

CSE Research: Short films for practice Research Briefing Note #5



Safeguarding teenagers from sexual exploitation and violence outside the home

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Text of the Film

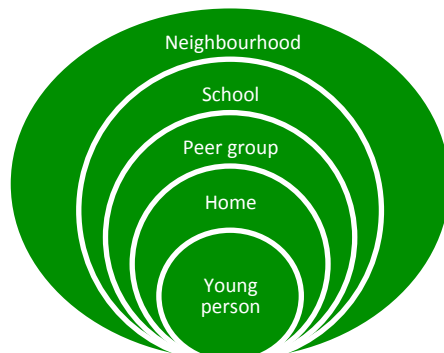
"We need to think more broadly about where young people are at risk of sexual exploitation and violence.

Teenagers in the UK spend more and more of their time outside the home as they get older: in school, with their friends, at the local park, shopping centre or cinema. Their peer group can be more influential than their family when it comes to setting standards of what is 'normal'. We know that child sexual exploitation often occurs around transport hubs, local shops and other public spaces. Young people tell us that gang-related violence is strongly associated with the kinds of neighbourhoods they live in.

So if we want to take the abuse of teenagers seriously we've got to think about these contexts. We need a safeguarding system that can assess risk and intervene to protect young people beyond the boundaries of their homes."

Research Summary

Literature on young people's experiences of violence and abuse indicates that young people may experience harm in a range of social spaces in addition to their homes (Berelowitz *et al.* 2012, Messerschmidt, 2012; Beckett *et al.*, 2013; Catch 22, 2013; Firmin, 2013), with peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods being increasingly important during the adolescent period.



Contextual safeguarding model (Firmin 2013)

Young people's peer groups have been found to be particularly influential at setting social norms (Warr, 2002): young men in violent peer groups have been found to be more likely to be abusive in relationships than those in violent homes (Chung, 2005; Barter *et al.* 2009), and attention to 'delinquent' peers is said to be critical for addressing harmful sexual behaviour amongst young people (Letourneau and Borduin, 2008; Henggeler *et al.*, 2009).

Violent peer groups form in environments in which young people feel unsafe and in need of protection (Pitts, 2008; Hallsworth and Young, 2011). For gang-affected young people, witnessing or experiencing violence on the street is an evidenced driver for serious youth violence (Pitts, 2008; Beckett *et al.*, 2013). Some models of child sexual exploitation also manifest in public spaces– with parks, shopping centres, fast food outlets and hotels all identified as locations in which young people have been sexually abused (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2012).

While school can be a protective factor for many young people, research has also documented their experiences of sexual harassment and other forms of peer-on-peer abuse in this environment (EVAW, 2010). Schools have also been sites of peer recruitment into abusive, and sometimes organised, networks of exploitation (Berelowitz *et al.*, 2012).

While child protection and safeguarding structures routinely engage with the impact that abuse within the home can have on young people, they are yet to consistently engage with these other social environments (Ofsted, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Firmin, forthcoming 2015). Yet, they are all spaces upon which young people are dependent for their development (Jenks, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2012), and, as a result, inform their identities and capacity for choice. In recognising this, some local authorities and police forces have worked with hotels and taxi firms to identify exploitation, or have closed down licensed premises that pose a risk to children - demonstrating a willingness to take a more 'contextual approach' to safeguarding (Ofsted, 2013). In order to prevent the sexual exploitation of young people all agencies need to assess, and intervene with the environments in which this abuse occurs - even when they are beyond the home.

Questions for practice reflection

You may want to begin to adopt a contextualised approach to safeguarding by exploring these questions.

- Which environments in my local area have been associated with child sexual exploitation and are there any trends in environmental data e.g. do the same parks, schools, streets appear on referrals?
- Is a young person's choice 'risky' in and of itself, or is it 'risky' because of the environment it is being taken in? For example, is it always a risky choice to go to a park or is it risky only when the park is unsafe? If it is the latter how can the park be made safe?
- Do you target environments when planning interventions or just the young people in them? Is there space to do both? What would that look like in your area?

**Is there someone you know who would benefit from seeing this short film?
If so, take a minute to pass it on http://youtu.be/K_jgQMtpztE**

To cite this film

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The International Centre

Increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking

The International Centre at the University of Bedfordshire is committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international contexts. This is achieved through:

- academic rigour and research excellence
- collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
- meaningful and ethical engagement of children and young people
- active dissemination and evidence-based engagement in theory, policy and practice



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Staff at the International Centre work collaboratively in teams with internal and external staff on applied research, evaluation, consultancy and training. We prioritise a focus on children and young people's participation, taking this seriously in all aspects of our work.

The University of Bedfordshire has been awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education for The International Centre's pioneering research into child sexual exploitation. This prestigious prize is the highest form of national recognition open to higher and further education institutions in the UK.

What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?

The following definition of CSE is that used in the government guidance 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation' (DCSF, 2009, p.9)

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.