

# Understanding exploitation

Identity and exploitation are strongly linked because exploitation often targets, shapes, and sometimes distorts how a young person sees themselves and their place in the world.

# WHO AM I?

## GIVEN

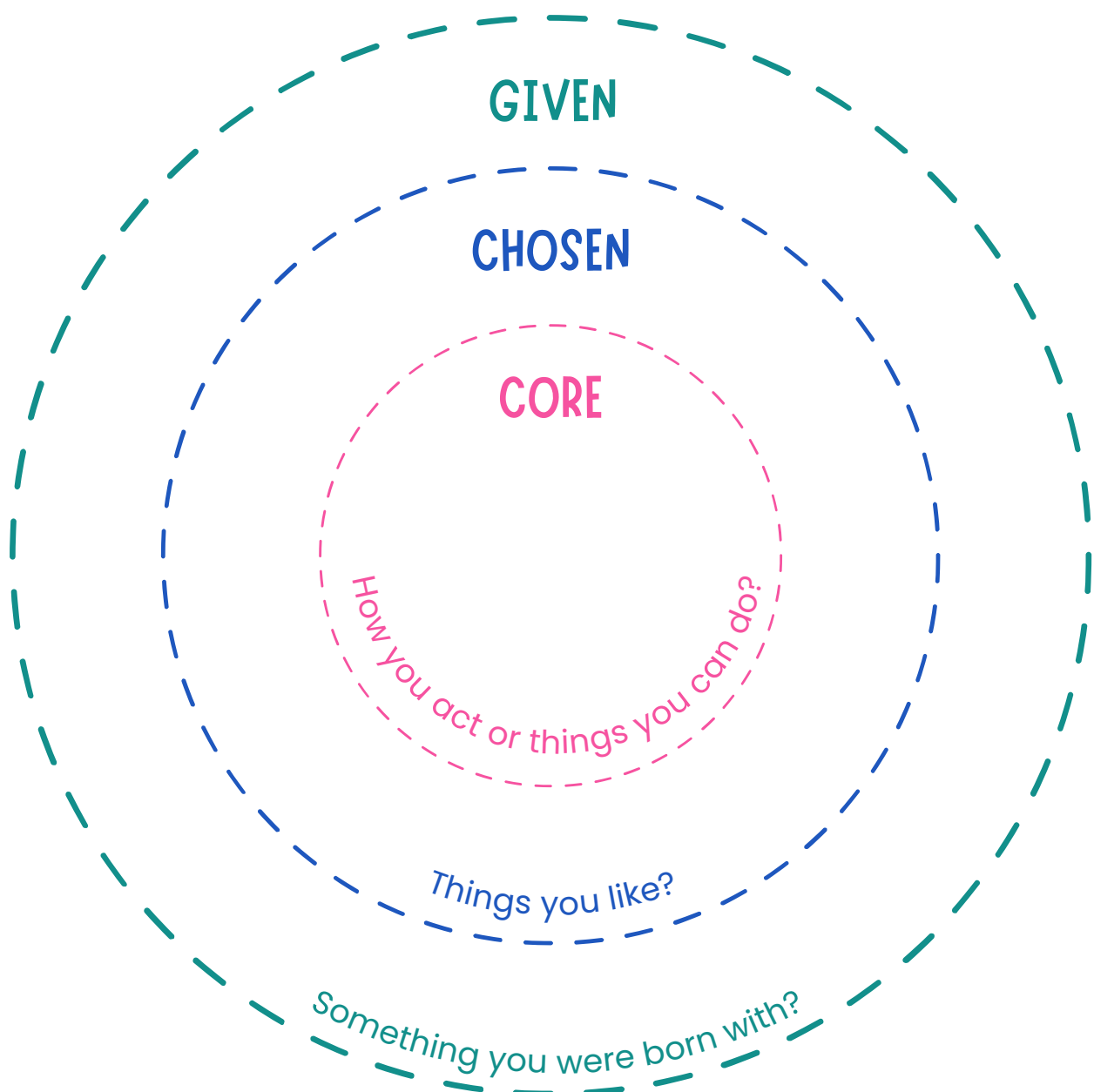
Characteristics we have no choice in (birthplace, ethnicity).

