




Safeguarding scenario: Would you recognise the signs?

Imagine this...





A member of staff mentions that one of your pupils has recently become worried about going home.

-  "There are always different people at the house."
-  "Mum says they're just friends staying over."
-  "People keep knocking on the door late at night."

The pupil also says their parent seems more anxious than usual and that the house is becoming increasingly untidy. Would you recognise this as a potential safeguarding concern?







What is cuckooing?

Cuckooing is when criminals take over the home of a vulnerable person and use it for criminal activity, often involving:

-  Drug dealing
-  Weapon storage
-  Criminal exploitation
-  Organised crime

The victim may feel unable to stop it due to fear, intimidation, coercion, dependency or manipulation.




Warning signs may include:

-  Frequent visitors at unusual times of the day or night
-  Increased anxiety, fear or withdrawal from the resident
-  A property becoming neglected or deteriorating
-  Reduced contact with family, friends or support services
-  Increased anti-social behaviour around the property
-  Excess rubbish, litter or evidence of frequent visitors


Who may be particularly vulnerable?

- Individuals experiencing mental health difficulties
- People with substance misuse issues
- Those who are socially isolated or lonely
- Individuals with physical or learning disabilities
- People experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity
- Families affected by domestic abuse, criminal exploitation or other vulnerabilities

How do offenders gain control?

-  Grooming and befriending
-  Offering gifts, money, drugs or help with bills
-  Isolation from family and support networks




 Intimidation, threats and coercion

As safeguarding professionals, we must remember that criminal exploitation does not only affect children. The adults around them can also be victims.

- If something doesn't feel right, report it.
- Share concerns through safeguarding procedures.
- Trust your professional curiosity.

As a former headteacher and now Safeguarding Consultant, I often remind staff that safeguarding starts with noticing the small changes, asking questions and being professionally curious.

 Would your staff team recognise the signs of cuckooing if they emerged through a child's comments or concerns?