

# County Lines

Please note, this is a sensitive topic that impacts many people. If you find that this has caused you any upset or distress, please stop and seek appropriate support or feel free to reach out to the Safeguarding team at [safeguarding@qa.com](mailto:safeguarding@qa.com)



# Contents

What is County Lines? ..... 1

Risks ..... 1

Recognising ..... 2

Responding ..... 3

## What is County Lines?



The 2018 Home Office Serious Crime Strategy defines a County Line, as a term that refers to gangs and organised criminal networks engaged in distributing illegal drugs to one or more areas within the UK. These operations utilise dedicated mobile phone lines or other "deal lines" and often exploit children and vulnerable adults to transport and store drugs and money. The gangs will typically employ coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence), and weapons in their activities.

## Risks

- A common characteristic of county lines drug trafficking is the **exploitation of young and vulnerable individuals**. Dealers often target children and adults, particularly those with mental health issues or addiction problems, to serve as drug runners or to transport cash, allowing the dealers to evade law enforcement detection.
- Perpetrators may use drugs and alcohol to entice young people and vulnerable individuals into the gang life style, in some cases gangs trick young people into incurring drug debts that they then have to pay off through county lines activity. This is often referred to as '**debt bondage**'.
- In some instances, dealers will take control of a **local property**, usually owned by a vulnerable person, and use it as a base for their criminal activities. This practice is known as cuckooing.
- As well as being used to transport drugs, county lines gangs may **sexually abuse and exploit** children of any gender. This can happen through:
  - Being forced into sexual activity with gang members or for the gang's financial gain
  - Being made to work off drug debts through sexual exploitation as 'payment'
  - Being groomed into what they believe is a romantic relationship with a gang member which then leads to exploitation
  - Being forced to transport drugs in ways that are invasive and harmful to their bodies.

Vulnerable and young people often don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality So it's important that we all play our part to understand county lines and speak out if we have concerns.

## Recognising

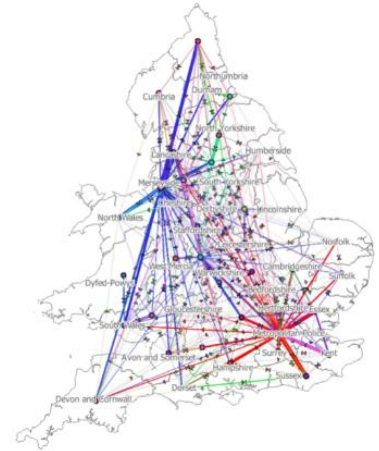
Some signs of County Lines but not limited to are:

- Frequently going missing from school, home or care
- Travelling to locations, or being found in areas they have no obvious connections with, seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Unwillingness to explain their whereabouts
- Acquiring money, clothes, accessories or mobile phones which they seem unable to account for
- Receiving excessive texts or phone calls at all hours of the day
- Having multiple mobile phone handsets or sim cards
- Withdrawing or having sudden changes in personality, behaviour or the language they use, isolation from peers or social networks
- Having relationships with controlling or older individuals and groups
- Unexplained injuries, self harming, significant changes in Mental Health
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in educational or work performance
- Associating with or being interested in gang culture
- An increase in visitors and cars / new faces to a house or flat, potentially with different accents
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Phrases used to refer to county lines include:
  - 'running a line',
  - 'going OT/out there'
  - 'going country'
  - 'going cunch'.



## Responding

- You can speak to your local police by calling 101, or in an emergency 999.
- If you would rather remain anonymous, you can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.
- If you notice something linked to the railways, you can report concerns to the British Transport Police by texting 61016 from your mobile. In an emergency dial 999.
- If you are a young person who is worried about your involvement, or a friend's involvement in county lines speak to an adult you trust and talk to them about your concerns, you can also call childline for a young person on 0800 1111.
- Contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 for young persons.
- Reach out to the Safeguarding team here at QA – [safeguarding@qa.com](mailto:safeguarding@qa.com) or to make a referral:  
[Safeguarding Referral Form \(Staff/Employer/Peer\) QA Ltd \(office.com\)](#)  
[Safeguarding Self-Referral Form \(Learners\) QA Ltd \(office.com\)](#)



## Thinking points

1. Were you aware of this topic before reading this?
2. Is there anything that surprised you?
3. How would you respond if you were to recognise signs of grooming into a gang?



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