

Child Exploitation

What you need to know

What is child exploitation?

Child exploitation is the criminal and sexual exploitation of children for profit or gain and is predominantly associated with the drug trade known as county lines. Criminals groom and use children to move and supply drugs, carry weapons and carry out other criminal acts such as burglary, violence and anti-social behaviour. Sexual exploitation occurs when children are coerced into performing sexual acts as a means of intimidation and control, to pay off debts and when they are forced into relationships with perpetrators.

What is county lines?

'County lines' refers to the dedicated mobile phone numbers used by criminal networks to organise the selling and distribution of drugs across the country, from bases in larger cities into towns and rural areas. It is a crime that relies heavily on exploited children.

How big a problem is county lines?

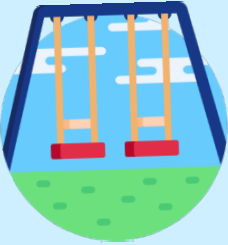
In 2019 The National Crime Agency estimated that the illegal drugs trade is turning over £0.5bn per annum, in England and that criminal networks are exploiting an estimated 46,000 children. It is thought that many more exploited children are not known to any authorities.

Like other rural areas, the south west of England has seen a significant increase in child exploitation. Escapeline is a charity working to prevent child exploitation through awareness-raising and education.



How criminals groom children

TARGET



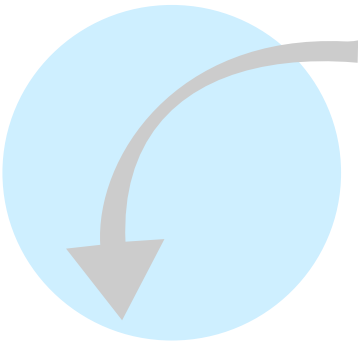
Perpetrators target children in parks, outside schools and shops and on social media. Perpetrators may be a stranger from out of the area, or someone known to the child.



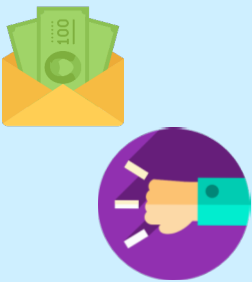
TEST



Perpetrators befriend potential victims and offer things for free such as sweets, cigarettes or cannabis. They may introduce the child into a group and make them feel wanted. Then they ask the child to carry a package or look after some money.



HOOK



The child will be paid well for what seem like small favours. The work is exciting and the group offer protection. One day the child may be robbed, threatened or attacked. They turn to the group for support but the support vanishes.



TRAP



The group threaten the child who must now pay back the debt by delivering more drugs. They may be transported to other towns to do this and they may be sexually exploited. The child is now enslaved and distanced from those who care about them.

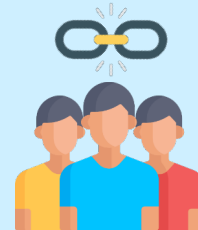
Signs of exploitation



Coming home late, going missing, being secretive about whereabouts.



Unexplained money, new clothes and mobile phones.



Sudden change in friendship group, relationships with older, controlling people, secrecy.



Receiving lots of messages and phone calls and having to respond immediately.



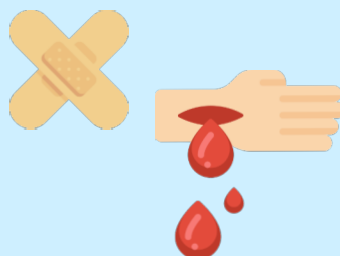
Changes in behaviour, becoming confrontational or withdrawn and distant.



Isolation from family and friends, getting into trouble at school.



Hiding and carrying drugs and weapons.







Unexplained injuries and a reduction in emotional and physical wellbeing.



Signs of drug taking such as excessive tiredness, changes in appetite, mental fog.

Action to prevent child exploitation

Be informed

-  Both boys and girls can be exploited.
-  Children between the ages of 10 and 17 and vulnerable adults are targeted.
-  Children from all backgrounds are targeted. Those with particular vulnerabilities may be at more risk.
-  Exploitation is taking place in towns and villages across the south west of England, irrespective of wealth or location.

Be part of the solution



Open up and maintain communication with children. Be the person they come to when they are in need. Be interested. Encourage involvement in positive activities.

Help children to feel welcome, included and valued. Create opportunities for success.

Create strong, supportive networks around children. When families, carers, schools, clubs and services work together, children are safer.

Know where your child, or the children you are responsible for are and who they are spending their time with. Be aware of what children are doing on the internet and who they may be interacting with.

Speak to children about the realities of child criminal exploitation. Invite a charity such as Escapeline in to your school or club to carry out an information session.

Perpetrators seek to isolate children from their families, schools and communities.

Criminals benefit from exclusion and a sense of not belonging.

Criminals exploit fractures in communities and poor communication between services.

Perpetrators operate in adult-free areas, including online, where they can have free access to groom children.

A lack of knowledge about exploitation puts children and communities at risk.

**If you are concerned about exploitation in your community contact
Crimestoppers 0800 555111 Police 101 Childline 0844 8920220**



educate | empower | prevent | www.escapeline.org.uk

Charity No. 1184475

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