## CHOSEN

Qualities, skills and things we choose in life (hobbies, likes).

## CORE

Traits we have developed over time (values, skills).



# What is Exploitation?

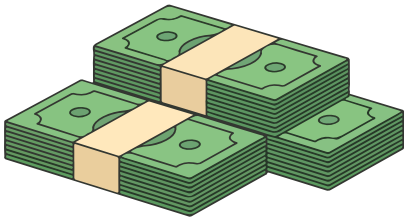


## The Core Definition

Exploitation is when someone uses you for their own gain. It involves an **imbalance of power** where one person takes advantage of another.

## Key Characteristics

- You are forced or tricked into doing things you don't want to do.
- The perpetrator gains something (money, sex, status).
- You often feel trapped, guilty, or scared to speak out.



## Sexual Exploitation

This happens when you are tricked or forced into sexual activities in exchange for:

- Money, drugs, or alcohol.
- Affection, attention, or a place to stay.
- Gifts or status.

It is never your fault.

## Criminal Exploitation

This involves coercing you into criminal activities for someone else's benefit.

Common examples include:

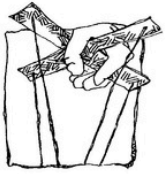
- County Lines: Moving/selling drugs.
- Theft: Shoplifting or handling stolen goods.
- Violence: Carrying weapons or hurting others.

# Understanding power and control



**safealliance**<sup>TM</sup>

WHERE HOPE & HEALING BEGIN



## Understanding Power & Control Tactics

(continued)

**Each sentence below is an example of one of the tactics described in the “Power and Control” wheel on the previous page. Draw a line to match the example on the left to the “Power and Control” tactic on the right.**

1. Jason has never hit Pat, but when he’s angry he often scares Pat by punching walls or throwing things.

A. Isolation & Extreme Jealousy

2. David makes Keira quit her job because he doesn’t trust the guys she works with. Instead, he says he’ll give her a weekly allowance – as long as she’s “good.”

B. Denying, Minimizing and Blaming

3. Denise tells William that if he leaves her, she’ll make sure that she gets full custody of their son and she will never let William see him.

C. Using Children

4. After hitting her, Robin tells Kim to stop crying and making such a big deal out of nothing, adding “I just get so out of control when I see you flirting with other people like that. If you didn’t act like that I wouldn’t have to hurt you.”

D. Sexism

5. Rosario bad-mouths Kristin’s friends all the time. Finally, he tells her he doesn’t want her hanging out with them anymore because they’re all a bunch of ‘hoes.’

E. Financial/Economic Abuse

6. Eva wants to have sex and Lynell isn’t ready. Eva says if he doesn’t want her, she’ll have to tell everyone he’s gay, and get her sexual needs met by a ‘real man’.

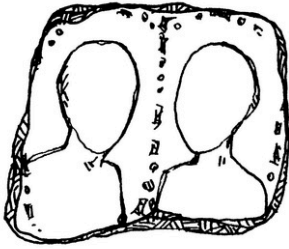
F. Sexual Coercion

7. Dillan and Dee are eating dinner with friends when Dillan says jokingly to Dee, “Are you sure you’re gonna have dessert? I don’t know, baby, that stuff is going right to your butt.”

G. Intimidation & Threats

8. While Kian listens to his girlfriend’s ideas, he expects that he should always make the final decisions because he is the man.

