



Parent Guide

10 Warning Signs Your Child May Be Being Groomed or Exploited

Introduction

Parents are often the first line of protection when it comes to keeping young people safe. However, exploitation can be subtle and difficult to recognise at first.

Young people may be targeted by individuals or groups involved in gangs, county lines activity, substance misuse or other criminal networks. These individuals often use manipulation, gifts, friendship and pressure to gain influence.

Recognising early warning signs can help families intervene before situations escalate.

1. Sudden Behaviour Changes

Your child may become withdrawn, secretive, aggressive, or unusually defensive about their activities and friendships.

2. Unexplained Money or Expensive Items

New trainers, phones, clothes, or cash appearing without explanation can sometimes indicate outside influence.

3. Increased Secrecy Around Phones

Young people being groomed often become extremely protective of their phones, deleting messages or hiding social media activity.

4. New Friends You Have Never Met

Groomers often introduce young people to new peer groups or older individuals who parents never see or meet.

5. Staying Out Later or Going Missing

Repeated unexplained absences or staying out much later than usual may be a warning sign.

6. Travelling to Unknown Areas

Young people involved in exploitation may suddenly start travelling to places they have never previously visited.

7. Changes in Mood or Anxiety

Some young people become anxious, stressed or fearful when they feel trapped or pressured by others.

8. Carrying Weapons “For Protection”

In some cases young people begin carrying knives because they feel unsafe or pressured by others.

9. Substance Use

Drug or alcohol use may increase if young people are being drawn into risky environments.

10. Reluctance to Talk About Where They’ve Been

If a young person becomes defensive or vague about their whereabouts, it may indicate they are hiding something they feel unable to explain.

Important Message for Parents

If you notice several of these signs, it does not automatically mean your child is being exploited. However, it is important to remain aware, maintain open communication and seek guidance if you are concerned.

Parents are not alone in facing these challenges. Early awareness and support can make a significant difference.

About Beyond the Streets

Beyond the Streets provides prevention workshops and awareness sessions for young people, parents and schools focused on:

- exploitation awareness
- gang influence
- knife crime prevention
- substance misuse awareness
- healthy decision making

Our goal is to support families and communities in protecting young people and helping them make safer choices.

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