



THEME OF THE MONTH
MARCH 2021

**CHILD CRIMINAL
EXPLOITATION &
COUNTY LINES**



CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

Young people and children who are involved with criminal exploitation and gangs require help and support. They may be victims of violence or pressured into doing things like carrying drugs/ weapons or stealing. They might be put into dangerous situations, exploited and abused.

WHAT IS CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION?

Criminal exploitation is when young people and children are manipulated and pressured into committing crimes, this is child abuse.

WHAT IS A GANG?

The word 'gang' means various things in different contexts, the government in their paper 'Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity' distinguishes between peer groups, street gangs and organised criminal gangs.

It is not illegal for a young person to be involved in a gang – there are various types of 'gangs' and not every 'gang' is dangerous or unlawful. However, gang involvement can be related to illegal activity, particularly organised criminal gangs involved in trafficking, drug dealing and violent crime.

DANGERS OF CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

It is important to be mindful of the risks of criminal exploitation or being involved with a criminal gang. They know how to use different tactics to recruit and exploit young people and children, including bribing them with rewards, threatening them, befriending them, or pressuring them.

Dangers of criminal exploitation include:

- Being exploited and forced to commit crimes
- Being subject to threats, blackmail and violence
- Being arrested, including for crimes committed by the gang that they have not directly committed under the law of joint enterprise
- Not being able to leave or cut off ties with the gang
- Having their safety or the safety of friends and family threatened
- Risk of physical harm, rape and sexual abuse
- Risk of emotional abuse
- Risk of severe injury or being killed
- Abusing alcohol, drugs and other substances
- Long term impact on career options and education.



Manipulating a child into committing crimes is abusive. Children who are targeted can also be physically abused, emotionally abused, sexually exploited, groomed or trafficked. However, as children involved in gangs often commit crimes themselves, occasionally they aren't seen as victims by adults and professionals. It is important to spot the signs and act immediately if you believe a child is being groomed or becoming involved with a gang.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE WORRIED

TALK AND LISTEN

If a young person or child is being groomed into joining a gang there are many factors to think about to protect them and keep them safe. It is important that they feel able to talk to you, or to another trusted adult outside of the gang. Speak to them openly about the consequences of violent or illegal behaviour as they may not realise how they could be liable or could have been lied to.

BE AWARE

If you are worried about a child, or realize that they are participating in a gang or criminal group, try to be aware where they go when they're out, who they're with and what they're up to on social media.

ASK FOR HELP

If you're concerned about your child, a young relative or friend, the sooner you reach out to the Police or other agencies the better.

- Contact the NSPCC helpline to speak to a trained professional about your worries. They can take action and signpost you to the right services and support agencies in your area
- Contact the police immediately if you're worried the child is in immediate danger
- Contact Children's Services – you can find them through your local council
- Talk to the safeguarding lead at the child's school and ask for support.

ENCOURAGE CHANGE

You can encourage them to get involved in positive activities at school or in the local area, this can include clubs or sports. You can also speak to them about what they would like to do in the future, and find apprenticeships and school programmes to help. It's important they understand that they have other options.

Have a conversation with them about how to cope with pressure and how to deal with conflicts without using violence.



WHAT IS COUNTY LINES?

County lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas, market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines, known as “deal lines”.

The gang activity is greatly associated with violence, drug dealing and exploitation which has a damaging impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities. Gangs will use children, and vulnerable people to transport drugs and money. They will also seek to establish a base in target locations, usually by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or intimidation – this is referred to as ‘cuckooing’.

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving and linking into:

- Drugs
- Violence/weapons
- Gang affiliation
- Criminal and sexual exploitation
- Modern slavery
- Missing/trafficked
- Safeguarding risks