H. Emotional/Verbal Abuse



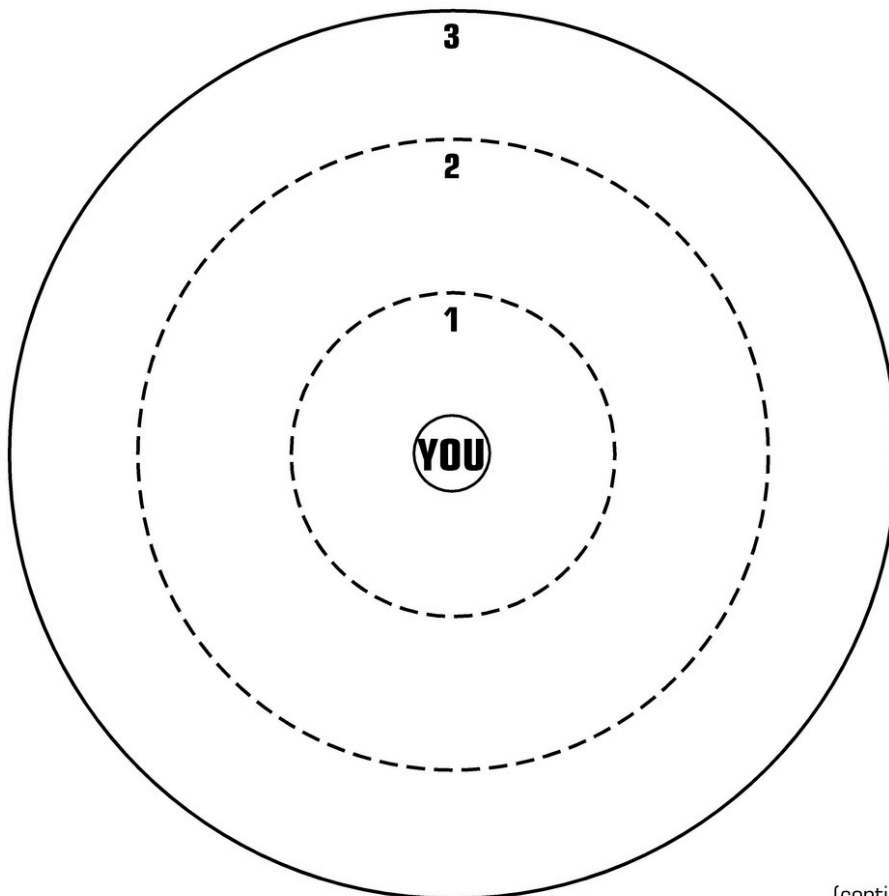
# Understanding Boundaries

**One important way to take care of yourself is to set strong and healthy boundaries around yourself and your life. A Boundary is like an invisible line around you. It is what separates you from other people. It is the line between what you are comfortable with and what you are uncomfortable with, what is acceptable to you and what is unacceptable to you. Boundaries help protect not only our physical safety, but also our emotional well-being.**

**Healthy boundaries are flexible. For example, you might open up your boundaries to let people you trust closer to you - you might share more information with them and feel more comfortable being physically close to them. But with people you don't know as well or people you distrust, you will probably keep your boundaries closed more tightly by not getting too personal.**

## DIFFERENT BOUNDARIES WITH DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS

In **circle 1** around "you", write the names of the people who are closest to you, and who you open up your boundaries the most for. In **circle 2**, write the names of a few people who you have good relationships with but are not as close as the people in the inner circle. In **circle 3**, mention names of people who you have relationships with that are not very personal. Is there anyone who has given you good reason not to trust them - who you feel you have to protect yourself from? Write these names on the **outside of the solid line**, which indicates that your boundaries are very firm with them.



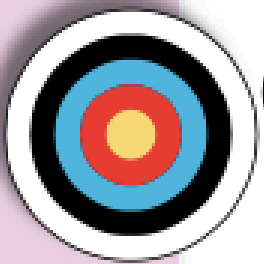
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# GROOMING

The word grooming is used to describe the process that abusive adults use to trick a child or young person into believing they are trustworthy so that they can eventually exploit the young person.

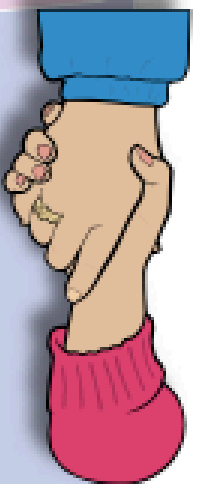
By being aware of the whole pattern of these behaviours you will be able to quickly spot things that you might need to be suspicious of if they happen. This will mean you are better able to look out for yourself and other young people around you.

