



# CHILD EXPLOITATION

## Parents Support Pack

Merton recognises and supports the commitment that parents, carers and families have for their children.





# Parents Support Pack

This pack is designed to help parents and carers understand what is happening to their child and how parents are the prime agents in helping their child exit exploitative relationships.

The pack is divided into areas that may be of concern for parents, families and carers.



# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
What is Exploitation	4
If your child is missing	8
Living and coping with Child Sexual exploitation	10
Understanding online risks	12
Alcohol and drugs	16
Important things to consider about discourse's of sexual exploitation	18
Disruption tools available to the police	19
Support agencies and contacts	20
Grooming Line	21
Glossary of Terms	22

Within this leaflet the term **child** refers to any person **under the age of 18** years



# What is Exploitation

## Criminal Exploitation

Children as young as 12 are being put in danger by criminals who are taking advantage of how vulnerable these young people are. Criminal exploitation is also known as 'county lines' and is when gangs and organized crime networks exploit children to sell drugs. Often these children are made to travel across counties, and they use dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs.



## Sexual Exploitation

Children or young people in exploitative situations and relationships receiving something such as gifts, money or affection as a result of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.



## Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery

Children or young people are trafficked into the UK as part of organised crime in which these individuals are treated as commodities and are exploited for criminal / sexual gain. For example they are moved or transported by force to work or in some cases are even sold. They are also forced into marriage, domestic servitude such as cleaning, childcare and cooking.



## This leaflet will focus on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

CSE is when an abuser manipulates, coerces or forces a child or young person into performing sexual acts.

Abusers are usually older males, but they can sometimes be of a similar age or be female. They are very sophisticated in the way they operate, meaning what they do is well thought out and planned.

An abuser will know areas to target. They are skilled in approaching children or young people in person or may use

a younger man or woman, or boy or girl, to make the initial contacts. Some use the internet or mobile phones to engage the child or young person.

To do this they may use threats and/ or violence, introduce them to alcohol or drugs and create a dependency, or make the child or young person feel special through attention or gifts, or pretend to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. They will also aim to alienate them from their friends and family.

This is sometimes referred to as the grooming process.

Because of the grooming process children or young people don't usually know that they are being drawn into sexual exploitation or realise that the situation they are in is abuse. They often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening.

### Who does it affect?

This type of abuse could happen to any young person from any background. It happens to boys and young men as well as girls and young women.

The victims of abuse are not at fault. Abusers are very clever in the way they manipulate and take advantage of the young people they abuse.

### How does it happen?

Many young people are groomed by an abusing adult who befriends the young person and makes them feel special by buying them gifts or giving them lots of attention. They may use threats and/ or violence, introduce them to alcohol or drugs and create a dependency, or pretend to be their boyfriend or girlfriend. Young people may be targeted online or in person.

In most cases the abuser will have power of some kind over the young person. It may be that the abuser is older or more emotionally mature, physically stronger, or that they are in a position where they are able to control the young person.

There are some situations that can make young people more vulnerable to exploitation; by becoming distant from the people who would usually look after them. Young people who are having difficulties at home, regularly go missing or have experienced care may be particularly vulnerable.

## Spotting the signs

### Missing from home

This might be returning home late, staying out over night or missing school. They might be defensive about where they have been, who they have been with and what they have been doing.

### Phone

Receiving excessive or strange messages or phone calls from people you and/or they don't know. Having adults as friends on social networking sites.

### Gifts

Coming home with new expensive items that they couldn't normally afford like phone, jewellery, new trainers or computer games. Or talking about people who give them free food or cigarettes.

### Adult friends

Associating with or developing close relationships with people over 18. They may give them lifts or invite them into adult activity like drinking, parties or even offer them the chance of a job.

### Alcohol or drugs

Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs on a regular basis. Particularly alcohol that is normally associated with adult drinking.

### Moods

Changes in mood, maybe acting secretive, withdrawn or aggressive.

### Injuries

Having marks on their bodies which they try to conceal.

### Sudden change

In friendship groups, music taste, clothes, behaviour, school attendance.