GROOMING

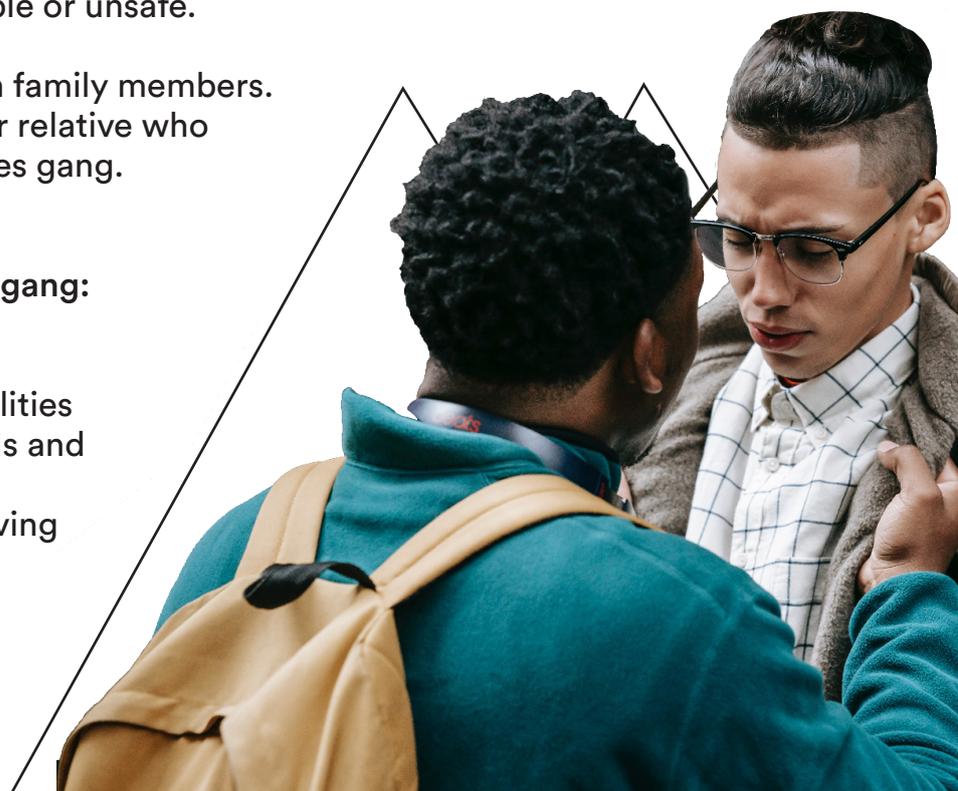
Once they have spotted a child, the gang will make some form of contact and this is when the grooming process will begin. This could be in person or by mobile phone. Social media profiles can also be used to glamourise gang life and attract the young people.

County lines gangs offer money and status to attract young people. Children may also be attracted to joining a gang by the possibility of belonging to a ‘family’ that will protect them if their own family feels unstable or unsafe.

Some children are groomed through family members. For example, if they have a sibling or relative who is already involved with a county lines gang.

The grooming process involves the gang:

- Seeking out a child to exploit
- Observing the child for vulnerabilities
- Finding out what the child’s needs and wants are
- Manipulating the child into believing that being in the gang can fulfil these needs.



WHO IS VULNERABLE TO COUNTY LINES EXPLOITATION?

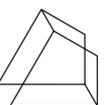
- Children as young as 10 years old being exploited to courier drugs out of their local area
- Both males and females (average age: 13-17 years old)
- Gangs targeting children that are not the usual 'stereotype', who are likely to evade police detection.
- Intensified use of social media to make initial contact with children: 'grooming'



SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Young people involved in county lines may display some of the signs below. Any sudden changes in their lifestyle must be discussed with them.

- Persistently missing days at school, being away from home and/or being found out-of-area
- Unexplained possession of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive numbers of texts and/or phone calls
- Relationships with controlling and older individuals or groups
- Leaving home/care without any explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault from unexplained injuries
- Carrying weapons
- Significant deterioration in school grades and performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being



REPORTING CONCERNS

If you're worried that a young person or child may be or is at risk of being exploited by a county lines gang, it is important that you share your 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.

- Follow your organisational child protection procedures. Organisations that work with children and relatives will have safeguarding policies and procedures in place.
- Contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Their trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.
- Contact the local child protection services. Their contact details can be found on the website for the appropriate local authority. The local authority the child comes from is accountable for the child's welfare. But it is also a good idea to contact the local authority in the area the child is found, as they may need to be a part of the multi-agency response and there may be other children or vulnerable adults at risk.
- Contact the police.

LSP'S SAFEGUARDING TEAM

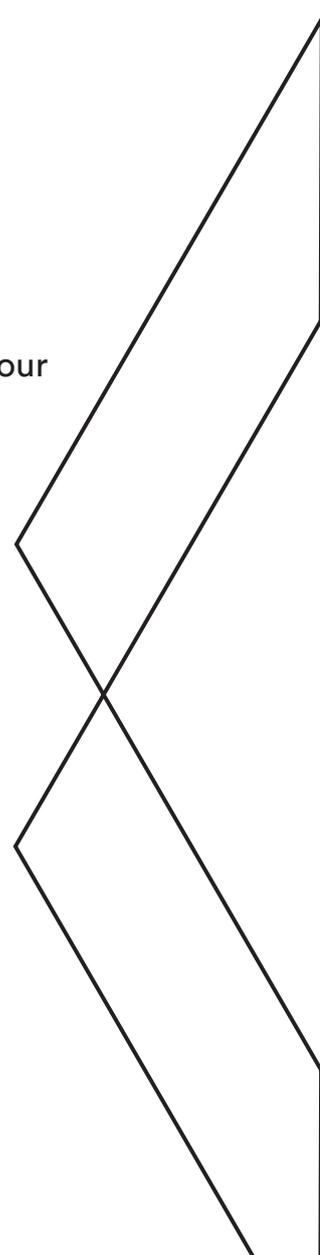
If you have any concerns at all, please don't hesitate to contact a member of our Safeguarding team.



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