
What is County Lines?



County Lines is a very serious issue where criminal gangs set up a drug dealing operation in a place outside their normal area. They will move their drug dealing from big cities to smaller towns like Bedford, or Leighton Buzzard for example in order to make more money. This is where they will try to groom young people to force them to sell drugs for them.

Put simply, County Lines is the Criminal Exploitation of Children (CCE), where gangs will find and use young people to move drugs and money for them. Young people as young as 10 are recruited, often using social media. They are exploited and forced to carry drugs between locations, usually on trains or coaches. They are also forced to sell drugs to local users.

The young person often isn't aware that they are being exploited. They are "groomed" by being encouraged, tempted or threatened to carry out crime for the benefit of the gangs. In return they are offered friendship, but also cigarettes, drugs (especially cannabis), alcohol or even food and accommodation. This often involves high levels of violence, threat and force.

Grooming

Is when someone builds an emotional connection with a young person to gain their trust for the purposes of exploitation. Young people can be groomed online or face to face, by a stranger or by someone they know (for example a family member, friend or professional). Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Gangs sometimes use violence to threaten young people when recruiting them. Gangs will become violent towards the young people working for them if they find their drugs or money are missing. Weapons and acid are sometimes used to make violent threats.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

This is where young people are often groomed and forced into relationships with gang members and made to perform sexual acts.



Other terms you may hear around County Lines:

Cuckooing - Is when drug gangs take over the home of a vulnerable person through violence and intimidation, using it as their base for selling/making drugs.

Going Country - This is the most popular term that describes county lines activity. It can also mean travelling to another city/town to deliver drugs or money.

Trapping - Is the act of selling drugs. Trapping can refer to moving drugs from one town to another or the act of selling drugs in one.

Trap House/ Bando - A building used as a base from where drugs are sold (or sometimes made). These houses usually are lived in by someone usually adult drug users but sometimes young people are forced to stay in trap houses.

Trap line - This refers to when someone owns a phone purely for running and selling drugs.

You may feel you owe money or favours to a gang and could be forced to pay off 'debts'. You may have been given things like clothes and alcohol at the start of your new friendship. Over time you may have experienced threats or violence and been made to break the law.

It's not okay for someone to intimidate you or be violent towards you.



Key facts:

Some key facts to remember with regards to criminal exploitation include:

- Both boys and girls can be exploited.
- Young people are targeted and groomed for criminal exploitation in major cities and trafficked into smaller towns. Young people are also targeted in smaller towns.
- Boys aged 14 to 17 are the most targeted, however girls and children as young as often 10 are targeted too.
- Young people can be shown how, or made, to internally insert and carry drugs inside their body, or store wrapped drugs in their cheeks, which can then be more easily swallowed if approached by police.
- Young people may be sent to 'trap' houses, or 'bandos' where they will be made to sell drugs for anything from a few days to weeks or months.
- Young people can receive money, mobile phones, expensive clothing, jewellery, new haircuts or other items and gifts in exchange for carrying out criminal activities.
- Young people can be vulnerable to targeting at pupil referral units, alternative education provisions, special education needs provisions or care homes/placements.
- Young people are often given targets to sell drugs to, given modes of transport such as mopeds, bikes or train tickets, weapons to protect themselves, and a phone with drug users' contacts on it.
- Young people receive a small cut of money/clothes/status or are 'looked after' by 'elders' i.e. given items of clothing/footwear.
- Organised crime groups have been known to set up young people in robberies, meaning that a young person believes they are in debt to the gang. This is where the young person believes they have to work for free to pay off the debt or find a way to pay it off themselves. This can also happen if the young person is actually robbed, or if they are arrested and have drugs, money or the phone confiscated by police.
- Young people may be at risk of harm from the vulnerable adults who may also be being exploited by the gangs, e.g. using their homes as a trap house. Those adults often have their own needs such as learning disabilities, substance misuse or mental health issues, and there have been cases of harm to young people by those adults.

