

Session six

Post information and resources

Nothing lasts forever – How I got out of the dark days

Taken from [Nothing lasts forever – how I got out of the dark days - Parents Against Child Exploitation \(Pace\) UK \(paceuk.info\)](#)

I felt very on my own when my son was being criminally exploited. It always seemed to be on a weekend when my windows were put through or there were drug dealers banging at my door. The out of hours' police and social care teams didn't know what to do.

My child became someone I didn't recognise, our family was ripped apart and my health was really affected. At first I felt as if the police turned their nose up at my family. A lot of negative feelings came towards me and even my child- from professionals, family, community.

I didn't want to leave the house. If I saw a neighbour on the street, I didn't want to go out. It's easy to go inward and shut yourself off. I cut myself off and it took me to a very dark place. I want to say though, from my experience, the more you cut yourself off and keep yourself in and isolate yourself, the more depressed you become.

It gets more on top of you and the more emotional you become.

I had to start reaching out. I had to take a deep breath and face it.

I know how hard that is, but what I told myself was, 'nothing lasts forever.' I had to get passed the judging looks.

The biggest tool that helped me to deal with this was building a relationship with services. I just started talking to them – I reported everything and I kept a timeline of what was happening.

It can be exhausting keeping everyone in the loop and so in the meetings with services I got an agreement that I'd share information with one key person who'd update everyone else. This was such a relief. I started using the meetings to try and get agreements, plans and support about, for instance, how to respond to drug dealers coming to my home in the middle of the night demanding debt drug money from my child.

Think about the one thing you want to come out of a meeting with.

I'm not saying that all the services came together and sorted it out. They didn't, but I felt less alone with it all; able to get through it.

One of the best tools to help you through it is to find one person you can trust and talk to. I needed someone to tell I was stressed, pissed off and to offload to. I just needed someone I could be honest with- for me it was my Pace worker. I needed that to feel less alone.

Living and coping with child exploitation

Taken from [Living and coping with child exploitation - Parents Against Child Exploitation \(Pace\) UK \(paceuk.info\)](https://paceuk.info)

It is so important to remember that you are not to blame for the exploitation of your child.

Finding out

Finding out that your child is being or has been exploited is extremely traumatic. You might find yourself in shock or in denial. You might feel angry, guilty, upset, confused, scared, embarrassed, annoyed, helpless and depressed. These feelings and reactions are normal and understandable.

It is vital to remember that you are not to blame for your child's exploitation and that they have been targeted by a ruthless and manipulative criminal.

It is also important that you tell someone and seek help during this difficult time. You may be understandably fearful that you will be judged. Pace has over 16 years' experience and expertise of supporting parents of exploited children and will never judge you. It is a safe place for you.

You and your child

One of the first difficulties many parents encounter on discovering that their child is being exploited is how they broach the subject with their son or daughter. Our Parent Support Workers suggest raising the subject directly, but gently – and avoiding conflict at all costs. We also suggest that you speak to your child in the language that they understand, rather than in terms of abuse or exploitation. It may be more helpful to talk about keeping safe, than abuse.

Talking to your child about the reality of their new relationship or network is not easy, especially if your child has been given drugs or is deeply traumatised. Furthermore, the offender (s) of the exploitation has a deliberate aim to estrange your child from you, so your relationship is bound to come under great strain. 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.

Coping with child exploitation in the family

Witnessing the exploitation of your much-loved child is distressing. But looking after yourself at this time is very important and can prevent long-term damage to your health and keep your family together. It is important that you and your partner and other children have quality of life to enable you and your affected child to find a way to move forward together.

This page outlines some of the feelings and fears you may have, and some ways to cope and seek help during this difficult time.

Feelings and physical symptoms

It is common to experience very strong emotions and even physical symptoms. Understanding that these are related to your stress and that other parents have experienced them too can help you to cope. If your child is repeatedly going missing at night time, then

you are likely to suffer fairly serious sleep deprivation, with obvious effects on your day-to-day health such as anxiety, headaches and forgetfulness. It may be helpful to speak to your GP about this. Many parents are understandably reluctant to tell their employer about their difficulties, so it is important your GP has a record of the levels of stress you are experiencing.

Why didn't my child tell me?

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

- No perception of abuse
- Belief that the offender is a loving partner
- Difficulty in talking about sex and sexual relationships
- Length of time that might have elapsed 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 offenders (emotional or for substances)
- A sense of powerlessness and/or isolation
- Denial ('It happened to someone else')
- Fear of disappointing loved ones
- Repercussions of crimes they may have been involved in during exploitation
- Feeling they owe the abuser
- Hope of rescuing the relationship.

My child keeps shutting me out, I can't reach out to them

Your relationship with your child may be extremely strained when they are in an exploitative and abusive situation. It is common to feel powerless and overwhelmed, which can be very frustrating and upsetting. Yet it is important to remember that you can still fulfil your child's basic needs, if they are still living in the family home. Parents find it helpful to prepare a hot meal for their child, even if they have been missing for several hours and do not return until late into the night. Some parents told us they would put a hot water bottle in their bed or a vase of fresh flowers in their bedroom to remind them that they still cared about them, despite the inordinate amounts of stress.

I'm scared for my child's health and future. What are the long-term affects?

Child exploitation can have profound, damaging and long-term effects on the lives of children and their families. The effects of child exploitation go beyond physical scars and impact on a child's behaviour, economic wellbeing and social life. There are also adverse consequences on their physical, sexual, mental and social health. These can include:

Physical health:

- Bruises, cuts, broken teeth
- Alcoholism
- Addiction to drugs
- Self-harm including cutting, overdosing and eating disorders

Sexual and reproductive health:

- Sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and chlamydia
- Pregnancy, miscarriage, multiple termination, 'backstreet' abortion

Psychological health:

- Suicidal tendencies
- Severe depression
- Nightmares, flashbacks
- Anxiety
- Violent aggression towards others, including siblings, parents and pets.

Exploited children often find it difficult to control their anger and direct it at their family members through physical and verbal abuse. Sustained, severe abuse from men whom they once trusted and considered as friends can make children extremely volatile, reflecting their suffering and confusion. They can become highly demanding, disruptive, defensive and defiant.

Social health:

- Criminal activity encouraged by perpetrators
- Loss of childhood friends
- Lack of trust in agencies and professionals
- Dropping out of school
- Failing statutory examinations
- Unemployment
- Teenage parenthood

Grooming and exploitation affects young people's civic and social life. If they are able to attain employment, mistreatment by employers due to stigma, criminal background and inadequate social skills often forces them to return to the life of exploitation and abuse.

For more detail on the potential health impacts of child sexual exploitation, read the [Health Working Group Report on Child Sexual Exploitation](#) and the associated appendix produced with Barnardo's called [The Range of health impacts that can result from child sexual exploitation](#).

For information about accessing health services and support for your child, check out [Young Mind's](#) topical resource for parents and carers. You can also search for services in your area on the [NHS Choices website](#).

Responding to long-term child exploitation

Don't give up. Be persistent and determined with the authorities. Make all the professionals who come into contact with your child – GP, sexual health services, schools, police and social care – aware of your concerns.

Keep rigorous diaries and notes of all incidences, as they will be invaluable in any future court proceedings. Even if your child seems a long way away from acknowledging their abuse, take courage from the fact that 2012 saw one of the first evidence-based trials, in which a man was found guilty of sexual offences against a child without the child having to give a statement or attend court – thanks purely to the strength of forensic evidence. Be patient, determined and persistent.

Pace believes that as a parent of an exploited child, you have a right to make your voice heard by decision-makers. We facilitate meetings with ministers, MPs, the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the police to ensure that your views and opinions count

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