

CSE Research: Short films for practice Research Briefing Note #6



What young people affected by sexual exploitation have told us about the support they want from you

Fiona Factor

Text of the Film

“There are six key messages young people affected by child sexual exploitation have given us about the support they want from professionals.

- 1. They want you to listen, and hear them – and really believe them.*
- 2. They don’t want to have to keep telling you what happened to them over and over again.*
- 3. They want to be involved in decisions about their lives, and be updated on the matters that affect them.*
- 4. They want you to be realistic and honest, but to do this gently and recognise it may be hard for them to hear what you have to say.*
- 5. They want consistent support from the same person – and, where possible, to have some say in who this person is.*
- 6. They want you to see them as an individual, not just a service user. Someone with potential, just like you were at their age.*

Whatever your role in protecting young people, it’s often the way you work with them rather than what you do, that can make the biggest difference.”

Research Summary

The International Centre is committed to the meaningful and ethical engagement of children and young people in our endeavours to increase understanding of and improve responses to child sexual exploitation. Young people participate in our research in various ways: as advisors to research teams; as interviewees; or taking a lead on creating resources to help prevent sexual violence (visit <http://www.beds.ac.uk/intcent/young-peoples-outputs> for examples). Through all these activities, young people have communicated some consistent messages about what they want from professionals who are there to support and protect them, and this is supported in a range of studies about work with vulnerable young people more widely.

We know that the quality of the relationship between a young person and the professional supporting them is frequently cited to be of fundamental importance to the success of the

intervention on offer (Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Berelowitz *et al.*, 2013; Shuker, 2013). It is important to young people that they are treated with empathy, sincerity and genuine care (Shuker, 2013; Warrington, 2013; Gilligan, 2015). Trust is a recurring theme in consultations with young people and interviews with practitioners (Foley *et al.*, 2004; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Berelowitz *et al.*, 2013). A trusting relationship takes time to build, and this therefore needs to be acknowledged by management and the funders of CSE services.

When they are courageous enough to talk about experiences of sexual exploitation and violence, young people need to know they won't have to tell their story over and over again. This is particularly relevant when thinking about the importance of consistency in support relationships (Shuker, 2013; Smeaton, 2013), as well as how to manage giving evidence in a criminal investigation (Beckett and Warrington, 2015). Trust is related to young people's requests for transparency, accountability and reliability from professionals, including, but not limited to, being updated about their case (Warrington, 2013; Gilligan, 2015).

Likewise, young people describe the importance of having some choice and/or the ability to negotiate in decisions that affect them (Warrington, 2013). Finally, consultations and research show that young people want to be treated as more than victims and service users. It is important that support focuses on, recognises, and facilitates young people's strengths, and is optimistic about their future (Warrington, 2013; Gilligan, 2015).

Questions for practice reflection

You may want to discuss or consider the following.

- How can the engagement of young people using your service, and the outcomes they achieve, be enhanced through the relationships they have with the professionals supporting them?
- What mechanisms are in place within the project to give young people the opportunity to feed back about the quality of their relationships with the staff?
- How does the work facilitate experienced practitioners to remain at the frontline of service delivery, and value this expertise?
- Are staff skilled and equipped to develop the relationships needed to encourage effective engagement?

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/75T_bgSgW8k

To cite this film

University of Bedfordshire (2015) *What young people affected by sexual exploitation have told us about the support they want from you*. Available at: http://youtu.be/75T_bgSgW8k (Accessed day, month, year)

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Warrington, C. (2013) *Helping me find my own way: Sexually exploited young people's involvement in decision-making about their care.* Doctoral thesis, University of Bedfordshire

Further information/resources

Kutner, J. and Factor, F. (2014) *'It's wrong...but you get used to it' Sexual violence and exploitation in gangs: Young People's Report.* Luton: University of Bedfordshire
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Be Healthy – www.ayph-behealthy.org.uk

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.