



Home Office

# **Criminal exploitation of children, young people and vulnerable adults**

## **County lines**



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# Who is this guidance for?

Criminal exploitation of children, young people and vulnerable adults for the supply of drugs, and transportation of the associated money and weapons, has a devastating impact on victims, families and local communities but is often not recognised by those who are best placed to spot it. This guidance is intended to explain the nature of this harm to enable practitioners to recognise its signs and respond appropriately so that victims and potential victims get the protection and support they need.

This guidance is primarily aimed at frontline staff in England and Wales who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. This includes professionals working in:

- education;
- health;
- adult social care, children's social care and early help/family support;
- housing;
- the benefits system;
- policing;
- prisons, probation and youth justice;
- multi-agency partnerships; and
- related partner organisations, for example in the voluntary sector.

The signs and vulnerabilities associated with county lines exploitation may present differently to different professionals and safeguarding processes will vary depending on local contexts. However, the information provided here is intended to be useful to all. This document provides links to other resources to assist professionals to consider in further detail how this guidance relates to their role and responsibilities. It may also be helpful for carers, parents and others in the community, although they are not the primary audience.

This guidance does not attempt to provide information about the entirety of the county lines issue or the UK Government's response.

It has been produced by the Home Office in co-operation with other government departments, the Welsh Government, statutory agencies and voluntary sector partners.

A number of real-life case studies are provided to illustrate some of the ways exploitation can take place and professionals have identified victims and to demonstrate some of the good practices in responding.

# What is county lines exploitation?

“County lines” is a violent and exploitative form of drug distribution. A common feature of county lines is the exploitation of children, young people and vulnerable adults who are instructed to deliver and/or store drugs, and associated money or weapons, to dealers or drug users, locally or in other counties.

## The UK Government defines county lines as:

“County lines is 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.” ([Serious Violence Strategy](#))

While county lines victims are not limited to under 18 year olds, where a child is exploited, it is often described as child criminal exploitation.

## The UK Government defines child criminal exploitation as:

“Child criminal exploitation is common in county lines and 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. 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.” ([Serious Violence Strategy](#))

Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and includes, for instance, children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft. However, many of the characteristics of county lines exploitation will be present in other forms of child criminal exploitation. Likewise, victims of county lines may also experience other overlapping forms of exploitation, such as sexual, in addition to criminal.

# Forms and methods of exploitation

County lines exploitation can be perpetrated by individuals or groups of any gender or nationality and can appear unsophisticated or organised. It is typified by some form of power imbalance, which perpetrators use to force, coerce, groom and/or entice victims into county lines activity. They can employ several methods to do so, such as:

- **offering an exchange** – carrying drugs in return for something, such as money, clothes, drugs, status, protection or perceived friendship, a sense of belonging or identity, or affection;
- **physical violence or threats of violence** – used to intimidate and punish victims and their families and can involve weapons, including knives and firearms;
- **abduction or kidnapping** – sometimes victims are forcibly moved and held in a location away from home;
- **emotional abuse or psychological coercive control** – by manipulating, threatening, controlling or monitoring the movements of the victim;
- **sexual abuse and exploitation** – this can be experienced by all genders;
- **blackmail** – by forcing victims to commit a crime so they can hold it over them and threaten to report it if they do not comply;
- the use of **social media, messaging apps, gaming sites and other online platforms** – including marketplace websites and smart TVs to target and communicate with victims. These modes are used by exploiters to falsely build online trusted relationships, or to post fraudulent job adverts which seem legitimate, or to cyberstalk victims in order to groom, entrap and coerce them into county lines activity;
- **"cuckooing"** (also known as "forced home invasion") – a tactic used by criminals, typically drug dealers, to take over the homes of vulnerable individuals, such as care leavers or those with addiction, physical or mental health issues, and use the property as a base for criminal activity. This is a common characteristic of the county lines business model and can occur in a range of settings such as rental and private properties, student accommodation, prisons, and commercial properties;
- **coerced internal concealment** (also known as "plugging") – the practice whereby a child or vulnerable adult is controlled or coerced into concealing drugs internally as a method of transportation to avoid detection. Drugs or sim cards are usually concealed within a condom or similar packaging and inserted into a bodily orifice (rectum or vagina) using lubricant, or swallowed;

