What Is Exploitation?

Understanding Exploitation

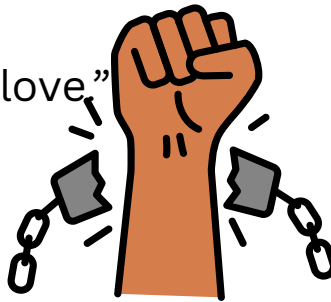
Exploitation happens when someone uses another person for their own benefit, often by taking advantage of trust, fear, vulnerability, or need. It can happen to anyone — but young people, women, and those facing trauma, isolation, or low confidence are most at risk.
It often starts with friendship, attention, gifts, or promises, and slowly turns into control, pressure, or fear.

Types of Exploitation

- Criminal exploitation: Being pressured to commit crimes, carry weapons, transport drugs ("county lines"), or hide items for someone.
- Sexual exploitation: Being manipulated or coerced into sexual activity in exchange for love, protection, status, or money.
- Financial exploitation: Being tricked into giving money, bank details, or signing contracts that benefit someone else.
- Emotional exploitation: When someone uses guilt, fear, or affection to control your decisions or behaviour.
- Online exploitation: Manipulation through social media, gaming, or messaging to gain trust, personal information, or images.

How Exploitation Can Feel

- Confusing: "They were nice to me at first."
- Trapped: "I can't leave or they'll hurt me or someone I love."
- Guilty or ashamed, even when you did nothing wrong.
- Scared to speak up — or afraid no one will believe you.
- Numb or disconnected — unsure how it even started.



Common Signs Someone May Be Exploited

- Sudden change in behaviour, mood, or appearance.
- New friends, gifts, money, or phone with no clear reason.
- Isolating from family or old friends.
- Excessive secrecy about whereabouts or online activity.
- Signs of fear, anxiety, or withdrawal.
- Pressure to keep secrets or "owe favours."

Why People Exploit

Because they want power or control.
They target those who seem isolated, kind, loyal, or in need of love — and use that as a doorway to gain influence.
It is never your fault if someone manipulates or deceives you.

Healing & Protection

You have the right to be safe, respected, and free.
If something doesn't feel right, talk to someone you trust — a teacher, parent, mentor, or organisation like Akima.
Support exists to help you rebuild safety, boundaries, and confidence without judgment.

If You Need Support (UK)

- **Akima Charity: contact@akimacharity.org | 0208 079 2198 (Lived experience, Trauma Aftercare, Therapeutic Interventions charity)**
- **Childline: 0800 1111 (24/7, free, confidential)**
- **NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000**
- **Fearless: 0800 555 111 (report anonymously)**