Advice for parents and carers

County lines involves the transportation of illegal drugs from one place to another, usually across different counties.

Groups or gangs target young and vulnerable people from all backgrounds, to run 'mobile phone lines' and move drugs across borders.

While most young people will not become involved in county lines, it is important that you are able to recognise the signs and know how to protect your child.

Why do young people become involved in County Lines?

Gangs are known to target vulnerable young people; some of the factors that heighten a person's vulnerability include:

- Going through a family breakdown
- Struggling at school or experiencing learning difficulties
- Homeless or living in a care home
- Trapped in poverty
- A sense of belonging
- Lack of money
- Pressure and influence by their peers. Peer to peer abuse can be males and females.
- A sense of power
- To gain friends and social status
- Protection

Signs to look out for

Here are some signs to look out for that may suggest someone you know might be involved in county lines activity:

- A sudden change in behaviour, with violent or aggressive outbursts
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Becoming isolated from friends and family
- Carrying weapons - this may include taking items from the home
- Multiple mobile phones or additional sim cards
- Unexplained new possessions and money
- Unknown train/bus tickets
- Having hotel cards or keys to unknown places
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going
- Regularly going missing and/or missing school
- Unexplained injuries that could indicate physical assault or self-harm
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Associating with established groups outside of their usual peers and social circle, in particular older members.

What you can do to help

- Be aware of what your child is looking at online and have appropriate restrictions in place. Groups will often target young people on chatrooms, social media and gaming apps
- Know where your child is and who they are hanging around with
- Talk to your child and listen to their concerns. Mae sure the doors of communication are always open
- Report any concerns you have to the Police on **101**. This helps us to build a local picture and protect young people from risky situations
- Encourage your child to get involved in positive activities and motivate them to succeed
- Talk to your child's education facility, or any other professionals - for example, your GP or healthcare professional - if you have any concerns
- Talk to other parents, especially if your child says they are going to a 'friend's house'.

Want to know more?

Here are some useful links you can explore for more information and support.

ChildLine 0800 1111 — www.childline.org.uk

The Children's Society — www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-is-county-lines

fearless.org — www.fearless.org

NSPCC — www.nspcc.org.uk

UK Safer Internet Centre — www.saferinternet.org.uk

THINK U KNOW — www.thinkuknow.co.uk

County Lines and Exploitation

Advice for parents and carers