### Cars

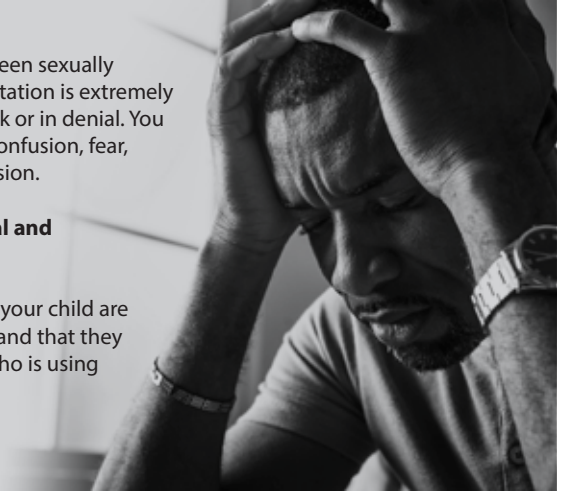
Getting picked up or dropped by unknown people, or talking about going to new places.



Finding out that your child is being, has been sexually exploited or is vulnerable to sexual exploitation is extremely upsetting. You might find yourself in shock or in denial. You may have feelings of anger, guilt, upset, confusion, fear, embarrassment, helplessness and depression.

**These feelings and reactions are normal and understandable.**

It is important to remember that you and your child are not to blame for your child's exploitation and that they have been targeted by an adult or peer who is using your child's vulnerabilities against them.



## If your child is under 13 years of age

# <13

The law states that children under the age of 13 years cannot consent to sex.

## If your child is over 16 years of age

# 16>

If your child has reached 16 or 17 (and legally able to consent to sex) this does not mean that they are no longer at risk of sexual exploitation.

In almost all cases involving grooming the child's ability is challenged by the imbalance of power between the child and the abuser, the control exercised and the manipulation or use of force.

The fact that a young person is over 16 years old and has reached the legal age of consent should not be taken as a sign that

they are not at risk of sexual exploitation. These young people are still defined as children under the Children Act 1989 and 2004. They can still suffer significant harm as a result of sexual exploitation and their right to support and protection should not be ignored by services because they are over the age of 16, or are no longer in mainstream education.

The information in all other sections of this pack relates to children **under** the age of 18 years



# If your child is missing?

**If your child is missing you must report them as missing to the police.**

One of the most common signs of child sexual exploitation is if your child is going missing. It is then really important that you report your child missing to the police every time they go missing, even if this is happening on a daily basis.

This means that Police and other professionals can build a true picture of your child's risk and take action.

## Phone

Before calling the Police

**Check where they might be**

**Try to speak to them or friends**

**Check where they last were (e.g. school)**

**Check they are not hiding somewhere at / near home**

**Search local 'hang outs' that they go to**

**Ask other people to check as they may not want to speak to you**



It is frequently thought that you should wait 24 hours before reporting somebody missing, but this is NOT TRUE.

You can make a report to the police as soon as you have done as much as possible to find your child and that you believe them to be missing.

If you have spoken to your child and they have given you their location but you cannot be sure this is where they are and that they are safe, still call the Police and pass this information on and your concerns. You can inform the police that your child is at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and that you are worried about their safety.



**You can report your child missing by visiting your local police station, or over the phone by dialing**

# 101

**which will automatically transfer you to your local police.**

**When you call the police, you are often put through to a call-handler rather than an officer.**





You need to tell them that you are calling to report a child missing. If this is not the first time you have reported your child missing, you should inform them that your call relates to an on-going concern about your child being missing and child sexual exploitation. The call handler will then ask for your location and the length of time your child has been missing.

When you have given this information, the call handler will either put you through to a police officer, or request a police officer to call you back or visit you at home.



It is important to note that the police officer may not call back or visit you till later after you have made your call (it is often when they have availability of officers). It is important that you ask for the police incident number for your future reference. If the police visit your home they will want to search your child's bedroom.

When you are contacted by a police officer, try to take some notes and you can also ask them for:

- Their name, collar number, telephone extension and email address.
- Contact details for the child sexual exploitation specialist team within the force (if they have one).
- Contact details for the Missing Person Coordinator.



