



# Child Exploitation



**A Guide for  
Parents / Carers**

# What is Criminal Exploitation?

County lines is a term that is used when gangs in big cities like London, Birmingham and Liverpool use mobile phone “lines” to sell drugs outside of their cities. They use young people and vulnerable adults to move their drugs around for them.

When a gang does this to an adult the police call it Criminal Exploitation. When they groom or threaten young people to become involved, it is called “Child Criminal Exploitation”. (CCE) The gangs running County lines are dangerous and cruel and once a person is involved, it is really hard to get away.

Child Criminal Exploitation usually starts with someone promising something if a person moves their drugs for them. This might be money, drugs or nice clothes. They often pretend to be a young person’s friend and say they will treat them better than their family/carers. Even if a young person is being given something for running they are still being used by gangs. Many young people find that after a while they get robbed and this might be by their own gang. They are then in debt and have to run for the gangs for free. Sometimes gangs threaten young people’s families or friends to get them to do what they want.

## How does it affect young people and vulnerable adults?

Children under 18 years of age and vulnerable adults over 18 years of age can be at risk.

- Both males and females can be targeted.
- Even if the person seems to be agreeing with it, it can still be exploitation.
- Victims can be made to feel special by being given gifts or money or be very scared due to threats and violence.
- It can lead to anxiety, depression self-harm and other emotional or mental health issues.
- Exploitation can be carried out by individuals or groups, males or females, other young people or adults.
- The giving of gifts is a way to draw people in. No one just gives away money, clothes, phones or drugs and expects nothing in return.

## How Does it happen?

- Gang members will ask young people to carry drugs for them and offer them money to do it.
- Young people might have friends doing it and they can be made to find other young people and introduce them to the gang.
- YouTube and other “social media are used to make gangs look “cool” and make young people want to join them.

- Young people who use drugs can be picked out by gangs as easy targets to be used as runners.
- Gang members may give you a phone so they can contact you without anyone knowing

## What to look out for?

Parents and family members can also identify and protect by knowing the signs, how it can impact and what they can do next if they are worried that a child is being exploited. Look for:

- Children persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area.
- Children having new clothes, phones or having money and not being able to explain where they got them.
- Getting a lot of phone calls or texts and being secretive about them, answering them where parents or carers cannot see or hear.
- Involved with older individuals, groups or new friends who seem to have a lot of control over them.
- Leaving home or care without explanation, especially after receiving texts or calls.
- Having physical injuries they can't or won't explain.
- Carrying weapons or hiding them in their room.
- Significant decline in school results or performance
- Gang associations, being isolated from usual peers or social networks.
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.
- Girls asking for the morning after pill.
- Young people complaining of sexually transmitted infections.

## What can I do as a parent / carer?

- Be aware of where your child/teenager is and who they are with.
- Monitor friendships/new associates.
- Look out for signs such as your child/ teenager having unexplained money, new clothes, mobile phones etc.
- Be available for your child to approach.
- Take note of anything suspicious and make police aware or professionals you or your child may be working with.
- Be vigilant. Phone police or crime stoppers with any information you may have e.g. names/car registration plates.
- Make contact with any agency on this leaflet.

**G**ifts you can't explain? Going missing from home or care? Growing apart from family or usual friends? Getting picked up by people you don't know?

**A**ctively keeping things from you? Always going off to places or with people you don't know? Acting strange? Anxious? Looking worried? Looking scared?

**N**ew friends who seem to be very controlling. New people in a vulnerable adult's home? Nagging doubts about what is going on?

**G**ive them signs you will support them. Give them a safe space to speak. Give them time to explain their worries, fears or problems.

**S**upport them. Speak out about it. Seek advice.

## Useful Contacts

Crimestoppers	0800 555 111
Children Social Care	
Peterborough	01733 864180
Cambridgeshire	0345 045 5203
Out of Hours (Emergency Duty Team)	01733 234724

Cambridgeshire Constabulary	101
If a child / young person is in immediate danger call 999	

Missing People Safecall (Call or text)	116000
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