

**Criminal exploitation often happens within the context of **COUNTY LINES** activity. The Home Office defines county lines as:**

'The police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or 'deal lines'. It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing'.



**The risk to a child or young person and their family and friends, as a result of experiencing **criminal exploitation** can include, but is not limited to:**

- Physical injuries, including risk of serious violence and death.
- Emotional and psychological trauma.
- Sexual violence, including sexual assault, rape, indecent images being taken and shared as part of initiation, revenge or punishment.

Debt bondage, where a child or young person and their families are 'in debt' to the exploiters, which is then used

- to control the young person.
- Poor attendance and/or attainment at school/college/university.

**The following list includes a range of practical tips and recommendations for professionals when working with children and young people who have been or are being criminally exploited:**

- **Be interested**, professionally curious, listen to what the young person is saying, and hear it from a safeguarding perspective.
- **Don't make judgments**, especially in relation to their involvement in criminal activities. Remember they may appear to be willing participants, but it is likely that their actions and choices are being controlled by perpetrators with more power than them.
- **Advocate** for the child or young person, and for the child protection processes to be followed, using the three steps: report to police, refer to children's social care, refer to the National Referral Mechanism.
- **Challenge** professional views which are oppressive, judgmental, or reject the need for a child protection response.
- **Explain** what is happening and why you might need to share information. Keep the young person updated on any outcomes.
- **Ensure** the child or young person is given choices. Throughout their experience of being criminally exploited, they will have been working with parameters of little or no choice, and therefore it is important that the child or young person is given the element of choice back.

If you believe a young person may be involved in county lines or gang activity, and could be at risk of harm, you can contact the Hillingdon Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

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