- **debt bondage** – a form of entrapment when a victim owes money to their exploiters and is made to repay their debt, either financially or through another means such as transporting drugs. The exploiter may groom the victim by initially providing money or goods which the victim will then be made to pay back. The exploiter may also deliberately manufacture a debt, for example by staging a robbery of drugs or cash in the victim's possession in order to extort money from families or to ensure the victim will continue to perform tasks for them. The debt may also be inherited from parents and siblings; and
- **financial exploitation** – financial exploitation can take many forms. In this context, we use the term to describe exploitation which takes place for the purpose of money laundering. This is when criminals target children and adults at risk and take advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate, or deceive them into facilitating the movement of illicit funds. This can include physical cash and/or payments through financial products, such as bank and cryptocurrency accounts.

### Case study (British Transport Police)

British Transport Police identified a child at a train station who was avoiding coming to police attention. Grounds to stop and search were formed and it was established that the child had been missing for a number of days. He was in possession of two mobile phones and some Vaseline with a large amount scooped out of it, as well as some cash. The child later told officers that a ball of drugs which was wrapped in tape had been inserted into his anus. The child was taken to hospital and required surgery to repair the internal damage. The child described being exploited and intimidated to deal drugs in a market town and that threats had been made to his family, causing him to feel trapped to continue. The child was offered a rescue service and ongoing support from a voluntary sector organisation. Children's services and the other agencies in the local authority have supported the whole family through the child protection framework. The investigation into this child's exploitation has led to the charging and remanding of several adults and further children identified who were also being exploited.

# Who is vulnerable to county lines exploitation?

**Any child, young person or vulnerable adult could be a victim of county lines exploitation** as exploiters continue to adapt who they target to avoid detection.

- **Age:** 15-17 year olds make up the majority of the vulnerable people involved in county lines but children of primary school age and adults are also known to be targeted (National County Lines Coordination Centre).
- **Sex/gender:** people of all genders can be exploited. Women and girls may be exploited to perform different roles and may experience other forms of harm alongside and so are often under-identified as victims of criminal exploitation – professionals should not make assumptions when working with a girl or young woman about the intervention required.
- **Ethnicity:** people from all ethnicities and nationalities are targeted and the demographics of victims of exploitation vary across England and Wales. In some areas, there is an over-representation of people from black and mixed ethnic groups, while in others, victims are mainly white.
- **Location:** county lines are widespread nationally, in rural and urban areas, and while they can involve the movement of drugs across county borders from one area of the UK to another, some lines supply the drugs market locally, within the same town, city or county in which they originate. County lines grooming can take place in a range of settings, including in homes, public spaces, schools and universities, prisons and youth offender institutions as well as online.

Some of the factors that may heighten a person's vulnerability include:

- **having contact with the criminal justice system** – even for minor offences that do not appear to be related to county lines;
- **having experience of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse/exploitation or a lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past** (including domestic abuse, parental substance misuse or parental criminal involvement) – trauma, including adverse childhood experiences, can negatively impact on an individual's ability to develop trusted relationships or access support services;
- **social isolation or social difficulties** – the lack of a support network can mean someone is less able to get help;



- **economic vulnerability** – offers of material possessions or money for victims or their family may be more readily accepted out of a feeling of necessity and lack of legitimate financial alternatives;
- **homelessness or insecure accommodation status** – there is a lack of a safe environment to provide security and privacy;
- **connections with other people in gangs** – some individuals are targeted through family or friends who are already involved in criminal activity themselves and sometimes a drug debt owed by them is passed on to peers or family members;
- **having a physical or learning disability, or being neurodivergent** – victims may be less able to recognise they are being exploited, or less able to communicate it or access support;
- **having mental health issues** – exploiters may target poor emotional wellbeing or low self-esteem;
- **having substance misuse issues** – victims are sometimes given substances in lieu of payment;
- **being in or leaving care** – the context behind why a person is brought into care can heighten a person’s vulnerability in itself, while those in semi-independent/independent accommodation, placed out-of-area or leaving care may have less access to support networks;
- **being excluded from mainstream education, and/or a pupil at an alternative provision such as a pupil referral unit** – factors influencing a child’s exclusion may indicate they are exposed to exploitation, while being disengaged from meaningful activity and peers can evoke feelings of disenfranchisement and, for those with a reduced timetable or not attending school at all, time spent unsupervised can offer opportunities for exploitation; and
- **insecure immigration status** – for example, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refugees may have a number of vulnerability factors that can increase their exposure to exploitation, including social/cultural isolation on arrival to the country and potentially links to organised crime from their journey.

