

County Lines

Information for parents and carers of primary school-aged children



What is County Lines?

County Lines is a form of criminal exploitation involving the transport and sale of drugs. It can involve moving drugs and money from one street to the next, or from one end of the country to the other, and the people who do the 'running' are often children who have been targeted and groomed into doing so by criminal gangs. Drugs are advertised by text message on dedicated 'deal lines' and on social media.

Why do I need to know about this? My child is so young

Unfortunately, children as young as 7 have been known to be recruited by gangs who are involved in drug dealing and other criminal activity. Awareness is key, as is early intervention, and knowing how to seek help if you are concerned is important, too. Be particularly aware if your child has older siblings or spends a lot of time with older children when you're not present.

How do criminals exploit children?

TARGET

Criminals will watch an area - e.g. children coming and going from school or hanging around a park - to see if they can spot a particularly vulnerable child. They will then strike up a friendship and get to know them before moving to the 'test' stage.

TEST

The criminal will offer gifts such as money, expensive trainers, a phone, and will aim to make the child feel special and part of the gang. They will then test the child's loyalty by asking them to run small errands or hold onto items for them, whilst rewarding this loyalty with more gifts.

TRAP

The criminal will now control the child by isolating them from their friends and family, making threats against them if the child tells anyone about what the gang does. They will demand payback for all the gifts previously given, which could include moving and selling drugs, and sexual exploitation. The child will now feel indebted and trapped.

[This video illustrates the process.](#)

How do I protect my child, and what are the signs that a child could be being criminally exploited?

Be curious about their friendship groups and where they are when they're not at school or with you. Make sure they know they can come to you if they are approached by new 'friends' when they are out and about, especially older people. Remind them about [Childline](#) as a source of support, too. If you have concerns, share them with family members and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at your child's school.

There are many signs that a child may be being groomed and/or exploited, including a change in their behaviour. Be conscious of any changes in presentation: they may begin to take more interest in their appearance and in the clothes they wear. Visit this [NSPCC weblink](#) for more information.

Report

You can report any information to the police: 999 in an emergency, or otherwise via 101 or [our website](#).

Visit [Crimestoppers](#) for advice on how to report County Lines-related information anonymously.

[Fearless](#) (part of Crimestoppers) is available for young people to make anonymous reports.

Crimestoppers.



Support

[Unseen's County Lines campaign](#)

- Request an information guide to learn more about County Lines.

Unseen also runs a [free helpline](#) offering advice and support.

[SafeCall - Missing People](#)

- A free and confidential anonymous helpline for children and their families affected by County Lines.

[NSPCC Helpline](#)

- Help and advice if you have concerns about a child's welfare.

