

A person wearing a dark green hoodie is sitting on a concrete barrier with orange and white diagonal stripes. They are looking down at a smartphone in their hands. The background is a large, teal-colored wall with vertical panel lines. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor setting.

COUNTY LINES INFORMATION

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WHAT IS COUNTY LINES?

County Lines is the term used where gangs or criminal networks exploit children and vulnerable adults to transport and supply drugs and money to and within rural locations via the use of a dedicated mobile phone line.

COUNTY LINES DEMOGRAPHIC

- Children as young as 9 years old
- 15-17 years is the most common age range
- Both males and females are being exploited
- White British children being targeted
- Children who have prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment - now or in the past
- Substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality
- Social isolation or social difficulties
- Economic vulnerability, poverty
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status
- Connections with other people involved in gangs

PARENTS - WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- More than one mobile phone
- Coming home late from school
- Persistently going missing from school or home, or being found out of the area
- Unexplained acquisition of money, new clothes, new mobile phone
- Excessive texting and phone calls
- Leaving the house without permission
- Suspicion of self harm, physical or unexplained injuries
- Significant decline in school performance
- Coming home later from school and consistently missing kerfew times
- Significant change in attitude at home

PARENTS - THINGS YOU CAN DO

- Spend more time with your children
- Talk to your children and listen
- Encourage them to get involved in positive activities
- Get involved in your child's school activities
- Know your child's friends and their families
- Always know where your child is and who they are with
- Help them to cope with pressure, and how to deal with conflict without the use of violence
- Speak to them about the serious consequences of violent or illegal behaviour
- Help them to understand the dangers of being in a gang and find alternative constructive ways to use their time
- Be aware of what your child is doing on the internet, listening to, and watching
- Look for ways to discipline your children that does not involve harshness, anger or violence
- Work with other parents locally and schools to watch their behaviour
- Contact your school, church, or local organisations that can provide additional support (i.e. mentoring)

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUTH

- The child or young person may have experienced multiple professionals talking about concerns with them, which again could lead a young person feeling frustrated or unable to engage.
- The child or young person may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their experiences.
- They may feel a sense of loyalty and brotherhood to the exploiters, and they may feel emotionally fulfilled in a way they haven't before experienced from parents, carers or professionals.
- The child or young person may feel that they have gained 'friends' or 'family'
- The child or young person may be receiving money or rewards that they have not had access to previously, or the money may be supporting their family to cover basic needs.
- The child or young person may feel a sense of status and power.

IS IT HAPPENING IN YOUR AREA? SPOT THE SIGNS

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g different accents compared to local accent)
- Change in resident's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in your community
- Unexplained injuries

REPORTING COUNTY LINES

- Youth organisations and schools should follow local safeguarding processes. Insist on a Multi-Agency approach in all cases of County Lines involvement.
- Parents, if your child does not come back home within 2 to 3 hour time frame after repeatedly being late home from school, report to the police 101.
- Parents contact your children's friends to see the last time your child was seen
- Parents call your child's school and work closely with them
- If you hear anything, ensure all information is reported to the police

REFERENCES

- www.childrenssociety.org.uk
- www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
- www.Nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk
- www.independent.co.uk
- www.local.gov.uk
- www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk