

### Who can be a victim of sexual offending?

In previous Explainers, we've focused on offenders. In this Explainer, we think through some of the things that make people vulnerable.

**Remember: Offenders are looking for the maximum reward at minimum risk—so they are looking for victims who are vulnerable or who can be made vulnerable. If this is something they are able to do, it is also something we can try to counter.**

#### Who is vulnerable to offending?

In short, anyone can be.

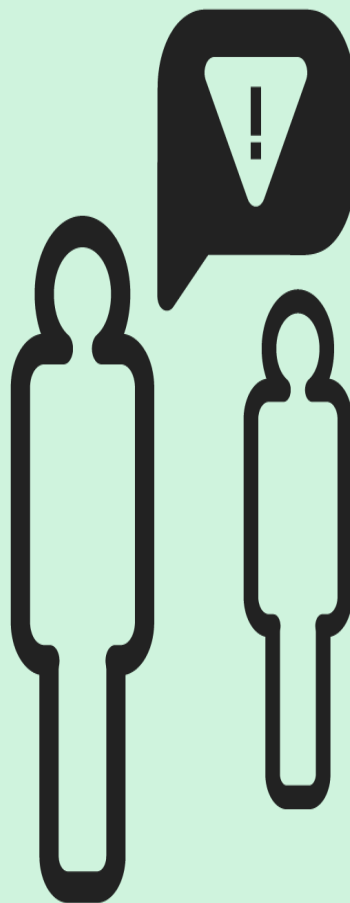
We pointed out in previous Explainers that most offences happen in situations where the offender knows the victim and particularly where the offender is able to have power over the victim.

All of us can find ourselves in positions where we are relatively powerless to protect ourselves.

However, some groups are at a natural disadvantage.

These groups would include:

- Children
- Vulnerable adults
- Women and girls
- Sex workers
- Those who have suffered prior abuse
- Looked-after children
- Drug and alcohol users



#### And what can make someone more vulnerable?

What ties many of these groups together is a lack of access to external support—either naturally, as can be the case in familial relationships, or through the offenders' own actions in removing support, as can be the case in abusive partner relationships.

Past experiences can create patterns of behaviour which make victimisation more likely—those who have been deprived of warmth and affection may tolerate abusive relationships for the insincere affection they receive from their abuser.

And those who are suffering disadvantage may find themselves trapped in situations where they see no alternative to an abusive relationship—for instance where that relationship provides financial or other material support which the victim needs (“survival sex”), or where there is a fear that reporting would lead to punishment by external

## Thinking back to grooming

Some of these factors are features that the victim carries with them, but some are created by the offender. Think back to the stages of grooming with vulnerability in mind:

### Stage 1

The offender looks for someone with existing vulnerabilities—a child who is unattended, a vulnerable adult who can be manipulated, a person with a history of abuse.

### Stage 2

The offender starts to build a relationship based around providing the victim with things they want or need—either material, such as financial support, or emotions, such as empathy and listening.

### Stage 3

The offender tries to remove alternative sources of support, perhaps by persuading the victim that such support isn't available ('you won't be believed', 'you'd get in trouble yourself') or by removing their access to it.

### Stage 4

The offender can then abuse with a degree of impunity. The victim is trapped in their situation, dependent on the abuser and unable to seek outside help.

### Further questions you might want to think about:

What can we do to help people who are vulnerable to victimization? What should we do when we know someone is a victim? What effects does abuse have?



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TDI is a national charity which works to increase public protection by finding practical and creative solutions to the problem of sexual offending.

For over 25 years we have been at the forefront of the field, providing training, research, consultancy and public protection schemes to individuals and organisations across society.

If you've found this explainer useful, you may be interested in learning more through one of our training programmes. Contact us at [info@tdi.org.uk](mailto:info@tdi.org.uk) to find out more.