

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Explained to Children

This document explains briefly what is child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Who is a child?

- Anyone under the age of 18.
- This is what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recommends. It is the main document agreed by most countries which identifies what children should be able to do (what their rights are) and what adults have to do to protect these rights.
- Children change dramatically from birth until 18 so you can exercise your rights differently but 18 has been set as the age when you are no longer a 'child'.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

- Child sexual abuse is when a child (under 18) is involved in any sexual activity to which they cannot or do not consent (or give permission) to because they are too young or not able to understand it.
- A sexual activity can be defined as when someone is touching or watching another person's private parts in a way that feels not ok. Child sexual abuse can happen between a child and an adult, but also with another child.
- The child victim of sexual abuse might be forced or threatened into a sexual activity, and they may also be manipulated into doing something sexual. Manipulation is when someone tricks a person, or uses a reward or the promise of it to get them to do something. Child sexual abuse can also happen when a child has to perform a sexual activity for someone who has power over them.
- Girls, boys and children who identify differently can all be victims of sexual abuse.
- Children under a certain age should never be involved in any sexual activity, even if they give permission. They are too young to understand sexual activity and the consequences it can have.

What is the age of consent?

- Certain countries have adopted laws to clarify the 'age of consent' - that is the age under which no sexual activity should happen. Over this age of consent, sexual activity can happen under certain circumstances, between children, in respectful and agreed manners. Adults should never have any sexual activity with a child.

What types of actions can be considered child sexual abuse?

Any type of sexual activity between a child and an adult, or an older child or if the child is used to give sexual pleasure to another person. There does not need to be in any physical contact or touching for child sexual abuse to happen. Trying to see the private parts of a child, saying sexual comments or showing unwanted inappropriate sexual images can also be abusive.

What is child sexual exploitation?

- Child sexual exploitation is when a child is used sexually by an adult (or another child) and the child victim is promised or given money, gifts or favours. A gift could be food or clothes. A favour could be a promise of good grades, shelter or protection etc.

Who

can be a victim of sexual exploitation and abuse?

- Child sexual exploitation and abuse can happen to any girl, boy or a child with a different gender identity. It happens when the adult or child exploiting them has more power than them, influence or can manipulate them.
- Sometimes when children are in vulnerable situations like being homeless, moving from their home, dealing with drug abuse, or living in poverty or in violent situations, they may be more likely to be exploited because they may need the money, gifts or favours being offered to them.
- Children who are sexually exploited can sometimes feel ashamed, or fear to be judged when they think they may have done something that led to the situation, such as sharing an intimate image, or accepting to meet someone without telling their parents. A child is NEVER responsible for their sexual exploitation, no matter what they have done or under what circumstances they have been abused and exploited.

Who can sexually abuse or exploit a child?

- Child sexual abuse and exploitation is usually committed by adults but can also be committed by other children. They are often known to the child and may even be one of their family members, or someone trusted and in a position of power like a teacher, sports coach, a family friend, a neighbor, a religious leader. It can also be a stranger, or someone met online.
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation can happen between children, and with romantic partners.
- It is therefore important that children understand what is acceptable and what is not, and recognize when they feel unsafe. It is good if they can identify situations that could be risky but children should never feel guilty for any form of sexual abuse or exploitation they may suffer. Children who feel unsafe should talk to a trusted adult, or contact a Child Helpline in your country for support: childhelplineinternational.org

What is Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse?

- Sexual exploitation of children can happen online as well as in person. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse happens when the internet, digital and communication technologies are used to facilitate the sexual abuse and exploitation of a child. It can happen in various forms and can be a mix of online activities and in-person interactions.

What

are some of the forms of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse?

- This is for instance when a person is using the internet as a way to connect with and manipulate a child in order to sexually abuse them online or when meeting in person.
- Sometimes children are forced or manipulated into doing sexualized things on webcams, or materials such as images, videos or even audios of sexualized nature are made about a child, and shared on the Internet. These are called child sexual abuse materials and are prohibited by law.
- It can also happen when a child makes intimate materials of themselves and these are stolen or shared without permission, or they are threatened to do things or pay money so that the material is not shared.
- It is also considered online child sexual exploitation and abuse when children are sent unwanted messages or materials of sexual content.

What is Grooming?

- Grooming is when someone builds a relationship with a child in order to trick or manipulate the child to engage in sexual activities. The person tries to grow the trust of the child over a short or long period of time.
- Grooming can happen online or in person. People will often use social media, chat rooms, online games and websites that are popular with children. They can pretend to be a child. They can also praise the child, pretend to develop a romantic relationship to gain their trust and convince them to engage in sexual activity, online or in person, or request intimate materials from the child.

What

is Child Sexual Exploitation in the context of travel and tourism?

- This is usually when adults (or other children) travel, for work, volunteering or for tourism and take advantage, encourage or force a child to engage in sexual acts.
- This can happen when traveling within the same country but also when traveling abroad - this means that the person who abuses the child can be from the same country or a foreigner.
- Places where travelers go like hotels, private accommodation, train and bus stations, bars and restaurants are places where child sexual exploitation can happen.
- Sometimes people travel and volunteer in organizations, like shelters, child care centers and schools and take advantage of these to groom and sexually exploit children.
- All these companies, like hotels, airlines, transport companies, tour guides, entertainment actors, digital companies or banks all have a role to play to prevent sexual exploitation from happening. ECPAT works with them so that they take measures and protect children.

If you are interested to read more, you can visit ECPAT's website:
[Child and Youth Participation - ECPAT](#).

The United Nations Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children also offers lots of child-friendly resources on violence against children:
[Child friendly materials | UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children](#)