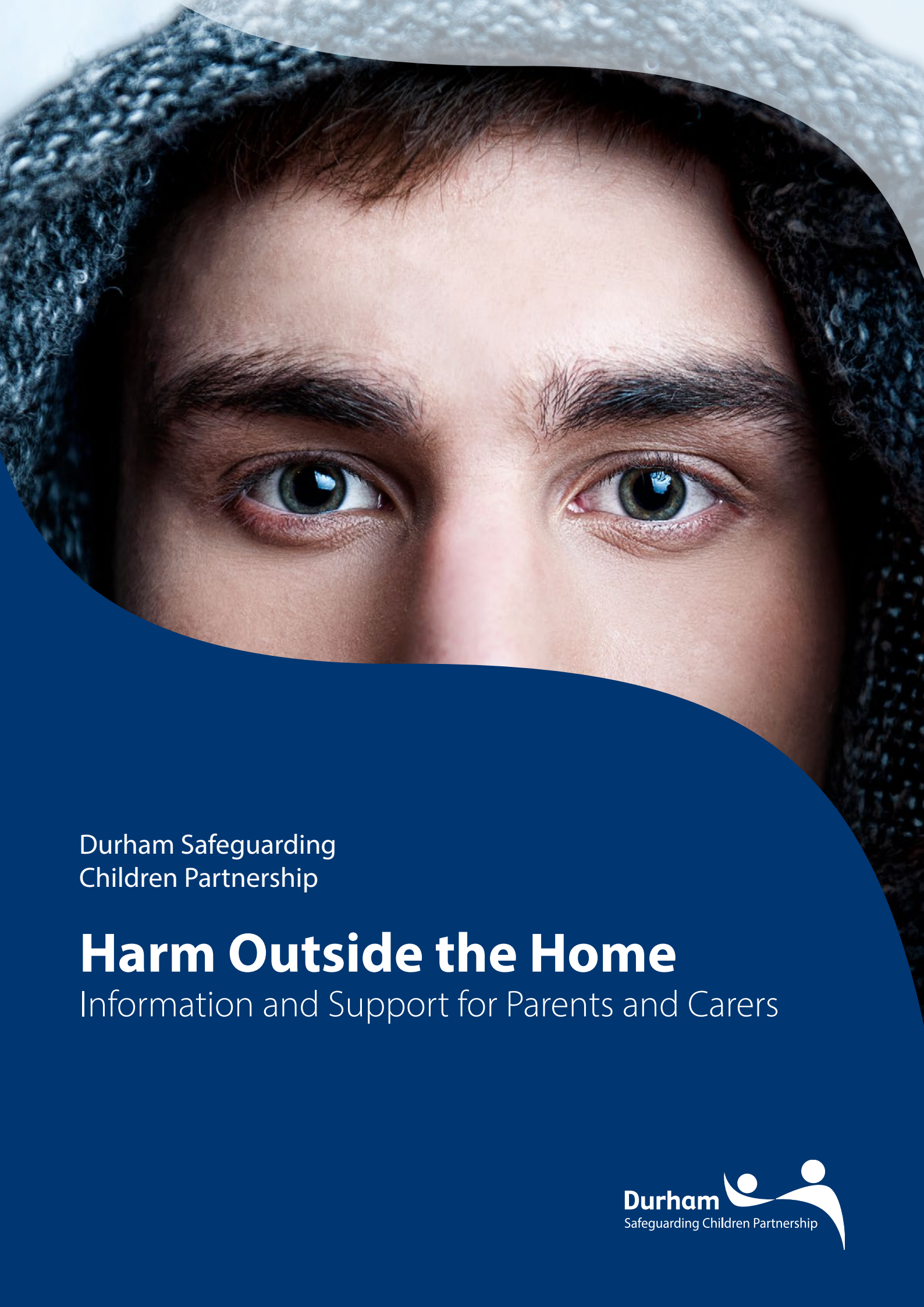




Durham Safeguarding
Children Partnership

Harm Outside the Home

Information and Support for Parents and Carers



What is Harm Outside the Home?