# The grooming line



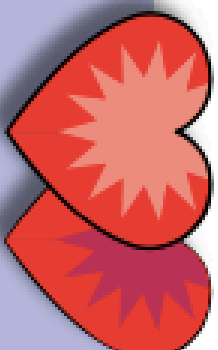
## Targeting stage

- 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

# UNDERSTANDING GROOMING AND POWER

In this box tell me what you now understand about:

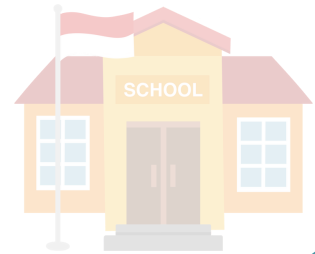
- What exploitation means?
- What manipulation means?
- What the differences are between choice and manipulation
- What a power imbalance is?



HOME



SCHOOL



Use the circles to tell me:

- Where you feel safest and why?
- Where you feel least safe and why?
- Who has power in each space
- Who are the key people in your world?
- Who influences decisions?
- Who benefits if something goes wrong?

ONLINE



COMMUNITY



# CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

## UNDERSTANDING COUNTY LINES

### What is it?

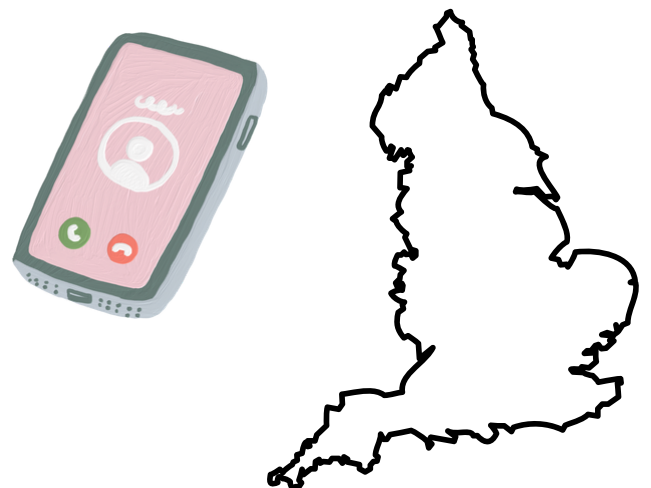
'County Lines' is a term used by police to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs from big cities into smaller towns.

### How it works

Gangs exploit young people to store and move drugs and money. They often use dedicated mobile phone lines ('lines') to take orders.

### The Trap

You might be offered money, designer clothes, or 'protection', but the reality is often debt, violence, and fear.



Draw a line or number the boxes to match the correct term to its definition. These are the core concepts of criminal exploitation.

Term	Definition
1. County Lines	The process where an adult prepares a child or vulnerable person to be exploited through trust-building and gifts.
2. Cuckooing	A situation where a person is forced to work or commit crimes to pay off a real or imagined sum of money.
3. Grooming	Criminal gangs from urban areas moving drugs into smaller towns, often using dedicated mobile phone numbers.
4. Debt Bondage	The practice of taking over the home of a vulnerable person to use it as a base for drug dealing.

Exploiters often use similar tactics to trap young people.

Answer the questions based on the indicators of exploitation.

**Which of the following is a classic "physical" indicator that a young person might be involved in County Lines?**

- a) They are spending more time at the library.
- b) They have unexplained new clothes, phones, or cash.
- c) They have joined a school sports team.
- d) They are asking for extra pocket money for lunch.

**Why do gangs often prefer to recruit children to carry drugs?**

- a) Children are better at driving.
- b) Children are less likely to be suspected by police than adults.
- c) Children know the geography better.
- d) It is legal for children to carry certain amounts.

## Case Study: 'Safe' House?



Read the scenario below and use your knowledge of Cuckooing to answer the questions.

