

# County Lines



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# What is County Lines?

- ▶ UK Government defines County lines as:

*“County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.”*

- ▶ Trafficking and criminal exploitation are forms of abuse and therefore should be afforded a safeguarding response.


# Child Criminal Exploitation

- ▶ Could appear to be consensual
  - ▶ Occurs when a group or individual takes advantage to coerce, manipulate, deceive or control a child
  - ▶ It does not always involve physical contact – it can occur through the use of technology.
  - ▶ Can involve enticement methods accompanied by threats of force/violence.
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# Signs to Look out For

- ▶ Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area;
- ▶ Unexplained money, clothes, or mobile phones
- ▶ Excessive texts / phone calls and/or having multiple handsets
- ▶ Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- ▶ Leaving home / care without explanation
- ▶ Unexplained injuries
- ▶ Parental concerns
- ▶ Carrying weapons
- ▶ Significant decline in school results / performance
- ▶ Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- ▶ Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being


# Who is Vulnerable

- ▶ Children as young as 12 years – 15–16 years most common age – Both males and females
  - ▶ White \ British children being targeted – more likely to evade detection
  - ▶ Prior experience of neglect / abuse
  - ▶ Lack of stable / safe home
  - ▶ Being in care
  - ▶ Excluded from main stream school
  - ▶ Social isolation and or difficulties
  - ▶ Homelessness or insecure accommodation
  - ▶ Physical / mental learning difficulties
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# What can you do?

- ▶ Any practitioner working with a vulnerable person who they think may be at risk of county lines exploitation should follow their local safeguarding guidance and share this information with local authority social services. If you believe a person is in immediate risk of harm, you should **contact the police.**
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# Victims not Criminals

- ▶ Victims are often viewed by professionals as having “made a choice” to get involved with these gangs and are therefore viewed as criminals.
  - ▶ It is important to remember that young people being exploited in this way are likely to be being trafficked, as they are having their travel arranged or facilitated for the purpose of them being exploited.
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# Statutory Defence

- ▶ the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a statutory defence for victims of child trafficking and slavery for certain criminal offences.
- ▶ this does not mean children and young people should be simply 'let off' of any crimes that they commit, but that the impact of the trafficking and exploitation be taken into consideration when making criminal justice decisions. In some cases, it may be appropriate not to pursue criminal proceedings, but this should be assessed on an individual basis.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKRCWbif-x4>