There are different types of abuse that can happen to children of all ages, from individuals, groups of people or gangs who aren't connected to your family. These people can be adults or other children and young people. The abuse can happen in school, in the community and online. We call this Harm Outside the Home. You might also hear it being called 'Child Exploitation'.

What does Exploitation mean?

Exploitation is when an individual or a group of people take advantage of another person so that the abuser benefits from it. This often means getting the person who is being exploited to do things they might not do otherwise. The abuser does this by having power over the other person. Abusers will often identify something that a child wants or needs. It could be something physical like money or expensive clothes, or it could be emotional, like affection or attention. They will give the child what they think they want, but they will expect something in return for this.

It's important to remember that abusers can be very manipulative. You and your child may not recognise the harm at first because abusers may pretend to be kind and nice when they are grooming the child. However, abusers may also use intimidation and violence, and they may threaten the child that something bad could happen to them or their family. The way children are harmed varies and each situation is unique. Here are some examples of different types of Harm Outside the Home:

Child Sexual Exploitation

Individuals, groups of people or gangs take advantage of (exploit) children to take part in sexual acts, often using force, threats or manipulation. Sexual exploitation can happen in person and online. The child may not realise they are being exploited and can sometimes think this is part of being in a relationship. Abusers are clever – they will show affection and buy gifts to make children think they care about them, but they also use threats or violence to get children to do what their abusers want them to do.



Child Criminal Exploitation

Criminal and organised crime groups or individuals force children to commit offences like shoplifting, stealing cars, burglaries or getting involved with drugs, for example by drug dealing or delivering parcels. Drug dealing is sometimes called 'county lines'. This is where networks of drug dealers and criminal gangs use children to move and sell drugs across the country or county. This behaviour is often forced, but it may not always look like this. Children are often asked to do favours, then when they try to say no, they are threatened.

Sextortion

Sextortion happens online, where people (including adults, who may pretend to be a child themselves) will manipulate a child into sending indecent pictures to them. They then use these pictures to blackmail the child into handing over money or more pictures. Sextortion is a form of Child Sexual Exploitation.

Modern Day Slavery and Trafficking

This is where children and young people are forced to work or are controlled by others and they cannot leave, even if they want to. It includes things like:

- **Human Trafficking** – when a child/young person is moved somewhere to be exploited
- **Forced labour** – when a child/young person is forced to work and there will be consequences if they don't
- **Debt bondage** – when a young person is trapped in work to pay off a debt they can never repay (for example drug debts)



Radicalisation

This is how a child/young person comes to support extreme ideas or actions, including those that could lead to violence or harm to others. It involves a child/young person being influenced or groomed – online or in person – by individuals or groups who want to convert them to a cause. It can include spreading hate based on race, religion or politics.

‘Push and Pull’ Factors

Abusers will often look for something happening in the child’s life that they can exploit, for example any additional needs that a child may have. We call these ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors.

‘Push’

Push factors are things that makes life a bit more difficult for the child, where they may feel sad or lonely and this is pushing them away from their family and friends. These may be in the home, such as parents separating, parents having their own struggles, a house move or money worries. Or it could be trouble at school, stressful exams, a friendship breakdown, or bullying. Abusers take advantage of these push factors by giving the child what they need.

‘Pull’

Using the push factors, abusers may create a pull towards them, by offering attention and affection to a child feeling lonely and sad, or offering money and gifts to a child whose family cannot afford the latest designer clothes.

Many families have times in their lives where there are difficult situations – even simple things like the stress of a house move or exams, which are perfectly normal life experiences. This isn’t about blaming parents – instead it is to help you understand how abusers exploit what is happening in a child’s life to their benefit. If parents understand push and pull factors, then this can help you think about how best to support your child the best you can.



What to look out for?