When you have reported your child missing to the police, they will make an assessment of the level of risk to your child. Your child's age, situation, possible reasons and circumstances of them being missing (eg whether or not they have been reported missing before) will dictate the level of investigation they will carry out.



Parents will often continue to search for their child once they have been reported missing to the police. However, it may be good for

**It is important that you ask for the police incident number. Keep it for future reference.**



somebody to stay in the family home in case your child returns. Check with the police about what you will do whilst they are conducting a search, to avoid things being done again.



Your child may return on their own and it is important to let Police know they have returned. If they are located by the police then they will most likely undertake a 'safe and well check' within 72 hours of the child's return, this can differ from force to force. It may be carried out by a third party or another agency or person, to whom the child may find it easier to disclose exploitation.



The Return Home Interview aims to explore the reasons why the child went missing and looks for chances to prevent any further missing episodes.



This is often not straightforward in the case of child sexual exploitation. The child will often refuse to share their whereabouts or who they were with. This can be out of loyalty to the exploiters, or because they have been groomed to believe they are in a consensual relationship.



# Living and coping with Child Sexual Exploitation

**It is important to remember that you and your child are not to blame for your child's exploitation and that they have been targeted by an adult or peer who is using your child's vulnerabilities against them.**

Many parents on discovering that their child is being sexually exploited often is concerned or worried how they talk about the subject with their son or daughter

Raising the subject directly, but gently – and avoiding conflict with your child is the best way to try to manage this. We also suggest that you speak to your child in the language that they understand, rather than in terms of abuse, exploitation or adult language.



The most important thing is for your child to feel that they can always come and talk to you, no matter what they have to say; and that you will always be there for them. Groomers have a deliberate aim to separate your child from you, so your relationship is bound to come under great difficulties. It is important for you to make sure your child is still loved and wanted by you and your family whatever has happened.

When talking with your child it's important to remember that it's medically proved adolescents brains continue to develop and change and their understanding of risk is limited. What seems dangerous to you or I will not to them (even if they can understand the danger or risk "it won't happen to them").



**Knowing your child is experiencing exploitation can be very distressing for you and your family. It is important that you and your partner and other children still continue to include all family members in activities and daily life.**

**It is important that parents and carers seek support for themselves so they can cope with the demands of a young person experiencing exploitation.**

**(See back page for numbers)**

**Many parents feel particularly upset that their child had been suffering abuse for some time before it was discovered or disclosed. The following points offers some reasons that may have stopped your child from telling you.**

- No understanding of the abuse happening
- Belief that the abuser loves and cares for them and that they are in a relationship
- Difficulty in talking about sex and sexual relationships
- Length of time that might have gone by from the time of abuse
- Not knowing who to tell
- Anxiety, embarrassment and shame
- Fear of not being believed or of being judged or rejected
- Fear for personal and family safety
- Dependency on abusers (emotional or for substances)
- A sense of powerlessness and/or isolation
- Numbness of feeling ('It happened to someone else')
- Fear of disappointing loved ones and losing family and friends.
- Fear of "getting into trouble" for crimes they may have been involved in during exploitation
- Feeling they owe the abuser



Your relationship with your child may be extremely difficult when they are in an exploitative and abusive situation. It is important to remember that you can still care for your child's, if they are still living in the family home. Still preparing a hot meal for your child, even if they have been missing for several hours and do not return until late into the night gives a message to your child that you still care and love them. Some parents told us they would put a hot water bottle in their bed, tell their child they were glad they came home and they loved them and leave them to rest before questioning them. Parents have said that giving this space has given both the child and the parent/carer the opportunity to have a calmer chat in the morning or later in the day.



When working with families , parents and carers we often ask if they could keep a note of all incidences, times and dates , number plates of any cars they see, descriptions of any adults or peers, anything new the child comes home with or any notable differences in the child. This supports professionals and agencies to work with your child and can assist in investigations.

Professionals working with your child will be able to support, advice and direct you to other support services who can offer you guidance.



**Please always ask for help whenever it is needed.**



# Understanding online risks

**Children growing up today might not see a difference between 'online' and 'offline' worlds and being online is very much a part of their normal social experience. Technology moves quickly and it can be difficult for parents and professionals to keep up and to know what safeguards might help reduce the risks children could encounter online.**



Mobile phones are often used by groomers in grooming a child. Many parents struggle where and how to set the boundaries when it comes to mobiles.

