

County Lines

Criminals are deliberately targeting and exploiting vulnerable children and adults. It is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.

Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, physical strength, status, access to economic or other resources, those who are homeless, experiencing learning difficulties, going through family breakdowns, struggling at school, living in care homes or trapped in poverty.

These criminals groom children into trafficking their drugs for them from urban to suburban and rural areas, with promises of money, friendship and status. Once they've been drawn in, these children are controlled using threats, violence and sexual abuse, leaving them traumatised and living in fear.

However, they become trapped in criminal exploitation, the young people involved feel as if they have no choice but to continue doing what the criminals want.

Key things to look out for are signs such as:

- Returning home late, staying out all night or repeatedly going missing
- Being found in areas away from home
- Increasing drug use, or being found to have large amounts of drugs on them
- Being secretive about who they are talking to and where they are going
- Unexplained absences from school, college, training or work
- Unexplained money, phone(s), clothes or jewellery
- Increasingly disruptive or aggressive behaviour
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Coming home with injuries or looking particularly dishevelled
- Having hotel cards or keys to unknown places.

It can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and young people or adults.

If you are concerned about a young person and think they may be being exploited then you should follow the referral [process](#) and discuss it with your unit or force lead for safeguarding and report it to the [National Safeguarding Manager](#).