Possible signs of Harm Outside the Home

Some behaviours may simply be part of normal child and teenage development. However, it's important to pay attention to changes that seem unusual for your child. Often, a shift in behaviour – especially if it's out of character – can be one of the most significant signs that something might be going on:

Changes in Behaviour and Mood

- **Increased secrecy** - Children may become unusually private, avoiding discussions about their day or whereabouts
- **Mood swings** - Noticeable shifts in emotions, such as sudden anger, sadness or withdrawal
- **Fearfulness** - Expressing fear or anxiety about certain individuals or situations

Physical signs

- **Unexplained injuries** - Bruises, cuts or burns without a clear explanation
- **Sexualised behaviour** - Taking part in or showing inappropriate sexual behaviours or knowledge for their age
- **Physical marks** - Signs of restraint or injury, such as rope burns or bite marks



Social and Friendship Group Changes

- **New relationships** - Associating with older individuals or unfamiliar people
- **Isolation** - Becoming distant from family and long-standing friends
- **Unexplained absences** - Frequently going missing from home or school without clear reasons

Changes relating to Money and Presentation

- **Unaccounted-for possessions** - Receiving gifts like mobile phones, clothes or money without clear sources
- **Sudden wealth** - Displaying expensive items that your child couldn't afford



Online and Digital Behaviour

- **Secrecy** - Guarding their phone/tablet/laptop and digital accounts, or spending time online with strangers
- **Increased screen time** - Spending more time online, often late at night or by themselves
- **Using new or different language** - For example, slang or code words related to drugs, sex or gangs

School and Social Withdrawal

- **Decline in school performance** - Dropping grades or not taking part in educational activities
- **Loss of interest** - No longer taking part in hobbies or activities they previously enjoyed
- **Crime** - Involvement in theft, vandalism or other criminal offences



What support is available?

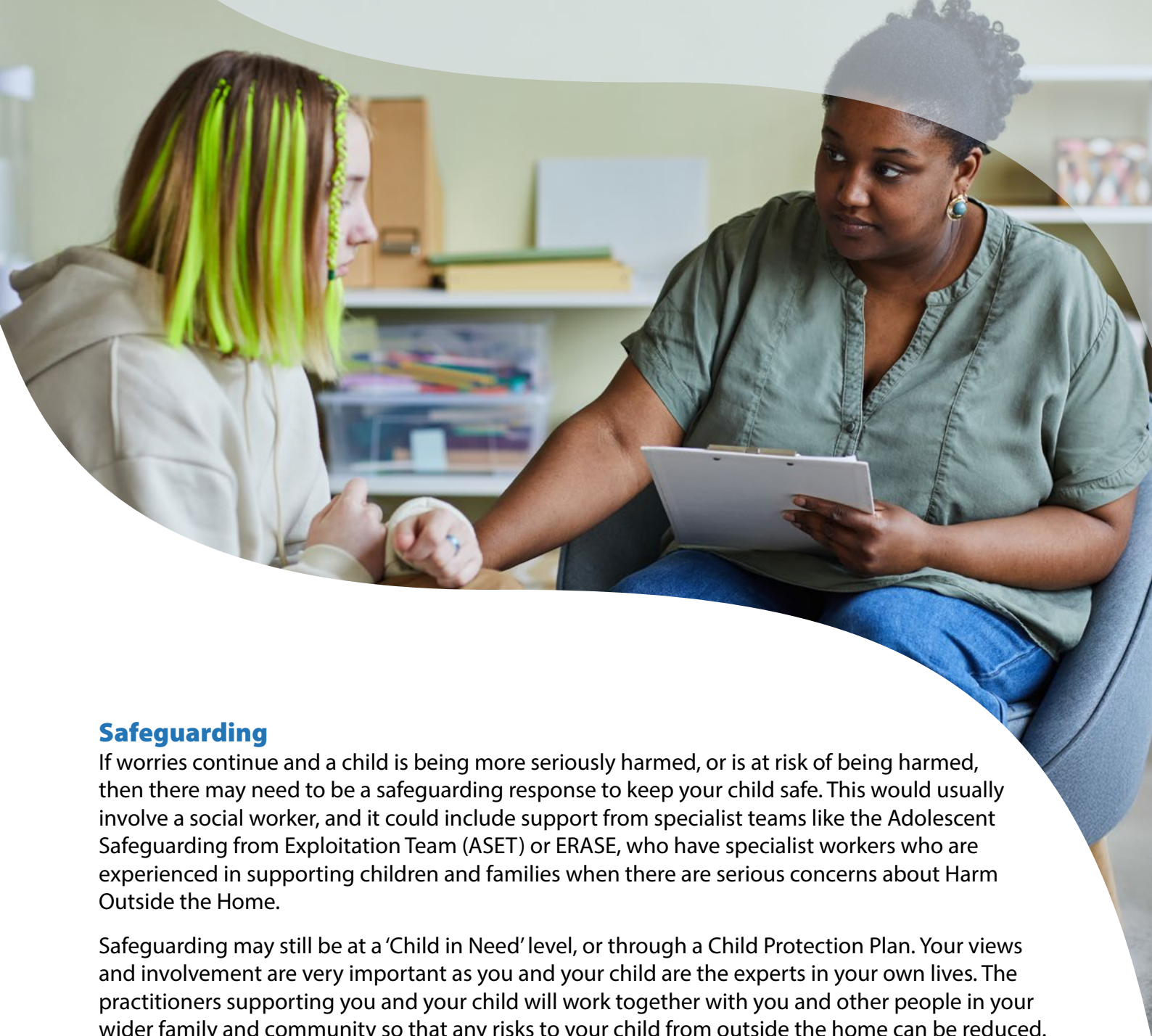
Universal Help – available to everyone at any time

