

Lancashire Violence Reduction Network

Child Criminal Exploitation
A Toolkit for Professionals
2020



LANCASHIRE
VIOLENCE REDUCTION
NETWORK

Acknowledgements

The Lancashire Violence Reduction Network

Established in 2019, the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (LVRN) is a collaboration of public, private, third sector, community and lived experience organisations and individuals, which aims to prevent and reduce violence.

Preparation and authorship

Catherine Hoyle, OCG and Genga (Partnerships) Lead, Lancashire Constabulary
Siobhan Collingwood, Headteacher and Education Lead, LVRN

Editor and contributor

Dr Lindsay Youansamouth, Evidence Advisor and Academic Liaison Lead, LVRN

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Key concepts and information

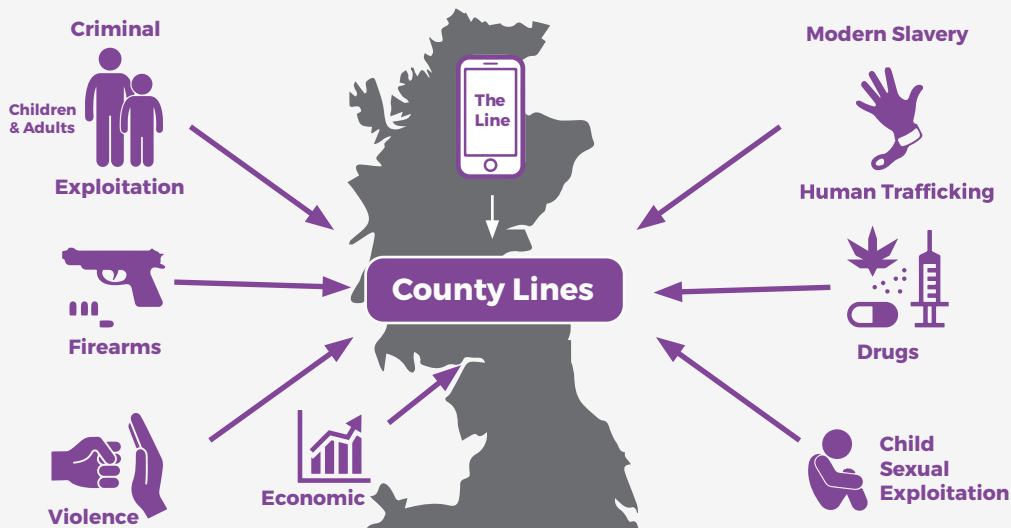
What is child criminal exploitation?

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. CCE is a form of modern slavery that sees children forced to work under the control of organised criminal gangs.

Child criminal exploitation 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. CCE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. County lines is a form of CCE.

What is county lines?

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'.



The gang activity is highly associated with violence, drug dealing and exploitation; having a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities. Gangs will use children, and vulnerable people, to move drugs and money, criminally exploiting them; they will also seek to establish a base in target locations, typically taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion – this is referred to as 'cuckooing'. It is also important to understand the grooming process, as this is evident within the recruitment of young people for criminal exploitation.

¹Criminal exploitation can also affect vulnerable adults.

What is grooming?

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of exploitation or trafficking. Children and young people can be groomed online or face to face, by a stranger or by someone they know (for example a family member, friend or professional). Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age. Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

There are similarities between different forms of exploitation and the criminal and sexual exploitation of children may overlap. Victims of child exploitation may, at any one time, be subject to both. It is vital that frontline practitioners recognise, and by working together, deploy tactics to disrupt multiple types of exploitation when they occur. Perpetrators of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE) can share patterns of behaviour in respect of coercion, violence, intimidation and the power imbalance inherent in them and many other offences.³

Key facts:

- Any child of any age and gender under the age of 18 can be exploited;
- Any vulnerable adult over the age of 18 can be exploited;
- Consensual activity can still be exploitation;
- Exploitation involves force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
- Can involve the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something);
- Social media platforms are used to exploit children;
- Gangs target children not of the 'stereotype', as they perceive they will evade police detection;
- Connections between children and perpetrators are difficult to break due to a sense of 'belonging'.

²The NSPCC have information available on grooming (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/grooming/>) child trafficking (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-trafficking/>) and child sexual exploitation <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-exploitation/>

³Home Office child exploitation disruption Toolkit: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794554/6.5120_Child_exploitation_disruption_toolkit.pdf

How are children recruited?

