe them, listen attentively and let them know that it was right to tell someone about their worries
* Make sure your son or daughter feels safe and knows they are not to blame for what has happened
* Don’t react in a way which will upset your child. Don’t tell them off if the abuse has occurred because they disobeyed you.
* Let them say as little or as much as they want. Don’t try to get more information than they are willing to give.
* Explain that you have to tell someone about the abuse and contact Children’s Social Care via Somerset Direct (0300 123 2224) or the police about it
* Remember, the police and social workers are highly trained and will deal with your concerns sensitively.
* Get support for yourself

Don’t worry that you may make things worse by reporting your concerns – few things are worse than allowing serious child abuse to continue.

Many children and young people are devastated by the experience of abuse and, in the most serious cases, may be seriously harmed or have their lives threatened.

If you suspect your son or daughter has been abused you’ll probably be very upset and feel anger towards the abuser. DO NOT confront the abuser; seek help and report your concerns – there are organisations to help you.

**Remember** – these guidelines are meant to help you feel comfortable about your son or daughter’s safety. Most adults are not abusers, so you need not be frightened, or frighten your child, unduly.

By following the advice in this booklet, you’ll help protect your son or daughter and help them protect themselves – developing independence and self-confidence.

It’s important to keep a sense of perspective about child abuse. Remember:

* Most adults will never hurt a child
* Children and young people should be allowed to become independent and learn to look after themselves – there’s no need to wrap them in cotton wool

**<Name of Youth Club>**

**If you want to know anything about how we look after young people at our youth club, please contact:**

**Youth worker:**

**Safeguarding lead:**

**Chair of <Name of Youth Club> Management Committee:**

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