



# Ellie's story

## A first-hand account of child sexual exploitation

Ellie was groomed from the age of 12 and was subsequently a victim of human trafficking and child sexual exploitation for seven years. She describes being trafficked as a 'life sentence'. Now a young woman of 23, she experiences regular flashbacks to the trauma she suffered and lives with ongoing medical complications.

### In Ellie's own words...



There were so many times as a young girl I would walk into a pharmacy, or the doctors, and could very easily get contraception without being questioned as to why, at the age of 12 and throughout my teens, I would even be in the position to need it. It was the same for so many of the other girls too. You could get it for someone else and they wouldn't have a clue or they just didn't care.

There's a reason that 'consent' has an age limit. You wouldn't put many life choice responsibilities into the hands of a kid and expect them to be able to fully grasp the concept of the decisions they are making.

So why is it so different when it comes to sex? How can a kid of 12 fully understand everything about it, what is right, wrong, safe or legal? No child is able to consent to something they can't fully understand.

I still can't understand my own experiences and I'm now 23, so how a young teenage child can be seen as able to consent by authorities is unbearable to accept.

If just once through those seven years one person was to question the behaviours they were seeing, or the warning signs right in front of them, then I would've had so much more of a chance of being allowed to be a child that wasn't exploited. But instead you get overlooked, ignored and become hidden by the authorities that are meant to look beneath the surface and protect.



Police, teachers, social workers etc just thought, ‘She’s just another one of those naughty, rebellious kids. Out and about all hours drinking, getting into trouble and putting herself around. She’s too much to deal with.’

But they should’ve been asking: ‘Why? What is happening to make her be this way? There has to be more to this.’ You’d be surprised at how many kids underneath all that hardness actually just want someone to look long enough to see something isn’t right, and they need protecting from something.

That first time I went to get the morning-after pill and a pack of condoms I was 12. If someone had stopped me and said, because of your age we need to bring your parent, carer or social worker in for you to have this, the next seven years I probably wouldn’t have been an exploited child. But it’s too easy to get hold of contraception without any questions or care, and then you slip under the radar and it’s too late.

**‘Ellie’ is a pseudonym. She lives in constant fear of her former abusers finding her and for that reason is unable to contact her family or friends. If she could speak out in public, she would.**



Sarah Carter

When youth worker Sarah Carter talked Ellie through the recommendations of the Family Education Trust report *Unprotected*, Ellie welcomed its publication. She particularly appreciated the recommendations in relation to applying the age of consent in professional practice.

*Unprotected: How the normalisation of underage sex is exposing children and young people to the risk of sexual exploitation*

by Norman Wells

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