

What is County Lines?

The [National Crime Agency](#) define County Lines as: “County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The ‘County Line’ is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes as a result of this trend.”

Exploitation in County Lines

A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young and vulnerable people. The dealers will frequently target children and adults - often with mental health or addiction problems - to act as drug runners or move cash so they can stay under the radar of law enforcement.

In some cases, the dealers will take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. This is known as cuckooing.

People exploited in this way will quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked to areas a long way from home as part of the network's drug dealing business.

Exploited people often don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality. It is important that we all play our part to understand county lines and speak out if we have concerns.

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

Some signs to look out for include:

- 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)
- Change in person's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- People you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- People seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- People seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school/activities etc.
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community
- Unexplained injuries

What to do if you have concerns

The best advice is to trust your instincts. Even if someone isn't involved in county lines drug dealing, they may be being exploited in some other way, so it's always worth speaking out.

You can speak to your local police by dialing 101, or in an emergency 999.

If you would rather remain anonymous, you can contact the independent charity [Crimestoppers](#) on 0800 555 111.

If you notice something linked to the railways, you can report concerns to the British Transport Police by texting 61016 from your mobile. In an emergency dial 999.

For professionals working with children and/or vulnerable people follow [local safeguarding procedures](#) and share your concerns with local authority social care services.

If you are a person who is worried about your involvement, or a friend's involvement in county lines a good option is to speak to an adult you trust and talk to them about your concerns.

Acknowledgement/Further information

- This learning brief has been written based on the National Crime Agencies page on County Lines [County Lines - National Crime Agency](#)
- Government guidance: [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Awareness Posters: [County lines - protecting vulnerable people from exploitation: posters - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Cuckooing Oxford County Council have produced an information page on cuckooing [What is cuckooing | Cuckooing | Oxford City Council](#)
- [West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adult Board Website](#)

Thankyou for taking the time to read Learning Brief. If you would like to provide any feedback or have any questions regarding the Board please contact: Lynne.Mason@Reading.gov.uk