It is important to remember that risk factors such as these are never the cause of a vulnerable person’s exploitation into county lines activity; rather, they give rise to the imbalance of power which perpetrators often seek to abuse.

Moreover, **there are recorded cases of exploitation of individuals with no known risk factors and who were not previously known to services** (sometimes referred to as “clean skins” by exploiters), as they were deemed less likely to attract attention from authorities.

# Signs to look out for

Professionals should not expect victims to report their exploitation as they may not identify or be able to express that they are being exploited. They may also be too afraid to tell professionals what is happening for fear of retaliation by their exploiter.

However, their exploitation through county lines often leaves signs. Any sudden changes in a person's lifestyle should be discussed with them.

Some potential signs of county lines exploitation include, but are not limited to:

## **Behaviours**

- going missing from school or home, an unwillingness to explain their whereabouts and/or being found in areas they have no obvious connections with (out-of-area);
- school exclusion(s) and/or a significant decline in school attendance, results or performance;
- self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being, personality or behaviour;
- anti-social behaviour or involvement in other criminality; and
- use of drug and county lines-related slang (see further resources).

## **Possessions**

- unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones;
- excessive receipt of texts/phone calls and/or having multiple sim cards or handsets – this could be a 'burner phone', often an older model which uses an unregistered sim card, but it may also be a smart phone which can utilise web-based apps without a phone number;
- carrying or storing weapons;
- misuse of substances or possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia such as discarded needles, scales, small snappy bags or cling film;
- possession of train tickets for unusual train journeys; and
- possession of a rucksack or a bag that they are very attached to or will not put down.

## **Relationships**

- relationships with controlling/older individuals or groups; and

- isolation from usual peers or social networks.

### Appearance

- suspicion of physical assault/unexplained injuries – these tend to be visible but minor injuries which are issued as a threat, such as cigarette burns or small cuts, but can also be much more serious life-threatening injuries, such as stab wounds.

Signs to look out for **online** include:

- spending increased or unusually excessive amounts of time online day and night;
- building inappropriate relationships online or appearing anxious or secretive about their online activities and who they are communicating with;
- unexpected or excessive sharing of personal information online, such as full name, address, or phone number;
- experiencing bullying, harassment or threats online; and
- receiving or sending money, gifts or gaming tokens/coins to someone online.

Signs of a **cuckooed property** include:

- the presence of unfamiliar individuals coming and going from the property at all hours or an increase in key fob activity;
- an increase in foot traffic or loitering in the area around the property or takeaway deliveries at unusual hours;
- an increase in noise and disturbance levels, including late-night parties or arguments or other signs of anti-social behaviour such as littering around the property;
- damage to the property, such as broken windows or doors; and
- threats or intimidation towards other residents or neighbours.

Signs of **coerced internal concealment** include:

- refusing to consume food or drink;
- being in possession of lubricants, condoms or similar packaging;
- a dishevelled appearance with stained clothing; and
- being physically unwell.

Signs of **financial exploitation** or a **debt bondage** include:

- receiving large or unexplained sums of cash or deposits in a bank account;
- unusual financial transactions or being made to make financial transactions they do not understand;
- a new preoccupation with earning money;
- asking for money or stealing money/items to pay back a debt; and
- opening new accounts with banks or crypto exchanges.

# What to do if you are concerned

## Safeguarding

Any child, young person or vulnerable adult who you think may be at risk of county lines exploitation requires a safeguarding response.

The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children sets out what professionals and organisations in England need to do, individually and in partnership with other agencies, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Working Together highlights that everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe and that multi-agency working and information sharing is essential to ensure that children and families receive the right help at the right time. Working Together makes clear that in all welfare and safeguarding enquiries, a child-centred approach should be adopted by practitioners to ensure that the best interests of the child are considered at all times.