Some worries can be supported by the workers (practitioners) and services already involved in your life, such as school, GP, health 0-25 service, health visitor, school nurse, family hubs, any youth or sports clubs, any community-based services that offer support, and online resources. You can speak to the people around you and your family to ask what support they can offer and what is available in your local area.

Family hubs have a fantastic offer to support children and parents/carers when there are some low-level worries that your child may be at risk of exploitation. The practitioners around you might suggest getting together as a group to help you have a plan of support and help you talk to your wider family about the worries and how they can help.

Family Help - when things start to get more worrying

If worries start to increase, then you and your child might need support from more experienced practitioners. This might be a family worker or a social worker. This would be at 'Early Help' or 'Child in Need' level, where you or practitioners are worried that without more support, the risks to your child will increase, so we need a clear plan of support. This includes monthly meetings where you, your child (if they want to), practitioners and wider family can come together, check in and make sure that everyone is doing what they need to for things to get better.



Safeguarding

If worries continue and a child is being more seriously harmed, or is at risk of being harmed, then there may need to be a safeguarding response to keep your child safe. This would usually involve a social worker, and it could include support from specialist teams like the Adolescent Safeguarding from Exploitation Team (ASET) or ERASE, who have specialist workers who are experienced in supporting children and families when there are serious concerns about Harm Outside the Home.

Safeguarding may still be at a 'Child in Need' level, or through a Child Protection Plan. Your views and involvement are very important as you and your child are the experts in your own lives. The practitioners supporting you and your child will work together with you and other people in your wider family and community so that any risks to your child from outside the home can be reduced.

In the most serious of situations, if we are unable to work together to keep a child safe in their home and community, then a child may become looked after by the Local Authority. This is known as a child in care. This will always be a last resort to keep a child safe and wherever possible, this decision would be made with you.

Important things to remember:

- Parents, wider family, practitioners and communities working together is the best way to keep a child safe from exploitation
- Being respectful and open is important for relationships – we always want to work with parents as partners
- Getting support at the right level is important to make sure the right help is provided



How might you be feeling?

