



# criminal exploitation and county lines

---

information and guidance for parents and carers



[www.safeineastsussex.org.uk](http://www.safeineastsussex.org.uk)

## Criminal exploitation and County Lines:

### What do parents need to know?

County lines, or 'going country' means groups or gangs using young people or vulnerable adults to carry and sell drugs from borough to borough, and across county boundaries. It is a tactic used by groups or gangs to sell drugs in an area outside of the area they live, reducing their risk of detection. This issue is affecting many areas across the UK and its impact can be seen in East Sussex and in many of our towns.

County line enterprises almost always involve exploitation of vulnerable people: this could involve both children and adults and is always a safeguarding issue. The gang/group will put vulnerable individuals between themselves and the risk of detection, asking them to carry and sell drugs, and/or to sell drugs at the other end of the line.

This almost exclusively involves violence, intimidation and the offer of money or drugs. The gang might also send young vulnerable people from their own area to stay at other locations out of the area and distribute the drugs, again often intimidating and threatening them to stay. These young people are made to stay in locations sometimes known as a 'trap house', and mobile phones are used to order more drugs, carried by other young people, who travel by train or car.

The impact of this is that young people become indebted to gang/groups and are forced into labour and exploitation to pay off debts.

**It is important to remember that a young person might not relate to their experience as being abusive or exploitative. The young person may feel a sense of 'loyalty' and 'brotherhood' to the exploiters and may feel emotionally fulfilled in a way they haven't experienced from parents or carers before.**

**The young person may feel they have gained 'friends' or 'family' and that these people care for him or her. The young person may be receiving money or rewards that they have not had access to previously or the money may be supporting their family to cover basic needs. They may also feel a sense of 'status' and 'power' that they haven't had before.**

**A young person's involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs.**

**A young person might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as a friend of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in a young person's lifestyle should be discussed with them. Some indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:**

### **Some indicators for parents/carers to be aware of can include:**

- Frequent missing episodes and been found out of area
- Found with large quantities of drugs or weapons
- Found with drugs inside rectum or vagina
- Unexplained amounts of money, mobiles, credit, clothing, jewellery, new hair cut or other items/gifts
- Returned from missing episodes with injuries, or dishevelled
- Change in behaviour; more secretive / withdrawn/isolated from peers or not mixing with usual friend
- Unexplained absences from, or not engaged in school/ college/ training/ work
- Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive at home or school Including use of sexualised language and language in relation to drug dealing and/or violence
- Expressions around invincibility or not caring about what happens to them
- Increased interest in making money
- Reports being taken to parties, people's houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adults
- Increasing use of drugs or alcohol
- Having multiple mobile phones, sim cards or use of a phone that causes concern - multiple callers or more texts /pings than usual
- Possession of hotel keys/cards or keys to unknown premises

**We all want our children to grow up in a safe and loving environment and become happy, confident adults. To get there they need to be surrounded by positive influences, good advice and the knowledge that if they ever need help and support there will be someone to talk to.**

**As a parent/carer, it's you who they'll look to for help. And, as they're your child, it's up to you to talk to them when you think they might need a nudge in the right direction to share information or try to find out more about something that doesn't seem quite right with them at the time.**

### **What to do if you suspect that your child is involved or at risk of being criminally exploited**

- Be interested and listen to what your son/daughter is saying and hear it from a protective perspective as a parent/carer. You need to keep them safe from harm.
- Don't make judgements; especially in relation to their involvement in criminal activities. Remember they may appear to be willing participants but it is likely that their actions and choices are being controlled by criminals with more power than them.
- You can't always control situations your child becomes involved in so ask for help and support to protect them. Contact police and children's services as they are there to help and will work with you to get the right support and protection needed. Please use the contacts on the next page to pass on any concerns.

Thank you for reading this leaflet - the Safer East Sussex Team

[www.safeineastsussex.org.uk](http://www.safeineastsussex.org.uk)

## Worried about a child or teenager who might be at risk of harm or in danger?



In an emergency call 999

Anyone who has suspicions or information about drug dealing in their community or wider afield can contact the police at any time online; <https://sussex.police.uk/contact-us/report-online/> or by calling 101.

Contact East Sussex County Council Children's Services - the Single Point of Advice (SPOA) team to report a safeguarding concern

Phone: 01323 464222

General enquiries: [0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk)

**Opening hours:** Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm, Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm

For out of hours enquiries please contact our [Emergency Duty Service](#).



**NSPCC Helpline service provides:**

- Support for adults who are worried about a child
- Advice for parents and carers



If you want to report information anonymously please call Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111