

WHAT IS COUNTY LINES?



County Lines is the police term for urban gangs exploiting young people into moving drugs from a hub, normally a large city, into other markets – suburban areas and market and coastal towns – using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”.

Children as young as 12 years old have been exploited into carrying drugs for gangs. This can involve children being trafficked away from their home area, staying in accommodation and selling and manufacturing drugs. This can include:

- Airbnb and short term private rental properties
- budget hotels
- the home of a drug user, or other vulnerable person, that is taken over by a criminal gang- this may be referred to as cuckooing.

If a child has been trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation then they are a victim of abuse. Find out more about [child trafficking](#) and what support is available.

HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE RECRUITED?

A child or young person might be recruited into a gang because of where they live or because of who their family is. They might join because they don't see another option or because they feel like they need protection. Children and young people may become involved in gangs for many reasons, including:

- peer pressure and wanting to fit in with their friends
- they feel respected and important
- they want to feel protected from other gangs, or bullies
- they want to make money, and are promised rewards
- they want to gain status, and feel powerful
- they've been excluded from school and don't feel they have a future

Organised criminal gangs groom children and young people because they're less suspicious and are given lighter sentences than adults

Studies show that a child is more at risk of being recruited if:

- they've been excluded from school
- they have special education needs
- there are problems at home like neglect, domestic abuse or sexual abuse
- they have problems with their mental health
- they live in existing gang territory
- **If you're worried a child or young person is being groomed for criminal exploitation or to join a gang, contact a trained professional immediately, see our signposting link.**

Worried about a child?

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, call the NSPCC on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000), email help@nspcc.org.uk

