

Safeguarding Bulletin

8th October 2024

County Lines

The Children's Society have reported a 40% increase in County Lines during lockdown due to young people spending more time online and more time by themselves. This allows gangs to 'groom' vulnerable young people into gang culture and take advantage of them, forcing them into criminal activity.

County lines is the name given to drug dealing where organised criminal groups (OCGs) coerce vulnerable people to move and supply drugs, usually from cities into smaller towns and rural areas.

They exploit vulnerable people, including children and those with mental health or addiction issues, by recruiting them to distribute drugs, often referred to as 'drug running.'

They exploit and take advantage of children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. Quite often, those children are made to travel across counties, and are given dedicated mobile phone 'lines' to supply drugs. The grooming might start with them being asked to "keep watch" but it soon escalates to them being forced to stash weapons, money or become drug couriers themselves. *It's at this point that they are likely to experience the intimidation and violence.*

Young people aged 14-17 are most likely to be targeted by criminal groups but there are reports of children as young as seven being groomed into county lines. **In recent years, victims of this crime have become younger.** It's worth noting, **Primary School children are seen as easy targets because they're less likely to get caught,** although secondary school students can still fall victim to their coercion.

County Lines is EVERYWHERE

Just because county lines may not get the coverage of other societal issues, it doesn't mean it's a small problem.

It's not just a 'big city' problem. ***Police forces report the violence subjected to victims involved in this criminal activity is getting worse.***

Cuckooing - This term relates to members of an organised crime group targeting a vulnerable person and taking over their property to prepare and deal drugs from.

Trap House - This refers to the property being used to deal drugs from. Sometimes this may be a vacant property or it will belong to the vulnerable person being exploited, and this will be used for the drop off and collection of drugs.

The trap house is mostly identified by the unusual amount of traffic where people may come even in late-night hours and there can be a lot of activities happening during the weekends or on the first and third day of the month

Signs of cuckooing:

- An increase in people entering and leaving the property
- An increase in cars or bikes outside
- An increase in anti-social behavior
- Increase in litter outside

Did You Know?

Young people aged 14-17 are most likely to be targeted by criminal groups but there are reports of seven-year olds being groomed into county lines.

Factors that heighten vulnerability include:

- Past experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of a stable home environment – both in the past and present
- Social isolation or difficulties
- Economic vulnerability
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status
- Connection with others, involved in gangs
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Having mental health or substance misuse
- Being in care
- Being excluded from mainstream education, particularly attending a PRU



Our School Locality:

Our school is located in a deprived area which increases our student's risk of falling victim to this element of safeguarding.

Sign and indicators:

- Connection with others, involved in gangs
- Returning home late, staying out all night or going missing
- Being found in areas away from home
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going
- Unexplained money, phone(s), clothes or jewelry
- Increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour

How do you know if 'County Lines' drug dealing is happening in your area?

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g different accents compared to local accent)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community



IMPORTANT

If you suspect a student could be involved, or at risk, you must report this to the Safeguarding Team as a priority.

School Safeguarding Team:

Dawn Hindmarch – Lead DSL
Jackie Reynolds – Deputy DSL
Jill Gray – Deputy DSL



- Recordings should be made under the relevant category
- Record student and staff initials only, no full names
- Recordings should be factual with no opinions
- Recordings should be precise and detailed
- Recordings in bullet point format

All staff are requested to complete the additional training through The National College, using the following link:

<https://nationalcollege.com/webinars/online-sexual-abuse-strengthening-safeguarding-measures>

