

Book Review

**Caring for a child who has been sexually exploited.
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Author:

Eileen Fursland

Corresponding author:

Estelle Carmichael, estelle.carmichael@strath.ac.uk

Eileen Fursland's book *Caring for a child that is sexually exploited* is intended for those who work with, or care for young people who have been affected by, or are at risk of sexual exploitation. The author's intention is to help workers and carers increase their understanding of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), relevant agency and court responses, the impact on victims and families and how to support recovery.

The opening chapter 'Child sexual exploitation —what it is and how the perpetrators operate' provides a helpful start to increase our understanding of this complex issue. Drawing on recent research from experts in the field at the University of Bedfordshire and providing quotes from young people offers early frameworks that may help carers make sense of young people's behaviours and begin to recognise the strength and range of influencing factors. The author first presents a definition of CSE and a clear outline of the grooming process before then setting out key features of CSE such as power imbalance and exchange or transaction. Whilst these descriptions may seem familiar to many working with vulnerable young people, the author effectively builds on this early input to then highlight the key significance of context and situation in which the offence occurs and how these factors can impact on a victim's capacity to make choices. This contextual focus continues as the author describes the different models of CSE, including: peer to peer; online/mobile phone grooming; 'organised/network model and trafficking'; inappropriate relationships; sexual abuse by adults in a position of trust and party lifestyle. This first chapter successfully broadens thinking beyond the young person and the carer and may help carers consider the challenges that, at times, can emerge when attempting to effectively intervene.

The shift in the next chapter towards focusing on the young people's characteristics is well balanced. Using relevant research and guidance, risk and vulnerability factors are identified but again placed alongside a further contextual framework that notes the interaction between a young person's vulnerabilities, perpetrator risk and inadequate protective structures. I was particularly pleased to see a cautionary note around CSE checklists and toolkits. The author has attempted to highlight key practice messages with these tools,

such as the importance of professional judgement and the recognition of the broad range of contexts in which CSE can occur.

The middle chapters relating to the broader systems and processes are like others in the book, brief but providing relevant key highlights for carers dealing with such an emotive issue within necessary formal procedures. At times, in my previous experience of training and working with carers, the issues with the justice system can wrongly be placed with a greater emphasis and relevance for the child's case manager or social worker. Carers play an active role in any safety plan and need to be equally informed and empowered to allow them to advocate and support young people.

Beyond increased understanding, in my experience, carers will often look for guidance and research that will either validate their existing good practice or provide insight into new strategies that may affect positive change. The final chapters recognise this and move towards considering support and safety, following a similar pattern of highlighting key messages across a broad range of relevant topics. Skills and approaches that have been found helpful, distinct points of time such as early placement and pre-trial are highlighted and specific issues for foster care and residential care are described. Relevant perspectives such as relationship based practice, child development and the importance of working as a team are noted. It is important to highlight that whilst the author makes a successful attempt at considering child, environment, practice and systems issues, all themes are presented in very concise summaries. Complex issues such as disclosure and long term impact are not avoided but are presented, as would be expected from a BAAF publication, from a relevance for practice perspective rather than a lengthy theoretical analysis. Given the complexity of the issue, some carers may want to access further detailed information and with that in mind there is a useful comprehensive list of resources and references. I believe this book provides an accessible and immensely helpful summarised overview of CSE and relevant issues for those working with affected young people. It emphasises key practice messages, highlighting both the individual needs and circumstances of young people as well as the valuable role that carers play in meeting need and managing safety.

In the recent weeks whilst reading this book for review, the national media has reported new calls for an independent inquiry relating to CSE in another English town, Telford. This media story and Eileen Fursland's book remind us all not to be complacent. Whilst Scotland has not had a media focus or formal significant case review located in one particular town, our young people remain vulnerable and the broad range of contexts of which CSE occurs are the very situations that carers and practitioners can come across day to day. When preventive strategies have not been in place or not worked, then 'recognition', as outlined in the starting point of this book can help us intervene in the most helpful way as soon as possible. This book is an invaluable initial, concise and accessible book for all those responsible for the care and support of vulnerable young people.

About the author

Estelle Carmichael is Consultancy Lead in CELCIS. A qualified social worker, she has held a keen interest in complex case work over the past 20 years in her work with children and families. Previously, based in therapeutic child protection projects, she provided direct work, training and consultancy and has also held a strategic multi-agency role as Lead Officer for Child Protection. Her current work in CELCIS involves taking a central role on projects relating to historical abuse.