

COUNTY LINES

➤ Who's this guidance for?

This guidance is primarily aimed at frontline staff who work with or are aware of vulnerable persons, either children, young people or vulnerable adults.

➤ What's the guidance for?

Criminal exploitation of children, young persons and vulnerable adults is a geographically widespread form of harm that is a typical feature of 'County Lines' (Dangerous Drug Networks) activity. It is a harm which is relatively little known about or recognised by those who are often best placed to spot the signals and its potential victims.

This guidance is intended to explain the nature of the harm to enable carers to recognise the signs and symptoms and respond appropriately, which will include intelligence submissions, so that potential victims get the support and help they need.

➤ What is county lines exploitation?

County lines, sometimes referred to as Dangerous Drug Networks (DDN's) is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs into our local market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone numbers, often referred to as 'graft phones' or 'deal lines'. It can often involve child criminal exploitation (CCE) through the use of children from the urban source area or the targeting of local children and vulnerable adults to move both drugs and money. Gangs having established a market base can typically take over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force, coercion and or deception in a term referred to as 'cuckooing'.

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

➤ Signs to look out for

A young person's involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs. A young person might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in a young person's lifestyle should be discussed with them.

Some classic indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below:

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

➤ What to do if you are concerned

Any carer working with a vulnerable person, irrespective of age, who they think may be at risk of county lines exploitation should share their concerns with their supervising social worker or children's social worker immediately.

If you believe a person is in immediate risk of harm you should contact the police as a matter of urgency through normal channels such as 999.