

Safeguarding News



County Lines and CCE

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Welcome to the latest edition of CLF Safeguarding News. County Lines seems to be making regular headlines across the South West and there has been a growing concern of students being groomed into gang culture. We thought that it would be a good time to revisit County Lines and provide you with some indicators/ signs to be aware of.



What is County Lines?

County lines relates to the supply of class A drugs (primarily crack cocaine and heroin) from an urban hub into rural towns or county locations. This is facilitated by a group who may not necessarily be affiliated as a gang, but who have developed networks across geographical boundaries to access and exploit existing drugs markets in these areas.

A key feature of county lines drug supply is the use of a branded mobile phone line which is established in the marketplace and promoted throughout the existing customer base. Group messages are sent out periodically to the customer base to advertise the availability of drugs and orders are placed back to this line in response. A relay system (another phone) is then used to pass orders onto dealers in the rural marketplace.

The exploitation of young and vulnerable persons is a common feature in the facilitation of county lines drugs supply, whether for the storage or supply of drugs, the movement of cash, or to secure the use of dwellings held by vulnerable people in the rural marketplace (commonly referred to as cuckooing).

What is CCE?

CCE, Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or

(b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or

(c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact;

it can also occur through the use of technology

Who is at Risk?

In July 2017, the Home Office issued "Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance". It identified CCE as integral to county lines.

The Home Office listed the following factors heightening young people's vulnerability to county lines exploitation:

- "Having prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example).
- Social isolation or social difficulties.
- Economic vulnerability.
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status.
- Connections with other people involved in gangs.
- Having a physical or learning disability.
- Having mental health or substance misuse issues.
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories)."

Indicators of gang involvement

The Home Office's document "Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity" sets out the following signs that a young person may be involved in gang activity (while recognising that many are common behaviours for adolescents):

- "Child withdrawn from family.
- Sudden loss of interest in school. Decline in attendance or academic achievement (although it should be noted that some gang members will maintain a good attendance record to avoid coming to notice).
- Being emotionally 'switched off', but also containing frustration / rage.
- Starting to use new or unknown slang words.
- Holding unexplained money or possessions.
- Staying out unusually late without reason, or breaking parental rules consistently.
- Sudden change in appearance – dressing in a particular style or 'uniform' similar to that of other young people they hang around with, including a particular colour. .
- New nickname.
- Unexplained physical injuries, and/or refusal to seek / receive medical treatment for injuries.
- Graffiti style 'tags' on possessions, school books, walls.
- Constantly talking about another young person who seems to have a lot of influence over them.
- Associating with known or suspected gang members, closeness to siblings or adults in the family who are gang members.
- Starting to adopt certain codes of group behaviour e.g. ways of talking and hand signs.
- Expressing aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of young people, some of whom may have been friends in the past.
- Being scared when entering certain areas.
- Concerned by the presence of unknown youths in their neighbourhoods.

An important feature of gang involvement is that, the more heavily a child is involved with a gang, the less likely they are to talk about it

For further information or guidance, on any of the topics covered in this newsletter or any Safeguarding concerns please contact a member of your academy safeguarding Team.