Working Together also sets out further information about the equal and shared duty on the three safeguarding partners (the local authority, health and police) to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area. Working Together provides further information about the referral process for reporting concerns about the safety or welfare of a child and the steps that practitioners should take when working together to assess and provide services for children who may be in need, including those suffering harm. Working Together makes clear that all local areas should have a local protocol in place that sets out how a case will be managed once a child is referred to children's social care.

If you believe a person is at immediate risk of harm:

**Contact the police.** Call 999 now.

If a person is not at immediate risk of harm:

**Follow your local safeguarding guidance** and ensure this information is shared with local authority social services and the police. Police involvement should not be limited to instances of immediate risk of harm.

The first step is usually to contact your designated safeguarding lead within your organisation who should complete a safeguarding referral to the local authority responsible for a child or vulnerable adult. If you do not know who this is, refer to your manager. Your designated safeguarding lead has the responsibility for linking in with your local authority's social services, but you should follow up to ensure action is taken. You should not assume a colleague, or another professional will take action that might be critical in keeping a vulnerable person safe.

Your local authority's social services will then consider with safeguarding partner agencies whether any further actions are necessary to protect the vulnerable person.

If you are not satisfied with the local authority's response, you should follow up on your concerns by discussing these with your safeguarding lead or escalating them via the local escalation procedure.

Further information on safeguarding can be found in the further resources section of this guidance.

### Modern slavery and human trafficking

Criminal exploitation is a form of modern slavery and as such, if you are a [designated First Responder](#) for the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), you must also refer any child you suspect of being a potential victim of modern slavery to the NRM using the [online referral form](#). In cases involving adults you must refer them where they provide informed consent for you to do so. Where an adult does not consent, statutory First Responders still have a 'Duty to Notify' the Home Office that they have encountered a potential victim. In all cases, First Responders should consider whether it is appropriate to also refer the potential adult victim to local authority adult safeguarding services. The NRM is a framework for identifying potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. Any referral should be after appropriate safeguarding steps have been taken and in light of any required multi-agency discussions. If you are not a designated First Responder for the NRM you should work with a designated First Responder who may make such a referral where deemed appropriate.

Following referral, a Competent Authority decision maker will consider the case and make a Reasonable Grounds decision. The Reasonable Grounds threshold is an objective one. The decision maker must agree with the statement that there are "reasonable grounds to believe that a person is a victim of modern slavery (human trafficking or slavery, servitude, or forced or compulsory labour)". A decision maker should take into account all of the information available, including the victim's account and any other relevant information that supports or undermines it, but should also consider whether, in the circumstances of the case, it is reasonable to expect supporting evidence or corroborating information to be available. Therefore, when a referral is made the first responder should consider what supporting evidence or corroborating information can be provided with it to support a decision.

Organisations in Wales should follow the Wales Modern Slavery Safeguarding Pathway.

Victims of modern slavery are also provided a statutory defence for certain criminal offences under Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Further information on the NRM, including referral and decision-making processes for adults and children, available support and the Section 45 defence can be found in the further resources section of this guidance.

## In custody

If an individual in custody is suspected to have experienced exploitation, police officers must use their local safeguarding arrangements to respond to safety and welfare concerns. Being arrested can be a key reachable moment and so a joined-up multi-agency approach should be used to prevent further exploitation.

Additional information on responsibilities towards children in custody can be found in the further resources section of this guidance.

## Coerced internal concealment

A victim who has been coerced into internally concealing drugs may have suffered serious physical harm as a result of the insertion or forced removal of items and so may require immediate medical treatment. In addition, they may require ongoing support to address their emotional and psychological needs.

Additional information on responsibilities where there is suspected coerced internal concealment, including on intimate searches, can be found in the further resources section of this guidance.

## Debt bondage and financial exploitation

Responding to debt bondage and financial exploitation is complex. The confiscation of money or drugs from victims can unintentionally create a debt that they will be forced to pay off and supporting attempts to make payments are unlikely to result in debts being written off. It is therefore important that professionals provide support and open dialogue to discuss risks with victims, including to their families, and consider safety plans and disruption interventions to break the cycle of exploitation.

Additional guidance can be found in the further resources section of this document.