There are a number of ways parents can reduce risks with their child and mobile phone. We acknowledge that some of these boundaries may be difficult to put in place, however this is where support from professionals can be useful

**1.**

Consider taking a child's mobile from them at night when they go to bed.

**2.**

Turning off Wi-Fi overnight or at specific times

**3.**

Ask friends/families to follow your child's social media accounts

**4.**

Limiting ability to send photo messages

**5.**

Limiting ability to download or buy apps

**6.**

Monitor what "apps" are being used

**7.**

Install on your own phone apps such as Selfie Cop, an app that will send a copy of any photo taken on the mobile to the parent.

**8.**

Monitor or have rules as to where phones can be used - isolated areas such as toilets and bathrooms are a no go.

If possible, keep a list of your child's usernames, pins and passwords for all of their social media accounts as this information could be passed on to the police as and when required or necessary.

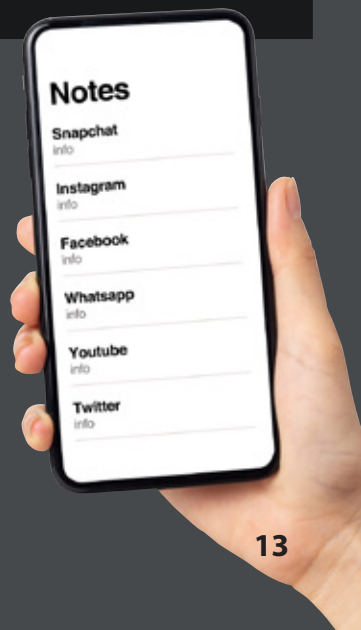
Through a site's 'privacy settings' you are usually able to control:

- Who can search for you
- Who sees what you share (Note: It is a good idea to restrict accounts for young people to friends only.)
- Who can post information about you

It is important that you stay up-to-date with the privacy settings for any social media that your child uses and to help them stay in control of their profile. Remember that your child may change the settings so check regularly.

The following link will give you access to a step by step guide to parental controls guides for Broadband, mobile, smartphones, social media search engines and more such as apps

<https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>



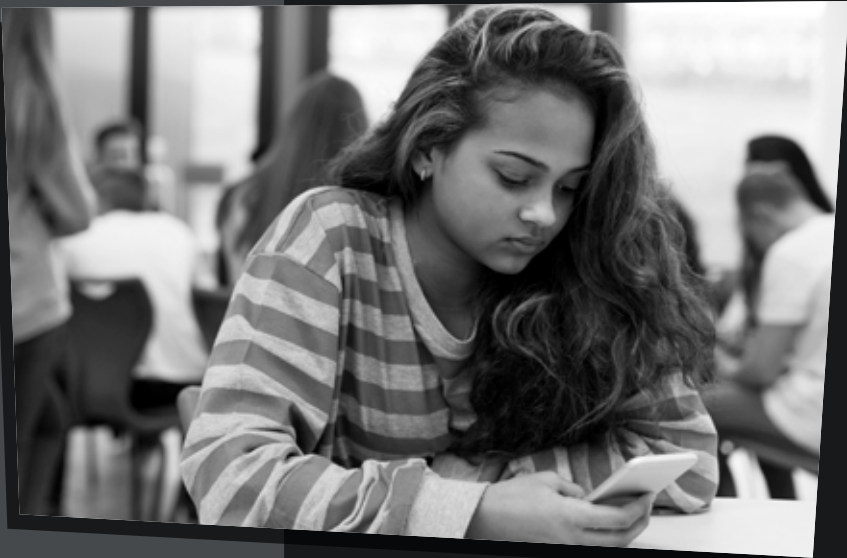
**Sexting, or the sending of a sexually explicit image, can be a feature of sexual exploitation.**

**The reality is that many children are sharing images of themselves.**

**What happens?**

Once a child shares an image of themselves, they might be blackmailed by the perpetrator and could feel ashamed, cornered and worried about what would happen if their images were shared.