A child or young person might be recruited into a gang because of where they live or because of who their family is. They might join because they don't see another option or because they feel like they need protection. However, it is also important to not ignore the risk to children regardless of perceived vulnerability. Children and young people may become involved in gangs for many reasons, including:

- peer pressure and wanting to fit in with their friends;
- they feel respected and important;
- they want to feel protected from other gangs, or bullies;
- they want to make money, and are promised rewards;
- they want to gain status and/or feel powerful;
- they've been excluded from school and don't feel they have a future;
- they don't always see themselves as victims.

Vulnerabilities

There are certain factors that **can** heighten the vulnerability that a child or young person will be exploited by others. These can include:

- **Child:** If a child or young person is looked after, has learning disabilities, substance misuse, mental health problems or prior experience of neglect or abuse;
- **Home/family:** Exposure/experience of neglect, abuse and/or violence, parental substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse, poverty or homelessness;
- **Peers:** If a child is exposed to other people who are known to be exploited or experiencing peer on peer abuse;
- **Schools:** If a child has been excluded from school, attends a pupil referral unit (PRU) or is exposed to violent crime;
- **Neighbourhoods:** If a child is exposed to poverty then such areas can be targeted as a result.

Signs to look out for

Young people involved in county lines may exhibit some of the signs listed below, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in their lifestyle should be discussed with them. Young people may:

- be frequently missing from home, placement or school and may often be found out of the home area – may often go missing without explanation;
- suddenly have significant amounts of money, new phones, new clothing which is out of character;
- be carrying a number of mobile phones, receive constant calls/text messages;
- be linked to groups of young people/young adults who are older or controlling;
- have unexplained injuries or starting to self-harm;
- have poor attendance/achievement at school or show an unexpected decline in their academic work;
- be isolated from their normal peer group/become secretive about their actions;
- become withdrawn or alternatively have unexplained outbursts which are out of character (e.g. increasing stressed/anxious/angry);
- have unexplained bus or train tickets;
- be using unusual terms;
- not want to go to specific areas without explanation;
- have keys/hotel cards for unknown places;
- Returned from missing episodes with injuries, or dishevelled appearance.

Case study 1

A 16-year-old male had been reported as missing from Lancashire and was considered at risk due to his age and link to gangs. He had recently failed to appear at court for his alleged involvement in a stabbing. He was found in possession of a 6-inch kitchen knife and 20 wraps of drugs. Whilst in custody he was found to have significant burns to his body, on his stomach area, consistent with having been burnt by boiling liquid. He would not disclose further details; however, it was suspected this may have been caused by those responsible for placing him in Ipswich to deal in class A drugs.

Case study 2

At least one vulnerable female has been used by a gang from London to sexually service its members and has been subjected to sexual violence. As a result of drugs debts, they attempted to kidnap her at least twice and it is believed that they have also trafficked her to Blackpool in order to pay off a debt through prostitution.

Case study 3

A male's hand was severed and both legs broken. The victim is believed to be part of a county lines network with the offenders being a local drug line. It's suggested to be a punishment attack by the people the victim was running drugs for, for having used drugs/spent proceeds himself.

'THEY MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE FRIENDS, BUT YOU'RE NOTHING TO THEM'

How can we help children and young people?

Our roles and contextual safeguarding

The area of child criminal exploitation requires us to move beyond a focus on the child and their family to include a focus on children's peer groups and their wider community. Such an approach is described as contextual safeguarding and seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people.

Contextual safeguarding aims to disrupt harmful extra-familial contexts rather than move young people away from them. It seeks to work with the child, their family, their friends, their school and the community as a whole to take responsibility for protecting our young people from the threat of exploitation in all its guises.

Knowledge and understanding

Organised crime groups (OCGs) are constantly evolving their practice in response to their own aims and the changes within society. It is vital that all agencies ensure up to date training on this issue is provided regularly enough to keep up with developments in this area of safeguarding. It is imperative that our workforces remain sighted on the threat to children and young people and know what action to take in order to continue to keep them safe.

Being clear about the signs of vulnerability, will allow early intervention to prevent ties to the exploiter becoming entrenched and further damage done to the child, their well-being and outcomes.

Links to resources and groups available to support with CPD and workforce development is included in Section 5 of this toolkit.

Listen - no really listen!

Children vulnerable to exploitation in all its guises often feel misunderstood, displaced and outside of societal norms. When listening to their experiences and feelings we need to be present, empathic and clear that we are not blaming them.

In our book, the Slightly Bigger Book of ACEs we refer to different levels of listening. In response to this issue it is particularly important that we listen to children and young people in a manner that is non-judgemental and is not waiting to jump in with our own viewpoints.

