

# What is County Lines?



County lines is increasingly becoming a huge safeguarding concern for children and young people. 90% of police departments have seen an increase in county lines activity in their area. Criminal activity is a serious issue in the UK with 46,000 children involved in gangs. In 2022 there were 478 cases of modern slavery reported in Birmingham involving children with many of these criminal exploitation and county lines related. (<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk>)

County lines is a type of criminal exploitation where children and young people are groomed by gangs for criminal activity such as selling or storing drugs and weapons and getting transported usually to remote coastal and market towns to traffic drugs.

Other ways children and young people may be criminally exploited include; trafficking, gang and knife crime, financial fraud and sexual exploitation. Children are groomed and then often stuck paying back debts to these gangs and forced into criminal activity.

Young people in secondary school are most targeted by gangs but children as young as 6 have been groomed into county lines.

Even if younger children aren't initially selling or moving drugs they are likely to be groomed and exposed because gangs see them as unlikely to be caught or suspected.

## Signs to look at out

- Often missing from school, home or care
- Unable or unwilling to explain where they have been
- Out for long periods of time where they are unreachable
- Having money, new clothes, phones which they can't explain
- Travelling to locations you wouldn't expect to find them
- e.g. coastal, rural towns, even big cities.
- Sudden changes in personality or behaviour such as becoming more withdrawn or acting out and being aggressive.
- Having relationships likely secretive with older people who may often be dominant and controlling towards the young person.



An infographic with a green header and a grey body. The header says 'SPOT THE SIGNS OF COUNTY LINES' and 'Children and vulnerable adults are at risk of exploitation from gangs. This could include...'. Below this are two rows of icons with text descriptions. The first row includes: 'Persistently going missing from school or home, or being found out-of-area', 'Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes or mobile phones', 'Excessive receipt of texts or phone calls', 'Relationships with controlling, older individuals or gang association', and 'Leaving home or care without explanation'. The second row includes: 'Suspicion of self-harm, physical assault or unexplained injuries', 'Parental concerns', 'Significant decline in school performance', and 'Significant change in emotional wellbeing'.



### **What are we doing as a school to raise awareness?**

The school has dedicated a week to educating staff and children on county lines starting 4<sup>th</sup> March. Things we are doing include;

- Our PCSO Duncan Long will be holding a workshop for years 4,5 and 6 to promote awareness and understanding of county lines and where to access advice.
- All staff will be receiving a safeguarding briefing on county lines, how to spot signs and relevant information
- All parents will be receiving this newsletter with access to useful links and information

### **Where to access support if you are worried about a child?**

- If a child is in immediate danger or risk call 999
- Contact your local children services- <https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/contact>



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### **Useful organisations for gaining information:**

- Crime stoppers helpline 0800 555 111 and website <https://crimestoppers-uk.org>
- NSPCC Helpline 0808 800 5000 and website <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/county-lines/>
- Children's Society offers a range of support, training and information on county lines and child exploitation as well as guides for parents <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk>
- Follow your organisations child protection procedures, Slade's is linked here> <https://slade.bham.sch.uk/document/2472#slade-primary-safeguarding-and-child-protection-policy-2023-24/>



**CrimeStoppers.**

**0800 555 111**

**100% anonymous. Always.**