



**NANAIMO  
LADYSMITH**  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS

# **Sexual Exploitation of Youth**

*- what we all need to know*

## **Enquires**

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## How do I know I am being exploited

There are often many indications that a youth might be exploited or trafficked, but there are five main warning signs:

### 1. Age difference

Traffickers and exploiters like to target younger victims because of their vulnerability. They will often act as a "boyfriend / girlfriend" to gain a youth's trust and to build a relationship. Not all relationships with an age difference are exploitative, but typically, exploiters and traffickers are older than their victims.

### 2. Gifting

Excessive and unexplained gifts may be used to build a youth's trust, that may later result in an unexpected debt (e.g. cellphone, clothes, pets, drugs, alcohol, etc.)

### 3. Lifestyle changes

Lifestyle changes can be tricky to spot because it is normal for youth to develop and go through changes. However, if a youth is skipping or dropping out of school, dressing differently, drastic change in behaviour and activities, increased use of drugs and alcohol, or any other noticeable changes in combination with the other warning signs, may be a red flag.

### 4. Isolation

There may be attempts made by exploiters, traffickers or recruiters to keep youth away from healthy relationships (like friends and families).

### 5. Gut feeling

If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Go with your gut feeling and trust your instincts.

## Warning signs of sexual exploitation

Most common signs a young person is being sexually exploited are:

- \* Receiving unexplained gifts or gifts from unknown sources
- \* Having multiple cell phones or being given cell phones by other people
- \* Having unaffordable new things (clothes, cell phone) or expensive habits (alcohol, drugs)
- \* Changes in the way they dress
- \* Going to hotels or other unusual locations to meet friends
- \* Having older friends or partners
- \* Increased absence from school
- \* Withdrawing from family and friends
- \* Withdrawing from activities they would normally have engaged in
- \* Being protective of a new partner or friend but providing little information
- \* Being private about online activity and contacts

Exploitation can happen slowly over time through a variety of different relationships (friends, partners, drug dealers, family members).

*"Looking for signs may help you spot someone who is on the verge of being, or is being sexually exploited."*

## Who is at risk

Any young person is at risk of being sexually exploited. Factors that make some young people more vulnerable than others are:

- \* Being missing, runaway or homeless
- \* Low socio-economic status
- \* Being in care
- \* Having prior experience of sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect
- \* Lacking friends or lacking friends from the same age group
- \* Not attending school or regularly missing school
- \* Living with mental health barriers
- \* Using drugs and alcohol
- \* Having low self-esteem or low-confidence
- \* Being part of the LGBTQ2S+ community
- \* Being from the Aboriginal community
- \* Being new to the city/area

## How can we prevent sexual exploitation

The following factors can significantly reduce the risk of a young person becoming engaged in sexual exploitation:

- \* Having their basic needs met (food, water, clothing, shelter)
- \* Access to healthcare services
- \* Supportive community connections
- \* Healthy peer connections
- \* Gaining knowledge about substance use, mental and sexual health
- \* Developing the skills to have healthy relationships

*"Any site popular with youth is potentially popular with individuals looking to sexually exploit youth simply because the very people they are looking for are on there."*

## How to talk to young people

- \* Be non-judgemental
- \* Provide a safe space
- \* Discuss healthy and non-healthy relationships: explain the difference
- \* Discuss what sexual exploitation looks like
- \* Discuss how to use technology in positive and responsible ways
- \* Educate youth about how to stay safe when out and about
- \* Let them know, no matter what, you are there to help them
- \* Discuss problematic drug and alcohol use and the risks associated with it

## Identifying signs professional(s) should look for

- \* Using to cope with feelings, emotions or trauma
- \* Use that interferes with day-to-day life e.g. not participating in activities they normally do
- \* Use that causes problems at home, school or with friends

## Slang dictionary sites

### Noslang.com

An internet and text slang dictionary site you can use to help you understand what children and youth are talking about online.

### Urbandictionary.com

An online urban dictionary with definitions written by everyone. It may help you understand slang used by youth today.



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**Sexual exploitation** is the sexual abuse of children and youth through the exchange of a sexual act for money or any other consideration. Considerations may be tangible, including drugs, alcohol, shelter, food or transportation. They may also be intangible, including love, acceptance or protection.

***Sexual activity includes:***

- \* Performing sexual acts
- \* Sexually explicit activity for entertainment (e.g., stripping or exotic dancing)
- \* Escort or massage parlour services
- \* Appearing in pornographic (sexual abuse) images or videos

**Resources - where to go for help**

Children of the Street Society  
[www.childrenofthestreet.com](http://www.childrenofthestreet.com)

Cybertip! [www.cybertip.ca](http://www.cybertip.ca)

Need Help Now [www.needhelppnow.ca](http://www.needhelppnow.ca)

Youth Against Violence Line  
[www.youthagainstviolenceline.com](http://www.youthagainstviolenceline.com)

Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868  
[www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

Vancouver Island Crisis Line  
1-800-494-3888 [www.vicrisis.ca](http://www.vicrisis.ca)

Haven Society [www.havensociety.com](http://www.havensociety.com)

Nanaimo and District Crime Stoppers  
[www.nanaimocrimestoppers.com](http://www.nanaimocrimestoppers.com)

Nanaimo RCMP Non-Emergency Line  
250-754-2345

Tillicum Lelum Friendship  
Centre [www.tillicumlelum.ca](http://www.tillicumlelum.ca)

Nanaimo Womens Centre  
Streetwise Designs Youth Group  
150 Wallace Street, Nanaimo  
250-753-0633