⁴Lancashire Violence Reduction Network web site - <https://www.lancsvrn.co.uk/resources/> - Slightly Bigger Book of ACEs

We also need to be transparent in our handling of this issue, explaining clearly to the young person what our next steps will be and why these are necessary. When young people disclose what has happened, we need to be mindful of the impact upon ourselves and maintain self-care. For further information on identifying signs of trauma in staff and self-care for professionals, see Section 4 of our Lancashire Violence Reduction Network Trauma Informed Guidance⁵.

Language please

Professional responses must be mindful of the potential to further stigmatise an already abused and vulnerable young person who may be experiencing varying levels of disquiet and shame over their actions and events they have been involved in or witness to.

The use of any phrases that suggest choice, promiscuity or engagement in criminal activity fail to recognise the reality of grooming and the vulnerability of the young person involved. The excellent resource – *Appropriate Language: Child Sexual and/or Criminal Exploitation – Guidance for Professionals* published by the Children’s Society and referenced in the resources section of this toolkit, will give clear and unequivocal advice on this issue.

Ensuring that we are fully informed about language young people currently use around these experiences is vital, but changes frequently. Present understanding is that terms such as “gone country”, OT (out there), “cuntch” or “bandos” (trap houses) may be warning signs.

Advocate and be aware of barriers to engagement

The Children’s Society⁸ identifies barriers to engagement including:

- Child criminal exploitation not being understood as a safeguarding concern.
- Professionals viewing criminal exploitation as a ‘lifestyle choice’.
- Services not being consistent or persistent in their approach and closing due to ‘non-engagement’.
- Young person fearful of repercussions towards themselves, friends or family.
- Young person may not feel safe or even still be being controlled by exploiters and have no ability or power to exit.
- Young person may have a learned distrust of services such as police and social care.
- Young person may be fearful of getting in trouble with the police or be in breach of court order.

⁵ Whilst this guidance was written for school staff, much of the signs of trauma and self-care guidance is relevant to multi-agency professionals.

⁶ <https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20Toolkit.pdf>

⁷ <https://safeguardinghub.co.uk/county-lines-get-a-step-ahead-by-improving-your-knowledge/>

⁸ Pages 11-12

https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/toolkit_criminal_exploitation_and_county_lines.pdf

- Young person may have a learned distrust of services such as police and social care.
- Young person may be fearful of getting in trouble with the police or be in breach of court order.
- Young person may be made to feel they are in 'debt' to perpetrators - this is often referred to as 'debt bondage'.
- Young person withdrawn from support network due to grooming process.
- Structural inequalities related to race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture, education.
- Young person may have experienced multiple professionals talking about concerns with them.
- Young person feeling embarrassed/ashamed of their experiences.

The young person's abusers may have filled a void in their young victims' lives in terms of belonging or family ties. Removing the one group or person the young person feels attached to requires sensitive and informed practice.

Young people affected by and exposed to exploitation need us to act as their advocates, to ensure that they are not blamed and stigmatised. They need us to call out inappropriate language and stand for their right to make choices so that they feel empowered by the support provided.

This needs to be a multi-agency response

Appropriate referral decisions and action are the first steps in disruption and protection of the young person. We need to:

- Use a 4 'P' response as part of the National Serious and Organised Crime Strategy to:
 - Pursue offenders through prosecution and disruption;
 - Prepare for when serious and organised crime occurs and mitigate impact;
 - **Protect** individuals, organisations and systems from the effects of serious and organised crime;
 - **Prevent** people from engaging in serious and organised crime.
- Identify potential victims and perpetrators;
- Ensure that there is enforcement activity from police and local authorities, safeguarding of vulnerable people, target hardening of victims and locations (for example, if we identify a cuckooed address, we need to prevent the victim from being further exploited in the future - this means working with our partners);
- Submit intelligence and ensure that partner intelligence is captured also;
- Train our workforce and our partners, so that we all know how to spot the signs and ensure that appropriate activity takes place;
- Understand what legislation we can use to tackle county lines criminality;
- Have effective partnerships with other organisations and agencies.

⁹Serious Organised Crime Strategy [Serious and Organised Crime Strategy 2018 - GOV.UK](#)

What to do if you are concerned

Any practitioner working with a vulnerable person who they think may be at risk of county lines exploitation should follow their local safeguarding guidance and share this information with local authority social care services and the police. If you believe a person is in immediate risk of harm, you should contact 999.

If you are a first responder, you should also refer any young person you suspect of being a potential victim of trafficking to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). National Referral Mechanism is the national process for identifying and providing support for potential victims of modern slavery including trafficking.