Staying Safe: What you can do

Being safe is important. If you don't feel safe it can make you feel unhappy or stop you doing things you enjoy like going out with your friends. The information here can help you keep yourself and your friends safe. But remember, if you're really worried about anything, you should talk to someone about it. Speaking out as early as possible is important. Gang members will often make you feel that if you speak out you will be in more trouble than what you actually will be in. The longer you stay quiet the more trouble you could get into.

Help is available; please tell someone you trust that this is happening to you.

National Organisations

ChildLine

 0800 1111 Freephone  www.childline.org.uk

ChildLine is the UK's free and confidential, 24-hour helpline for children in distress or danger.

Careline

 0845 122 8622

Crisis telephone counselling service for children, young people and adults on any issue, including relationship difficulties, depression, mental health, child abuse, bullying, rape and sexual assault, domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems or stress.

Runaway Helpline

 0808 800 7070 Freephone

National 24-hour helpline for children and young people who have run away from home or care or been forced to leave home. Advice, referrals to other organisations. Can help a young person get to a place of safety. Can also pass on a message to enable them to get in touch with their family or carers.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

 www.ceop.police.uk

CEOP help children stay safe online. Has someone acted inappropriately towards you online, or to a child or young person you know? It may be sexual chat, being asked to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable or someone being insistent on meeting up. To make a report: www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-report

Don't be afraid - Say Something:

 116 000

Helpline for young people - Say Something offers a free, 24-hour, anonymous phone and SMS helpline, to disclose information and seek support.

FACE (Fighting Against Child Exploitation)

 www.faceup2it.org

Is a group of young people, male and female, who are aware of the dangers of grooming and sexual exploitation. This website was developed by them to help other young people who are vulnerable or taking risks.

Release

 0845 450 0215 Local rate

Helpline and support for drug users, families, friends and professionals. Advice on drug related subjects, including health, welfare and legal issues.

FRANK

 0800 776 600 Freephone  www.talktofrank.com

Advice and information for anyone concerned about drug or solvent misuse, including drug users, their families, friends, carers and professionals.

If you've been a victim of crime

Victim Support

 0845 3030900  www.victimsupport.org.uk

Please visit the following websites to find out more www.bedfordlscb.gov.uk, www.centralbedfordshirelscb.org.uk/lscb or www.lutonlscb.org.uk

Local Organisations in Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Against CSE

 <http://bedfordshireagainstcse.org/joining-forces-against-child-sexual-exploitation/information-for-young-people>
Agencies across Bedfordshire are teaming up to help tackle the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

If you are being exploited, or you know someone who you think may be a victim of CSE, it's important to seek help straight away. You can report concerns to the Police on 101 (always dial 999 in an emergency).

iCaSH (integrated Contraception and Sexual Health) Service Bedfordshire - supporting safe sex in Beds

 0300 300 3030  www.icash.nhs.uk

iCaSH provides all aspects of sexual and reproductive health, including contraception, sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV testing and treatment.

The Hope Programme - Helpline:

 0300 365 1045  www.hopeprogramme.com
The Hope Programme offers a telephone helpline, emotional support and counselling to women and girls, men and boys, over 10 years old who have suffered rape and sexual abuse and childhood sexual exploitation.

Link to Change - Text number for young people:

 07910 451752  www.linktochange.org.uk
Link to Change help protect young people from sexual exploitation in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Lincolnshire.

Children's Services

If you are worried about yourself or a friend you can call or email:

Bedford Borough Council - Children's Social Care
 01234 718700 (office hours) or
 mash@bedford.gcsx.gov.uk

Central Bedfordshire Council - Children's Social Care
 0300 300 8585 (office hours) or
 AccessReferral@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Luton Council - Children's Social Care
 01582 547653 or
 mash@luton.gcsx.gov.uk

Children's Social Care - Out of hours
 0300 300 8123 (out of hours)

In an emergency, phone the Police 999.