Emotional and Psychological Effects on Families

Feelings of Guilt and Self-Blame

Parents may question their actions or inactions, wondering if they could have prevented the exploitation. Self-blame can lead to depression and anxiety. Parents can speak to wider family and practitioners to make sure you have the support you need.

Anger and Frustration

There can be intense anger towards the abusers, services or even the child for their involvement. This anger may be made worse by feeling powerless. It's understandable that you might react to situations, for example if your child commits a crime or has been missing and is brought home by police. You may question why your child is behaving this way. It's important to try to not share your frustrations with your child. Remember, behind the behaviour you see is an abuser and your child may be doing things out of fear or because they are being manipulated.

Isolation and Stigma

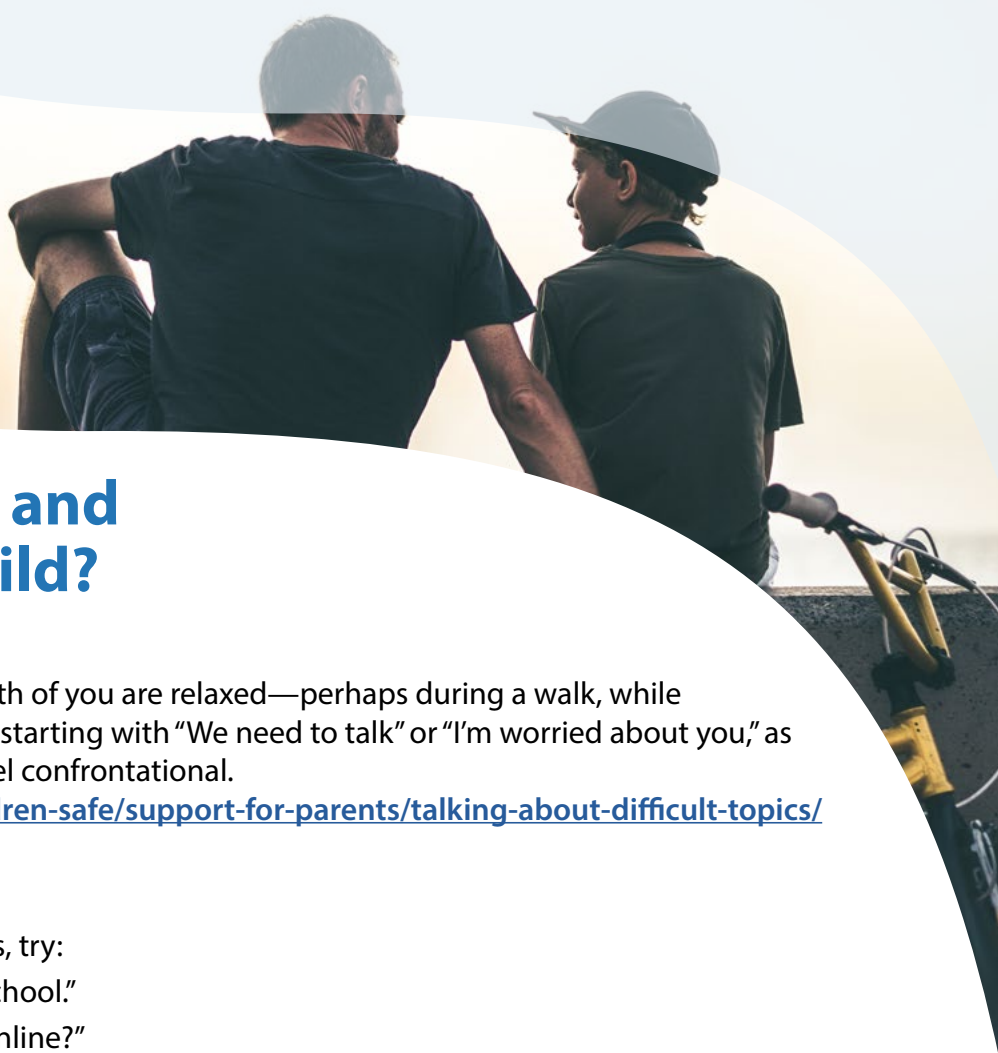
Families often feel isolated, either due to the stigma associated with exploitation or because they feel that others don't understand their situation. This isolation can get in the way of families seeking support. Being open with others in your network of family and friends can provide you and your child with more support and help you to face difficulties together.