## Disruption

Targeting and disrupting the perpetrators of county lines exploitation is an integral part of protecting victims. Likewise, reporting safeguarding concerns can support disruption activity and investigations.

There is a range of drugs, modern slavery, weapons, violence and sexual offences that can be charged against county lines perpetrators on a case-by-case basis.

There is also a range of civil orders which can be applied for to disrupt perpetrators, including but not limited to: Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders and Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders; Anti-Social Behaviour Civil Injunctions; and Drug Dealing Telecommunication Restriction Orders. Non-statutory tools are also available such as Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNS).

## Cuckooing

In cases of cuckooing, the police, local authorities and housing associations can take action to evict the offenders and support the victim to regain control of their property through the application of civil orders such as Closure Orders and Community Protection Notices which can be used to close down premises that are being used for criminal activities. You should consider how the use of any order will impact on the victim's safety.

Additional information on disruption tools and tactics can be found in the further resources section of this guidance.

## Case study (North Wales Police)

A missing child was arrested by North Wales Police in possession of a number of wraps of Class A drugs and a personal mobile phone. Although he declined to provide evidence at any point during the investigation and did not see himself as a victim, officers assessed that, on balance, the child was a victim and did not wait for a NRM positive conclusive grounds decision before taking safeguarding measures and discontinuing the drugs offences against him. An evidence-led complex investigation was launched which collaborated with a range of partners including local authorities and probation, and utilised lines of enquiry such as phone downloads, call data, prison intelligence, open source information, Automatic Number Plate Recognition and taxi booking systems data. The evidence identified multiple offenders involved in directing the child to handle drugs and cash and transporting him to different locations. As a result, and despite the victim not being involved in the investigation, seven convictions were secured for human trafficking and six for conspiracy to supply heroin and cocaine, with sentences of up to over ten years. Three Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders, one Slavery and Trafficking Risk Order and two Restraining Orders were also issued.



# Ways of working

## Putting the victim first

When working with an individual suspected of being exploited by county lines, their activity may appear consensual, they may not recognise that they are being exploited and the distinction between victim and perpetrator may appear unclear. This may be the case especially for those transitioning into adulthood.

However, individuals who have been groomed and exploited into criminal activity have not freely chosen to be involved, cannot consent to being exploited and so should be seen as victims first and foremost.

It is also important to recognise that they are likely to have had traumatic experiences which they may have begun to normalise. You should consider responses from a trauma-informed perspective and take an approach that puts the child, young person or vulnerable adult first, including involving them in the safeguarding process and discussing next steps with them to build their trust.

## Case study (Catch22)

Jack (not his real name) is 18 years old and had been groomed into a county lines group at the age of 13. He would often be sent many miles from home for days at a time, staying at unknown people's addresses to sell drugs. On one of these occasions, Jack discarded the drugs he was carrying just before being arrested. He then became a victim of debt bondage and was made to work to pay his debt off. When another young person fled the gang, Jack was forced to either find this young person or pay their debt off too. When Jack refused to give up the location of the other young person, the gang kidnapped and tortured Jack. He finally went to the police and witness protection measures were implemented.

Jack was referred to Catch22, a charity funded by the Home Office to provide specialist support to victims of county lines. Jack received prolonged and intensive support. Interventions have included: mental health support to help manage trauma, confidence building, housing support, CV writing and employability support, and support from a lived experience mentor. Jack has been able to acknowledge his past and understand that he was a victim of exploitation. He has demonstrated a keen interest in sharing his story and one day aspires to become a mentor himself.

## Understanding the risks

When working with a suspected victim of county lines, have professional curiosity, keep a log of activity and save any evidence related to the exploitation, including items like train tickets and receipts from out of the area, as well as messages, images or videos online. Use reachable moments to connect with the vulnerable person and actively seek inputs from different professional perspectives to build a picture of the whole story.

## Partnerships and multi-agency working

Effective collaboration and information sharing between agencies is essential to protecting victims and disrupting offenders. It is therefore important to provide as much information as possible as part of the safeguarding referral process. This will allow any assessment to consider all the available evidence to address harm.

