

County Lines is a form of Criminal Exploitation where children and adults at risk are forced to transport and sell drugs across the country for Organised Crime Groups

It is estimated that at least 46,000 children in England are victims of County Lines.



It is understood that 80% of known deal lines in 2021 were exported from London, West Midlands and Liverpool.

Children are groomed into County Lines by abusers offering them a sense of belonging, money, verbal and physical gifts, and a sense of protection

County Lines Awareness Week

The National Crime Agencies (NCA) Strategic Assessment 2020/21 reported there being in the region of 600 operational county lines in any given month

7th – 13th March 2022

Children can be forced to transport drugs in harrowing and life threatening ways such as swallowing them or being coerced into concealing burner mobile phones or drugs internally

Homes of elderly people and of adults at risk are being taken over by criminals who invade and use them to sell and manufacture drugs. This is known as Cuckooing

Children as young as nine are given a phone and drugs. They are sent on a train to locations miles from their home to stay in squalid conditions and sell drugs





Increase in substance misuse

Staying out late or overnight, or sudden and often frequent missing from home episodes - being found in locations for which they have no known connection

Unexplained money, gifts and/ or clothing



Getting in trouble with the police for offences such as possession of substances

Spending more time on social media and being secretive about use

Spotting the Signs a Child is involved in

County Lines

Frequent phone calls or messages at all hours which may trigger an anxious response

Change in peer group including older peers/ more secretive about peer group and how they spend their time

Unexplained injuries

Disengagement from school, hobbies/ interests and peer group

Change in personality or behaviours

Finding large quantities or drugs, weapons, money and/ or drug related equipment such as scales, 'deal' bags, basic low cost mobile phones hidden by the child





An increase in people entering or leaving a property at all hours of the day and night



An increase in litter outside the property and/ or the property looking unkempt with no attempt to rectify

Signs of drug use from within and/ or outside the property

Suspicious people or vehicles attending the address

An increase of anti-social behaviour from a property

Spotting the Signs of Cuckooing

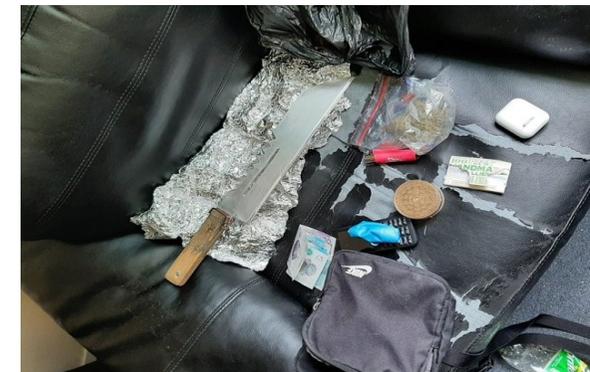
Not seeing a neighbour for a while or they become more distant or present as anxious/ pre-occupied

A noticeable lack of regular visitors e.g. family, health care professionals, friends

An unoccupied property such as a holiday let, rental or abandoned building suddenly becomes occupied and unusual activity is noticed within

An increase in vehicles and/ or bikes outside

An older neighbour suddenly starts having children/ young people attending their property at all hours and/ or is seen driving unknown children/ young people around



Useful Contacts and Further Information

- Police – Emergency 999, Non-Emergency 101
- Crimestoppers – 0800 555 111
- West Berkshire Children and Family Services - 01635 503090 or child@westberks.gov.uk
- *#LookCloser is a partnership campaign between The Children's Society, the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre and the British Transport Police aiming to raise awareness of child exploitation and abuse, with a particular focus on public spaces. The campaign also seeks to challenge stereotypes of victimhood, highlighting that child exploitation can happen anywhere, and any young person can be a victim.*

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/child-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines/spotting-signs>