

COUNTY LINES

What are county lines?

County lines is a term used when gangs and organised crime networks from big cities expand their drug dealing operations to smaller towns often using violence to drive out local dealers and exploit children and vulnerable people to sell drugs on their behalf in return for money, gifts or status. Dealers will use a dedicated mobile phone line known as the 'deal line' to take orders from drug users.

In cases where the customers live in different areas to where the dealers and networks are based drug runners are required to transport drugs and collect payment. In most cases these runners are children and vulnerable people who have been targeted and exploited as they can stay under the radar or law enforcement but are dispensable if they are caught.

This form of exploitation has devastating effects on each individual's life, their families and their community. Children as young as 7 years of age are groomed, pressured and coerced into trafficking drugs, often between urban and rural sites. These vulnerable children are used to transport drugs, cash or even weapons whilst being exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse.

In some cases, dealers will take over a local property, known as 'cuckooing.' 'Cuckooing' is a term used when criminals target the home of a vulnerable person, often so that they can use the property for criminal purposes.

This may be for criminal activity such as drug-dealing, hiding weapons, trafficking's, sexual activity etc. The term comes from the behaviour of cuckoo birds who take over the nests of other birds. Often, a criminal will befriend a vulnerable person in order to exploit them and use their property for their criminal activity. The person is usually intimidated and too scared to report it to anyone.

Some children are particularly vulnerable, including children who:

- have previous experience of abuse or within the care system
- are living in homes with domestic abuse/mental ill health/ substance abuse
- have few social opportunities and feel isolated
- are living with financial abuse or in deprivation
- have frequent house moves or homelessness
- have a learning disability
- have been excluded within the education system
- are involved with gangs through older friends or sibling

As seen in sexual exploitation children often don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality.

Some signs to look out for include:

- an increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- new and regularly changing residents (changing accents compared to local accent)
- returning home later or staying out all night
- unexplained absence from school, college, training or work
- young people going missing maybe for long periods of time
- young people seen getting into different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- being found in areas away from home
- increasing drug use or large amounts of drugs found on young people
- unexplained often unaffordable new things e.g. clothes, jewellery, phones, cars etc
- increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour
- using sexual or drug related/ violent language you wouldn't expect them to know

In an early year's setting, it is not likely to be the child that is involved in county lines, but a sibling, friend or parent might be. It's important to be alert to and respond to language a child may use or any behaviour they display which might cause concerns.

**If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on 999.
If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns with your DSL and contact ICRT for further advice.**

Safeguarding

In case of an immediate referral contact Integrated Contact Referral team (ICRT)

Children's Safeguarding	8.30am to 5.15pm Monday to Thursday, and 8.30am to 4.45pm Friday	0191 561 7007
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The Out of Hours Team	Available Monday-Thursday 5.15-8.30am and from Friday 4.45pm - until Monday 8.30am. 24 hours Saturday and Sunday	0191 520 5552
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A written referral must be sent within one working day to
safeguarding.children@togetherforchildren.org.uk

In the case of an Allegation

Designated Officer (LADO)	lado@togetherforchildren.org.uk	0191 561 3901
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Early Help

Early Help Advice and Allocations Team	Early Help Together for Children	0191 561 4084
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For more information

SSCP Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership - Home Page
(safeguardingchildrensunderland.com)

[Protecting children from county lines | NSPCC Learning](#)

[County lines: criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[County Lines \(county-lines.co.uk\)](http://county-lines.co.uk)

[County Lines & Child Exploitation | The Children's Society \(childrensociety.org.uk\)](http://childrensociety.org.uk)

[county-lines-v2-final-parent-and-carer-leaflet.pdf \(northumbria.police.uk\)](#)

Brought to you by the Childcare Team:

Nicola Wardroper, Childcare Team Leader

nicola.wardroper@togetherforchildren.org.uk / 07435 753524

Kaye Welsh Childcare Development Officer

kaye.welsh@togetherforchildren.org.uk / 07867 160236