Robert is 55 and lives alone in a council flat. He struggles with alcohol addiction and mobility issues. Recently, a group of young men, who initially offered him cheap alcohol, have started spending all day at his flat. They have taken his keys "for safe keeping" and Robert now has to ask permission to enter his own kitchen. Strange visitors come to the door at all hours.

**Identify three pieces of evidence from the text that suggest Robert is a victim of cuckooing.**

**Explain why Robert might be afraid to call the police, referring to the concept of coercive control.**



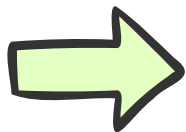
**Online safety** is closely linked to exploitation because the internet is one of the main ways people target, groom, and control young people—especially in both sexual and criminal exploitation.

### **Easy Access to Young People**

Online platforms (social media, gaming, messaging apps) allow adults or peers to:

- Contact young people directly
- Pretend to be someone else
- Reach many young people quickly

This creates opportunities for targeting and grooming.



### **Grooming Often Starts Online**

Exploitation frequently begins with what looks like a normal interaction:

- Compliments (“you’re mature for your age”)
- Building trust and emotional connection
- Offering gifts, money, or attention

Over time, this can shift into:

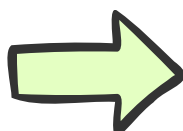
- Sexual pressure (CSE)
- Requests to carry items, hold money, or travel (CCE)



### **People Can Hide Who They Are Online, it’s easier to:**

- Fake identity (age, gender, lifestyle)
- Use edited photos or stolen profiles
- Build a false sense of trust

This makes it harder for young people to recognise risk.



### **Control and Coercion**

Once someone has built a connection, they may:

- Ask for photos or information
- Use threats or blackmail (“I’ll share this”)
- Isolate the young person from support

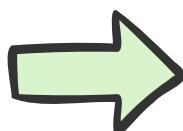
This is a key part of exploitation—power and control



### **Links to Criminal Exploitation**

Online contact can lead to:

- Being recruited into county lines
- Being asked to deliver drugs or money
- Being drawn into risky situations through promises of status or income



### **Normalisation of Risk**

Online spaces can make harmful things feel normal:

- Sharing explicit images
- Talking to strangers
- Accepting gifts or money

Young people might think: “Everyone does this” when actually, it’s a risk.



# ONLINE SAFETY

# Which apps do you use?



## Snapchat

Messages and photos disappear. Children can be pressured to send images because they believe they will not be saved. Location sharing can show where a child is in real time.



## Roblox

Although it looks like a children's game, it includes chat features. Children can be contacted by strangers and slowly groomed through friendly game play.



## Kik

### Messenger

Accounts can be anonymous. It is often used to move conversations away from apps parents may check.



## Fortnite

Voice chat allows children to talk to strangers during games. Language and behaviour are often inappropriate.



## TikTok

Children can see adult content, receive sexual comments, and be contacted by strangers. Live videos allow real-time interaction, which can quickly become unsafe.



## Telegram

Messages and groups are encrypted, making them difficult to monitor. It is used to share sexual images, harmful material, and to keep conversations hidden from adults.



## Hoop

The app connects directly to Snapchat and encourages children to add new contacts quickly, including people they have never met.



## Reddit

Children can easily access sexual, violent, or extreme material through posts and comments.



## Instagram

Messages allow strangers to contact children directly. Many children run secondary accounts that parents do not know about. There is strong pressure around appearance and popularity.



## OmeTV

Random video chats with strangers. No effective safeguarding. Sexual content and adult behaviour are common. Children have no control over who appears on screen.



## LiveMe

Children can broadcast themselves live to anyone watching. Viewers can comment in real time, including adults.



## BeReal

The app prompts children to take photos instantly, which can lead to oversharing without thinking about safety.



## WhatsApp

Private chats and group chats are often used for school or friendship groups, but bullying, exclusion, and sharing of images can happen quickly and spread widely.



## Yubo

The app is designed to meet new people. Children can live stream and chat with strangers, which can quickly become sexual or exploitative.