If a child does share an image of themselves, it's important to tell them that whatever happens things will be ok. Retrieving or removing the image might not be possible, but there are ways to report indecent images.



The picture opposite from [www.Thinkyounow.co.uk](http://www.Thinkyounow.co.uk) shows a young person sending an image and how parents can support their child and help get a positive outcome

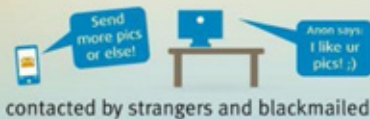
You should always report to the police or inform a professional you trust if you discover that your child has been sharing images on line and social media.



## When Chloe sent a naked selfie to a boy



### Without help the image could spread



### But when her parents noticed she was upset



Need help talking to your children about what they share?

visit: [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)





# Alcohol and drugs

**Alcohol and drug usage is often used by groomers during the grooming process. This can be so they are unable to fight back.**

If your child returns home under the effect of large amounts of alcohol or drugs, it is important that they have plenty of water and that they are not left alone. It is important to remember the dangers of having a bath under the influences of drugs or alcohol. Children under the influence of drugs may be likely to panic and may be disorientated, so it is important to keep calm, stay with them and help them to breathe slowly.



**Remember that groomers have a deliberate aim to try and keep your child away from you, and have a form of power and control over your child.**

**It is important for you to make sure your child is still loved and wanted by you and your family whatever has happened.**



**For more detailed information on the effect of drugs on young people, visit [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)**



## TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS

As a parent or carer, it is important to discuss with children the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships to help highlight potential risks to them.

There are also a number of practical steps you can take to protect children such as:

### Support them

Spend time with your child, support them and let them know you love them. Remind them that if they ever have a problem or are concerned by something/someone they can come to you.

### Encourage

Encourage them to talk to you about anything, remind them it's ok for them to ask questions or share things with you even when things have gone wrong.

### Know their friends

Know who their friends are, talk about them with your child and be cautious of any friends or older people who seem to have power over them.

### Stay in touch

Make sure that when they take their phone with them, it's charged and has credit or can be used to message you for free. Being on the same network often means you can message each other for free or there are simple apps available that can help you stay in touch.

### Know where they go

Know where they go to hang out, make sure you feel it's an appropriate place for your child to be.

### Plan ahead

If they're going out encourage them to have a plan of how they are getting where they are going and how they are getting back. Ensure they have got enough money for this plan and agree a time to return home.

### Talk about it

If your child seems to be receiving free gifts/things from someone encourage them to think about what that person might want in return.

### Take an interest

Take an interest in your child's online life; the people that they're friends with, talk to, game with and the photos they post or receive. If they want to meet up with people offline make sure they take an adult with them and meet in a public place.

### Give advice

Drinking alcohol and taking drugs can make children unaware of risky situations and can make them a target for someone who may want to hurt them. If you think your child is drinking chat to them about the dangers, how to know their limits and how to seek medical help if they or a friend feels unwell.

### Restrict access online

Help your child stick to age restrictions on games, websites, videos and apps. If they are designed to be used by adults then chances are your child will be interacting with people older than them. Ask yourself if you would feel uncomfortable if your child was chatting to lots of unknown adults in the street and apply the same.



# Important things to consider about disclosures of sexual exploitation

**Do not become cross with yourself up if you cry and feel angry– it is a natural response to seeing your child’s being upset.**

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**When your child has showed they have told you as much as they feel able, tell them again that you believe them**

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**Try to write down what your child said including any dates, time’s names and locations.**

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**Do not be tempted to add anything or take anything away from what your child has said.**

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**If the rape or sexual assault is recent, it is strongly advisable that you call the police, even if the child does not want you to.**

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**Remember you can also report information anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.**

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# Disruption tools available to the police

**There are a number of disrupting actions that are available to the police. These may be applied for by a higher ranking officer if your child is being sexually exploited. We have not included all the actions the police can use but below is one action that is often used by the police and local authorities.**

## **Child Abduction Warning Notices**

These can be issued against individuals who are suspected of grooming children by stating that they have no permission to associate with the named child and that if they do so they can be arrested under the Child Abduction Act 1984 and Children Act 1989.

