

1 What is it?

County Lines is the term commonly used to describe the approach taken by gangs and criminal networks to supply class A drugs from urban to suburban areas across the country, including market and coastal towns, using dedicated mobile phone lines known as 'deal lines' or 'graft lines'.

2 How it works

Typically, the 'graft phone' is kept away from the area where the drugs are sold and a relay system is used to contact those acting as dealers. A local property which is often occupied by a vulnerable person is used as a base for the groups activities. The acquiring of the property is often by force or coercion and is known as 'cuckooing'.

3 Why it matters

Groups and Organised Crime Groups exploit children and teenagers to deal on their behalf. Children are seen as easily controlled and inexpensive to resource. These children will often fall into some form of debt to the group and this can lead to violence and assaults against them.

7 What should we do?

Be cautious with the language we use. Some language minimises the risks and reality of the child's situation, so professionals should avoid using such terms in their recording and conversations. Use the County Lines and Exploitation Toolkit for guidance. If a child or young person is at risk of harm or abuse please report it to the Integrated Front Door on **0151 606 2008**. In an emergency always dial **999**.

4 Why it matters

The children involved often do not perceive themselves to be victims of exploitation, as they consider they have acted voluntarily. This is further complicated as the exploited children often receive cash or gifts/drugs from their abusers as a means to groom them.

6 What are the signs?

Recognising a child who is being exploited means seeing changes in behaviour including; going missing from home or absent from school without explanation; mixing with new friends their parents don't know; experimental drug use, often cannabis; having more than one mobile phone; appearing nervous/scared/evasive/secretive; suffering injuries they can't explain; having tickets for train or coach travel.

5 Recognising vulnerability

There are several factors that will make a child more vulnerable to being exploited including: Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household; Drug or alcohol misuse; History of abuse; Recent bereavement or loss; Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships; Friends with children who are exploited; Lacking friends from the same age group; Living in residential care; Low self-esteem or self-confidence.