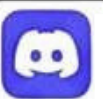
## Calculator+

These apps look like calculators but are used to hide photos, videos, and messages from parents and carers.



## Twitch

Children watch and interact with live streamers through chat, which often includes adults and unmoderated comments.



## Discord

Children join private chat servers linked to gaming or interests. These spaces are often unmoderated and can include adults, sexual content, or harmful language.



## Monkey

Children are placed into random video chats with people they do not know. They have no control over who appears on screen.



## YouTube

Children can be exposed to adult content through suggested videos, comments, and live streams, even when watching innocent clips.



## Bumble

This is a dating app. Despite age limits, some under-18s access it to talk to adults looking for relationships.

# Online safety agreement

The internet is a very important part of our lives today and setting up an agreement can help ensure that everyone within your organisation/ group are safe when navigating the online world. It gives you the opportunity to discuss together how to behave in a positive way and what to do when things go wrong. Bear in mind it is difficult to have complete control over anyone's internet usage, however an online safety agreement is a great way to set clear expectations for positive and safe internet use.

Please note this agreement is to support your organisation in working to keep young people safe online and should never be used in place of a safeguarding policy or acceptable use policy.

## Top tips

- 1 Try to focus on promoting positive behaviour and the choices we can make online which will have a positive impact on others
- 2 Set clear boundaries about what may be unsafe or inappropriate online and include situation promises which may change based on the device, person or app
- 3 Include all members of your organisation or group and make sure everyone is happy with the agreement
- 4 Review your agreement in the future if your group changes or their needs change

## Starting questions

Who is this agreement for?

What do we use the internet for?

Why are we creating this online safety agreement?

# We agree to...

Eg, we will only go online during the agreed times

Who is responsible for this?

Eg, Everyone in blue team

Final  
thoughts

How long will our agreement last for?

Who do we talk to if we are worried about something or someone online?

What happens if someone doesn't follow the agreement?

Eg, revisit the agreement and discuss how it was broken and what changes can be made for the future

Signatures

Date:

# Things to consider...

## Devices

- Which devices are we allowed to use and when?
- Are we allowed to use our own personal devices?
- Are there any areas of the internet which we are not to use, eg games or social networks
- How long can we spend online or on a device?
- What do we do if a notification appears on a device? Eg not clicking 'accept' before checking with an adult
- When is it okay to download files, games or apps?

