

Warning signs

of child/youth sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation or sex trafficking of a child or youth can be a difficult thing to recognize. There are often many indications that a youth might be in an exploitive situation, but there are five main warning signs that we share with youth in our workshops as noted below. You may not always detect all 5 warning signs, sometimes 1 or 2 signs is enough.

Age Difference

Traffickers and exploiters will often target younger victims because of their vulnerability. They will sometimes act as a “boyfriend/girlfriend” to build a relationship. If a child is spending time with someone much older than they are, on or offline, it could be a warning sign.

Physical & Emotional Isolation

Exploiters, traffickers, or recruiters may attempt to alienate or keep a youth away from healthy relationships with friends, family, and other trusted adults.

Gifts

Exploiters initially use gifts to build trust and then as a debt to be repaid. These can be excessive and unexplained material items that youth could not usually afford (e.g., electronic devices, cloths, jewellery, alcohol, drugs, etc.), or virtual gifts (such as online gift cards, cheat/admin codes for games).

Lifestyle Changes

Noticeable changes in behaviour, including skipping school, staying up / out later, feeling tired more often, partying more, hanging out with new/older friends, may be a red flag.

Gut Feeling

Pay attention and trust your intuition.

The presence of these warning signs does not necessarily mean a child is being exploited. However, the warning signs should be recognized, noted, and discussed.

If you need help having this conversation, please reach out to our team at info@childrenofthestreet.com or call us on 604 777 7510.

