

Dear Parent/Carer,

Sexual and criminal exploitation of children – will you spot the signs?

The exploitation of children is, sadly, a growing problem and has a devastating impact on those directly affected and their families. It happens, and it happens here, in Essex. This is not just involving older children, even primary age children are being drawn into exploitation. It is never too soon for our children to learn how to keep themselves safe.

Essex Police is working hard to tackle these awful crimes but we cannot do it alone. As a parent or carer with responsibility for a child I am asking for your help. Please be aware of the warning signs together with the help and advice available to you.

Exploitation - what is it?

Sexual exploitation involves a child being manipulated, forced or deceived into sexual activity often for financial gain or to build status or control.

Criminal exploitation involves a child being coerced to commit criminal activity. This is often associated with gangs and the selling of illegal drugs.

The warning signs

- Is your child regularly going missing, coming home late or persistently absent from school?
- Do they have new or older friends different to their normal social group?
- Do they have money, expensive-looking clothes or a new phone you didn't buy for them?
- Are they being secretive when using their phone or the internet or perhaps making / receiving lots of calls and texts?
- Has their mood changed or have they become withdrawn or aggressive?
- Are they harming themselves or displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour?

These are indicators. They do not always mean a child is being exploited, but, please see them as a potential 'warning sign'.

A new hotline number – 01245 452058

If you are worried, please call us. You will not be wasting our time. A team of Essex Police officers and staff are on standby to listen, help and offer advice. The line is open Monday to Friday 08:00-16:00 with a voicemail facility outside of these hours.

As a parent of school age children myself I would encourage you to talk to your child / children about these potential dangers. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Prophet
Assistant Chief Constable

You can more information and advice about child exploitation on the Essex Police website
<https://www.essex.police.uk/advice/child-sexual-exploitation>