If you are aware that a potential victim may have come from / travelled to another area as part of their involvement in county lines, you should include this information to enable liaison between safeguarding agencies in the different areas. However, remember that this cross-county travel is not necessary – where you have concerns about criminal exploitation for the supply of drugs locally, victims will need safeguarding in the same way. Likewise, the absence of a phone line for supply of the drugs should not prevent you from making a safeguarding referral as county lines activity can be conducted online. The type of technology used should not determine whether action is taken to safeguard victims.

Proactive sharing of other contextual information, such as assessments that have been undertaken, referrals for support or other measures that are in place for a vulnerable person will help partners act more effectively.

You should understand the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and groups you can report information into locally which can enable this collaboration, including but not limited to: child protection strategy meetings, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, Multi-Agency Child Exploitation panels (or equivalent), Community Safety Partnerships, Combating Drugs Partnerships, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

In addition, be aware of Violence Reduction Units and other commissioned services available locally and nationally provided by other sectors which can deliver specialist support interventions to vulnerable people of concern.

Parents and families should also be considered safeguarding partners. Listen to their concerns seriously and discuss solutions with them as they could help practitioners recognise what will work best for their child.

# Other useful resources

## County lines and Child Criminal Exploitation

- National County Lines Coordination Centre, [County Lines Awareness Video](#) – a 10 minute video created in partnership with Sketchups, discussing the county lines methodology and how this is impacting children, young people and vulnerable adults, partners, law enforcement and society.
- The Children's Society, [#LookCloser](#) exploitation awareness campaign – funded by the Home Office and run in partnership with the National County Lines Coordination Centre and British Transport Police, which asks everyone to play a role in spotting the signs of county lines and other forms of child exploitation and taking action to ensure these children get help.
- The Children's Society, [County lines and criminal exploitation toolkit](#) – toolkit for supporting young people who are at risk of or being trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation.

## Sexual abuse and exploitation

- Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, [Signs and Indicators: A template for identifying and recording signs of child sexual abuse](#) – to support professionals across a range of organisations and agencies in systematically observing, recording and communicating their concerns about possible child sexual abuse.
- Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, [Communicating with Children Guide](#) – a guide for those working with children who have or may have been sexually abused.
- Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, [Helping education settings identify and respond to concerns](#) – three resources tailored to help all education professionals when they have concerns of child sexual abuse or behaviour.
- NCA, [CEOP Education Programme](#) – Protecting children and young people from online child sexual abuse through education.

## Debt bondage and financial exploitation

- The Children's Society, [Debt Bondage in a Criminal Exploitation and County Lines Context](#) – a support resource for professionals.
- NCA, [Money muling - National Crime Agency](#) – NCA advice for young people, parents and education professionals on money muling.

## Coerced internal concealment

- NHS, [County Lines: Coercive Internal Concealment](#) – a rapid read document on internal concealment.
- College of Policing, [Children and young persons](#) – authorised professional practice for policing on intimate and strip searches of children and young people.

## Safeguarding

- Department for Education, [Working together to safeguard children](#) – statutory guidance on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.
- [Report Child Abuse to Your Local Council](#) – an online tool which directs to the relevant local authority children’s social care contact number.
- Department for Education, [Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners](#) – guidance on information sharing for people who provide safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers.

## Modern slavery and human trafficking

- Referrals to the NRM should be made using the online referral form [here](#).
- Home Office, [Modern slavery: how to identify and support victims](#) – statutory guidance for England and Wales, describing the signs that someone may be a victim of modern slavery, the support available to victims, and the process for determining whether someone is a victim.

## Disruption

- Home Office, [Child exploitation disruption toolkit](#) – disruption tactics for those working to safeguard children and young people under the age of 18 from sexual and criminal exploitation.

## Ways of working

- [Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm](#) – non-statutory guidance for local areas, developed by the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme, funded by the Department for Education and supported by the Home Office, the Department for Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Justice.
- [Contextual Safeguarding research programme](#) – publications and practice resources produced by the Contextual Safeguarding research programme.
- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, [Working definition of trauma-informed practice](#) – guidance on trauma-informed practice.

## Language

- The Children's Society, [Child Exploitation Appropriate Language Guide](#) – guidance to professionals on the appropriate use of language when discussing children and their experience of exploitation in a range of contexts.
- Parents Against Child Exploitation, [County lines slang](#) – some words/terms that are commonly used when describing county lines activity.