They can be a useful tool for parents because they require a statement from the person(s) with parental responsibility for the child. This is important if you identify a risk as a parent, but your child insists that the person is a legitimate 'friend' or 'boy/girlfriend'.



**Child Abduction Warning Notices are only able to be issued for children up to the age of 16 if they are living at home and 18years if they are in the care of the local authority.**



# Where to go for help support agencies and contacts

**PARENTS AGAINST  
CHILD EXPLOITATION:**

<https://paceuk.info/>

**BARNARDOS:**

[https://www.barnardos.org.uk/  
what\\_we\\_do/our\\_work/sexual\\_  
exploitation.htm](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/sexual_exploitation.htm) 0800 0121552

**NSPCC:**

[https://www.nspcc.org.uk/  
preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-  
neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-exploitation/)

**Helpline 0808 800 5000**

**LONDON BOROUGH  
OF MERTON:**

<https://www.merton.gov.uk/>

**CRIME STOPPERS:**

<https://crimestoppers-uk.org/>

**CHILDLINE:**

**0800 1111**

**CEOP – (ONLINE ABUSE  
OR EXPLOITATION) :**

**0370 496 762**

## THE GROOMING PROCESS

### Targeting stage:



- Observing the child/young person
- Selection of child/young person
- Befriending – being nice, giving gifts, caring, taking an interest, giving compliments, etc.
- Gaining and developing trust
- Sharing information about young people between other abusive adults

### Friendship forming stage:



- Making young people feel special
- Giving gifts and rewards
- Spending time together
- Listening and remembering
- Keeping secrets
- Being there for them
- 'No-one understands you like I do', being their best friend
- Testing out physical contact – accidental touching
- Offering protection

### Loving relationship stage:



- Being their boyfriend/girlfriend
- Establishing a sexual relationship
- Lowering their inhibitions – eg. showing them pornography
- Engaging them in forbidden activities – eg. going to clubs, drinking, taking drugs
- Being inconsistent – building up hope and then punishing them

### Abusive relationship stage:



- Becomes an 'unloving' sexual relationship
- Withdrawal of love and friendship
- Reinforcing dependency on them – stating young person is 'damaged goods'
- Isolation from family and friends
- Trickery and manipulation – 'you owe me'
- Threatening behaviour
- Physical violence
- Sexual assaults
- Making them have sex with other people
- Giving them drugs
- Playing on the young person's feeling of guilt, shame and fear



# Terms used in relation to Child Exploitation

- 1. Exploiters** - someone who uses other people for their own advantage

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- 2. Grooming** - the action by a exploiter to befriend and build a relationship with a child for their own advantage

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- 3. Groomers** - individual who look to build relationships and groom children.

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- 4. Consent** - mutual agreement and or permission for something to happen or to do something.

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- 5. Vulnerabilities** - individuals that have a need that is not being met, which leaves them open to possible hurt or to be influenced more by others.

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- 6. Significant harm** - A child may experience this situation if they being groomed or have vulnerabilities that make it easier for someone to hurt them.

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- 7. Abuser** - a person who hurts a child physically, sexually or emotionally.

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- 8. Incident number** - number police give you when reporting a crime

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- 9. Conflict** - an argument or disagreement that may happen between parents/carers and child.

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- 10. Risk** - Situation that may put the child in danger or harm.

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- 11. Safe and well check** - where your child is visited following them being missing by a professional.

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**12. Dependency** - An individual need, want, or habit for something or someone.

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**13. Disclosure** - when a child tells someone about something happening to them or someone else.

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**14. Isolation** - when a child is removed from or kept apart or away from family, friends and trusted adults.

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**15. Explicit** - shows sexual pictures without any effort to hide details.

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**16. Boundaries** - set of clear instructions for safety.

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**17. Powerlessness** - Feeling Helpless

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**18. Accurately** - truthfully and correctly give information

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**19. Safeguard** - to protect

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**20. Rape** - Where a sexual act is done to someone against their consent (permission); N.B Under 13 years cannot consent to sex by law.

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**21. Disorientated** - confused

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**22. Perpetrator** - someone who carries out a harmful, criminal or wicked act.

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Merton CSE Parents Support Pack



[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)