

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
Please speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead: **Hannah Pallôt** or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads: **Matt Collinge** or **Sam Shainberg** immediately with any concerns.
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Seven Minute Safeguarding County Lines



What is it?

[The 2018 Home Office Serious Crime Strategy](#) states the National Police Chiefs Council definition of a County Line as a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young and vulnerable people. The dealers will frequently target children and vulnerable adults to act as drug runners or move cash so they can stay under the radar of law enforcement.

In some cases, the dealers will take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. This is known as cuckooing. People exploited through County Lines will quite often be exposed to physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked to areas a long way from home as part of the network's drug dealing business. Many children who are victims of child criminal or sexual exploitation don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality. It's important that we all play our part to understand county lines and speak out if we have concerns.

Why is this a concern in Cornwall?

The number of known gangs operating in Devon and Cornwall is currently around 20 but likely higher. Children are particularly vulnerable to methods these gangs use to 'recruit' members. Young people aged 14-17 are most likely to be targeted by criminal groups but there are reports of seven-year-olds being groomed into county lines. Primary school children are seen as easy targets because they're less likely to get caught. The grooming might start with them being asked to 'keep watch' but it soon escalates to them being forced to stash weapons, money, or become drug couriers.

Want to know more?

[This NSPCC page](#) has a wealth of information about County Lines

[The Children's Society](#) have reader friendly and incredibly informative pages about County Lines and other forms of Child Exploitation. The NCLCC (National County Lines Co-Ordination Centre) have produced [this awareness video](#) (10-minute watch).

[This article](#) on the BBC reports on an operation from Dec '25

One of the key aims of safeguarding is ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. Being aware of potential risks (such as County Lines) is a vital part of this.

What are the signs that a child may be at risk?

The following signs may indicate that a child is being exploited by a county lines gang:

- frequently going missing from school, home or care
- travelling to locations, or being found in areas they have no obvious connections with, including seaside or market towns
- 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
- having relationships with controlling or older individuals and groups
- unexplained injuries
- carrying weapons
- significant decline in school results or performance
- being isolated from peers or social networks
- associating with or being interested in gang culture
- self-harming or having significant changes in mental health (Ministry of Justice, 2019).