Strained Relationships

The stress of dealing with exploitation can lead to conflicts within the family, affecting parents' own relationships and relationships between brothers and sisters. This is normal but can also create more 'push' factors that abusers can take advantage of.

Fear and Anxiety

Constantly worrying about your child's safety and wellbeing may lead to difficulties sleeping or ongoing anxiety.



How to respond and support your child?

Choose the Right Moment

Find a calm, private time when both of you are relaxed—perhaps during a walk, while watching TV, or at bedtime. Avoid starting with “We need to talk” or “I’m worried about you,” as this can make the conversation feel confrontational.

www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/talking-about-difficult-topics/

Use Open-Ended Questions

Instead of asking yes/no questions, try:

- “Tell me about your friends at school.”
- “What do you do when you’re online?”
- “Has anything ever made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?”

This invites your child to share their experiences without feeling pressured.

Listen Without Judgement

Even if your child doesn’t want to talk make sure that they know you are always there when they are ready.

If your child opens up, listen attentively and without interrupting. Reassure them that they are not at fault and that you believe them. Avoid expressing anger or disbelief, as this may cause them to shut down.

Normalize the Conversation

Let your child know that talking about difficult topics is okay and that you’re always there to listen. Regular, casual check-ins can make it easier for them to come to you when something is wrong.

Reassure and Empower

Help your child understand that exploitation is never their fault. Empower them by discussing safe boundaries, how to recognize manipulation, and how to say no. Encourage them to trust their instincts and to come to you with any concerns. Let’s stop abuse together.

Could you spot the signs of child sexual abuse? Get confidential advice and support to help keep your child safe.

Useful Resources

Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership – additional information about Harm Outside the Home
www.durham-scp.org.uk

Definition of Exploitation; video including British Sign Language
www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/child-abuse-and-harm/definitions

Information and resources to educate on child sexual abuse and exploitation
www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/child-abuse-and-harm/child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation

Information and resources to educate on child trafficking
www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/child-abuse-and-harm/child-trafficking

Talk to Frank, CONCERNED ABOUT A CHILD - an excellent resource for anyone, either professional or parent/carer - covers street names, risks, dangers, education etc.
www.talktofrank.com/get-help/concerned-about-a-child

Free information and support for parents and carers, including information on teenage behaviour
www.durham.gov.uk/article/30894/Courses-and-groups-to-support-you-with-understanding-your-child-or-teenager-s-behaviour

Find out more about what your children might be doing online and give you some simple, practical and easy advice on the steps you can take as a parent to keep them as safe as possible.
www.durham-scp.org.uk/parents-and-carers/online-safety/

Fearless is the dedicated youth service of the independent charity Crimestoppers. We give people the power to report crime 100% anonymously.
www.crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/parents-guardians

County Lines is the police term used for the criminal exploitation of children and young people involving the movement of drugs; It comes with the associated harms to the young person such as sexual exploitation, violence and human trafficking.
www.crimestoppers-uk.org/about-us/who-we-work-with/trusts-and-foundations/county-lines

Advice for parents and carers on how to talk to your child about relationships, sex and consent
www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sex-relationships/healthy-relationships/

Planning to talk to your child about sex, relationships and their lives online can be tricky. Find lots of advice about these complex areas here.
www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/Listing/?cat=&ref=4765

Information and support for families affected by criminal and sexual exploitation
www.ivisontrust.org.uk/