## Police and CPS

- Crown Prosecution Service, [CPS county lines offending guidance](#) – sets out the approach of the police and the CPS to county lines offending, including the safeguarding of vulnerable persons, and the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences.
- Home Office, [Concordat on children in custody](#) – statutory guidance for police forces and local authorities in England on their responsibilities towards children in custody.
- College of Policing, [Risk and associated investigations](#) – authorised professional practice for policing on county lines and child criminal exploitation.
- College of Policing, [Children and young persons](#) – authorised professionals practice for policing on children and young people.
- College of Policing, [Adults at risk](#) – authorised professional practice for policing on adults at risk.
- National Policing Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, [spotlight briefing on criminal exploitation](#) – police practice learning drawn from two published Serious Case Reviews around safeguarding children at risk of child criminal exploitation.

## Education

- Department for Education, [Keeping children safe in education](#) – statutory guidance for schools and colleges in England on the legal duties that must be followed to safeguard children.

## Health

- [County Lines exploitation: applying All Our Health](#) – a resource to help health professionals prevent child exploitation and protect vulnerable children that have been manipulated and coerced into crime.

## Prisons, probation and youth justice

- Ministry of Justice, [County Lines Exploitation: Practice guidance for YOTs and frontline practitioners](#) – practice guidance, providing clear referral pathways to follow and use as a best practice template, when responding to, and safeguarding children involved in county lines.

- HMPPS, [Modern slavery guidance](#) – modern slavery guidance for staff.

### Local government

- Local Government Association, [Tackling child exploitation: resources pack](#) – guidance for councillors, outlining local authorities' responsibilities with regard to child criminal and sexual exploitation.
- Local Government Association, [LGA resources on modern slavery](#) – a range of guidance documents and toolkits to support councils with their work on modern slavery.

### Wales

- Safeguarding Wales, [Wales Safeguarding Procedures](#) – national Wales procedures which detail the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children and adults who are at risk of abuse and neglect.
- Safeguarding Wales, [All Wales Practice Guides - Safeguarding children from Child Criminal Exploitation](#) – additional information about safeguarding children from child criminal exploitation. It should be used in conjunction with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.
- Welsh Government, [Wales Modern Slavery Safeguarding Pathway](#) – the pathway describes what to do if you encounter a suspected victim of modern slavery.
- Welsh Government, [Sharing information to safeguard people: factsheet](#) – a summary of what to consider when sharing information to safeguard people.
- [Trauma-Informed Wales](#) – an all-society framework to support a coherent, consistent approach to developing and implementing trauma-informed practice across Wales.
- [SchoolBeat.cymru](#) – Wales Police Schools Programme.

### Support for victims

Professionals can refer victims and families to the following Home Office-funded specialist support services:

- [Catch22 County Lines Support and Rescue](#) – a specialist support and rescue service in London, West Midlands, Merseyside and Greater Manchester for young people up to the age of 25 and their families who are criminally exploited through county lines.
- [Missing People's SafeCall](#) – a confidential and anonymous helpline and support service for young people and family members in England and Wales that are affected by county lines and criminal exploitation. The service also provides confidential support and advice for professionals in relation to their work with an exploited young person or family. Call or text 116000 for free, 9am to 11pm, 7 days a week.

- [Barnardo's](#) – runs the specialist [Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service \(ICTGS\)](#) in 17 sites in England and Wales, providing an independent source of advice and advocacy for children who have been trafficked and somebody who can speak up on their behalf. ICTGs are provided in addition to the statutory support provided by local authorities to all children in their area.

Other organisations that offer further information, advice or direct support in some areas of the county include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- St Giles Trust
- The Children's Society
- NSPCC
- Parents Against Child Exploitation
- Railway Children

### Report a concern

- Police – call 999 in an emergency, call 101 for non-emergency enquiries.
- British Transport Police – text 61016 or use the [Railway Guardian app](#).
- Crimestoppers – call 0800 555 111 or use the [online form](#). The Fearless service for under 18s can also be accessed using this [online form](#).
- Action Fraud – call 0300 123 2040 or visit the [website](#).