## Keeping safe

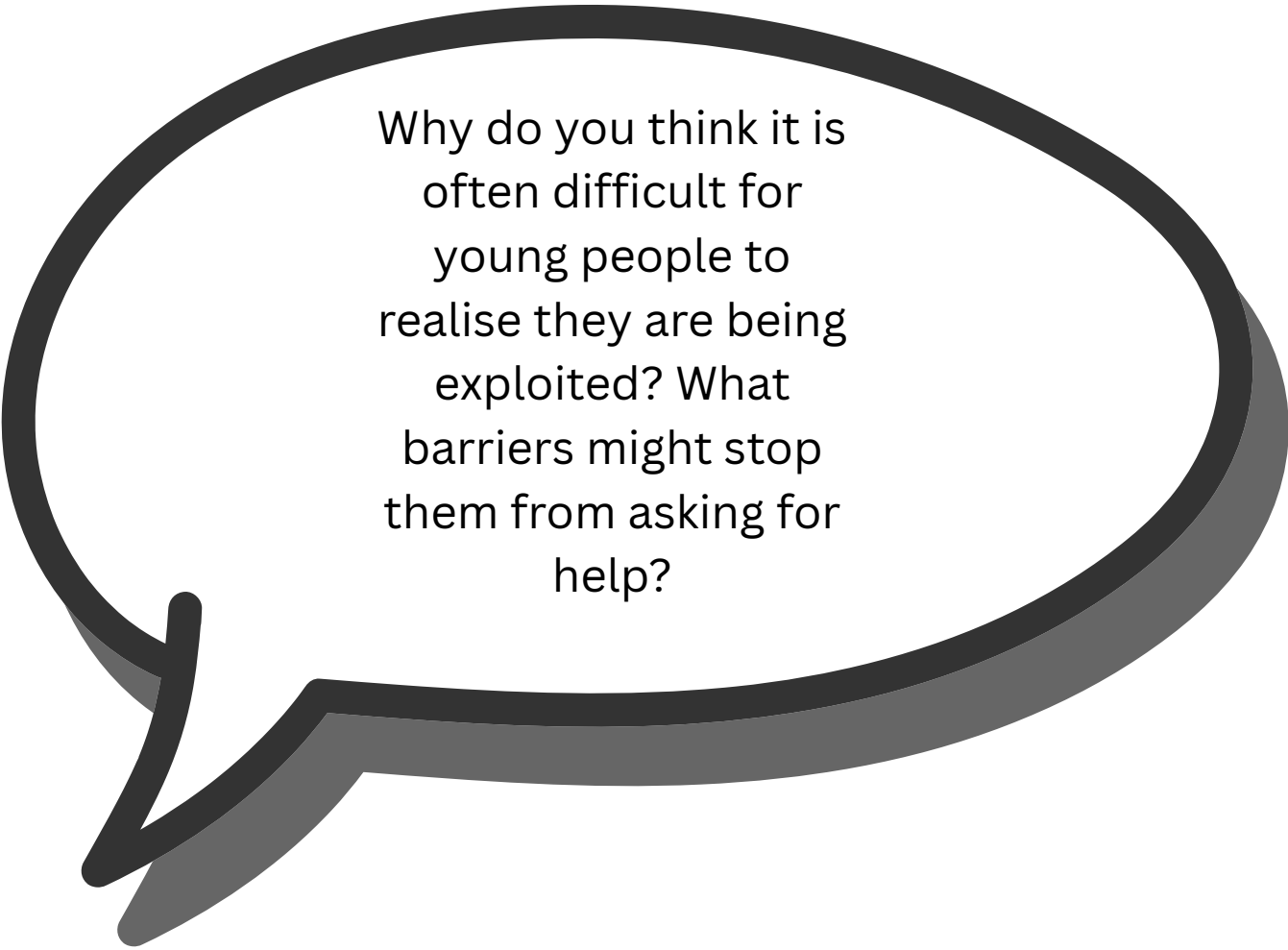
- What information is ok for us to share online? Eg reinforcing not to share a club's location online or names of other players
- Who will we talk to if we feel uncomfortable about anything we have seen or heard online or on a device?
- Which websites are okay for us to use?
- Should we open links from people we don't know?

## Social networking

- Does everyone know the age requirements to be on social networks?
- Who can I post images and videos of online?
- Do I know why it is important to be private and how to set this up?
- What information is ok to share about our organisation/ group? Eg name, location, names of members etc
- Do we use online groups for our organisation and are there any rules we should follow?

## Positive online behaviour

- How can I be a good friend on the internet?
- What will I do if I receive frightening or bullying messages?
- Do I know where the report and block buttons are online?



Why do you think it is often difficult for young people to realise they are being exploited? What barriers might stop them from asking for help?



**You might have said...**

Fear for themselves or family  
Shame about what happened  
Loyalty to the abuser  
Not realising it is wrong  
Believing they won't be believed

# Legal consequences



## For the Perpetrators

The law takes exploitation extremely seriously.

- **Sexual Exploitation:** Perpetrators can face lengthy prison sentences for rape, sexual assault, or trafficking.
- **County Lines:** Charges include drug trafficking, modern slavery, and possession of weapons. Sentences can be over 10 years.

## For Victims

The law recognises that victims are forced into these situations. You are treated as a victim, not a criminal. **Protection is the priority.**



### Key Takeaways

- Exploitation is abuse—**it is never the victim's fault.**
- Grooming is a gradual process used to **gain control and trust.**
- County Lines and sexual exploitation happen in real life, not just online.
- If something feels wrong, it probably is. **Reporting can save lives,** including your own.