

Sexual Exploitation of Children

Sexual exploitation is illegal and is a criminal offence. Sexual exploitation is when someone demands or trades sex in exchange for gifts or favours, or things like food, housing, drugs, alcohol, or money. Sexual exploitation of children is when someone older or in a position of trust or authority – like a relative, teacher, minister, or lawyer - takes advantage of a younger, more vulnerable person (under the age of 18) for sexual purposes. Sexual exploitation includes touching any part of the younger person's body or asking the younger person to touch someone else's body for sexual purposes.

Who Is Sexually Exploited?

Most young people who become victims of sexual exploitation are female, but boys are also sexually exploited. Many have experienced family conflicts, addictions or childhood abuses such as neglect and physical or sexual abuse. Many have been homeless for short or long periods of time, and it is often during these times of homelessness that adults take advantage of them for sex.

What Is the Age of Consent for Sexual Activity?

The age of consent for sex in Canada is 16. This is the age that someone is considered old enough to make their own decisions about sexual activity. Even though a 16-year-old may be old enough to make decisions about sex, they are not yet adults. In Manitoba someone is considered an adult at age 18. A 16-year-old can agree to have sex with an adult only if the adult is not in a position of authority or trust. It is illegal for an adult in a position of authority or trust to have sex with anyone under 18. It is the adult's responsibility to obey the law.

What Happens If You Are Found Guilty of Sexually Exploiting Children?

If you are convicted of sexually exploiting a child under 16 you could go to jail for up to 10 years, and you may be deported from Canada. Your behavior will affect your family and the reputation of your community or ethnic group. The Police will put your name in the Child Abuse Registry database where anyone can see it. You will have to live with the shame all your life and you may have trouble getting a job or finding a place to live.

What Are the Health Consequences?

A child that has been sexually exploited may have sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). If you have sex without a condom, the child may infect you, or you may infect the child with an STI. If you have or pass on an STI, it makes it much easier to get HIV. HIV causes AIDS, and there is no cure for AIDS. If you are infected with HIV you may not even know it because you might not have any symptoms. Even if you don't have symptoms, you will transmit that infection to other sexual partners, your husband or wife, and even your future children.

What Should You Do If You Think Someone Is Sexually Exploiting a Child?

It is every adult's responsibility to keep children safe from sexual exploitation. If you are worried that a child is being exploited or abused, you should report your concerns to the Police, to Child and Family Services, or to the STI department at a health clinic. You don't have to give your name and the information you give will be confidential. If you are not sure how to report your concerns, talk to a counselor and ask them to help you

The following activities are illegal. You should contact the police if:

- you see an adult on the street asking someone under 18 for sexual activities
- you know that an individual is selling a child for sex (pimping)
- you find child abuse images (child pornography) on the Internet
- a child has been contacted for a sexual purpose over the Internet
- you find a website promoting travelling for the purpose of sexually exploiting children
- you suspect a home in your neighbourhood is being used for the sexual exploitation of children
- you are aware that a child is being exploited in his or her family, at school, or any other place

You can report these illegal activities online at www.cybertip.ca, phone the Winnipeg Police at 986-3464, or email them at wps-vice@winnipeg.ca. For more information on this topic, visit www.stopsexwithkids.ca.