Any subsequent plans to protect the young person involved should ensure that they feel consulted and empowered, including the identification of diversionary and positive activities that acknowledge their individual talents and interests. Giving the young person choices will ensure that we take them with us as we act to protect.

Further disruption and diversion of exploitation will be successfully achieved by strengthening and engaging with family and community support as explored further in this toolkit.

How can we support and strengthen communities?

Parents and families

Public information programmes, shared by schools, health professionals etc. can be helpful in ensuring that parents are aware and informed about the risk of exploitation to all children. It is vital that this is not viewed as an issue that applies to specific and vulnerable groups. Our resources section and the section on 'Signs to look out for' should help in getting relevant information out to parents and families in a timely manner.

If parents are worried that their child is at significant and imminent risk of being exploited they should in the first instance, be supported to ensure they refer their child to the correct safeguarding agencies as identified in the 'What to do if you're concerned' section of this toolkit. However, if individuals feel unsafe or that this is a step too far culturally, they can still get the right help for a vulnerable child by ringing Crimestoppers, whose contact centre is professionally staffed, open 24/7 and available on **0800 555 111**, or fill in an [anonymous online form](#), accessible via the following weblink: www.crimestoppers-uk.org.

Reporting and intelligence gathering

It is important that communities are vigilant, take responsibility and work together to disrupt the efforts of organised groups who exploit children. Reporting information to appropriate agencies like schools and the police can help to keep our children safe. The Children's Society has issued guidance on types of intelligence to be collected and includes:

- Areas that have become hotspots;
- Types of worrying activity in areas;
- Timings of issues;
- Numbers of children and young people involved;
- Names, descriptions, numbers and activities of adults who are present;
- Worrying travel patterns, including types of transport, specific bus routes and number plates of vehicles;
- Names of businesses frequented by vulnerable children/young people;
- Names of gangs that are present and information including rivalries and known possession of weapons.

⁹ <https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20Cap%20Intel%20Toolkit.pdf>

The Children’s Society guide, referred to above advises, “Each policing region has its own method of reporting intelligence. Information about an individual region’s intelligence-reporting process can be found by contacting the local police force. If in doubt, Crimestoppers can send intelligence on to a local police force intelligence management team”. In Lancashire local district Genga groups meet regularly as multi-agency teams to share intelligence and agree local plans in response to this intelligence.

Schools and pupil referral units

Schools are at the heart of their local communities. School exclusions and attendance at schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) are known by exploiters as vulnerabilities, this can make children more susceptible to being groomed and exploited. It should therefore be a priority for schools to avoid exclusions and employ supportive behaviour management.

Further steps that schools can take to reduce the vulnerability of their pupils include:

- Recording of all unauthorised absences;
- Regularly updated training for staff on exploitation;
- Working to establish links with local police officers;
- Seeking out information on known local risks, including local geographical hot spots and known perpetrators;
- High visibility patrols by staff and/or police to monitor any risk around the premises at relevant times of the day;
- Use of highly visible CCTV;
- Updated safeguarding policies including links to key multi-agency practice and information sharing links documents.

Awareness and language

Children and young people can feel very detached from their families or elders, and the inclusion within a peer group may be of more cultural relevance/significance than other influences. This, alongside differences in cultural references and language may make it more difficult to spot vulnerability to exploitation in the young people we care about. All those with a sense of responsibility for young people or a safeguarding role should ensure a good level of cultural awareness that will help identify any risks as they arise.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>

The Children's Society has produced a slang dictionary that may be helpful for adults and young people to ensure that they can recognise risks when they hear them and although language employed evolves rapidly, such phrases include:

- **Bando:** A trap house (short for abandoned house);
- **Cunch:** Out-of-town locations where drugs can be sold;
- **Going country/going long:** Going to a faraway area to sell drugs;
- **Joey:** A person employed by gang to sell to customers;
- **Kester plant:** Drugs hidden in the rectum;
- **OT:** Out trapping/out there;
- **Trap house:** Area or house usually and frequently occupied by drug dealers/drug users.

Levels of prevention and support

The effectiveness of the grooming process in creating a sense of identity and purpose in children and young people's lives cannot be ignored. If we are to be successful in protecting young people from the harmful presence of organised crime and exploitation in their lives, we must be able to offer alternative long-standing relationships and diversionary activities that create hope, interest and belonging.

Positive, diversionary activities that are long term, relevant and of interest are a vital tool in disrupting the efforts of those who seek to exploit our young people. Such activities should respond to interests of individuals, not shoe-horning young people into an existing package, which will not engage their interest long term. Third sector groups and community organisations can be a rich source of assistance in making such provision available across a community.

There are varying levels of support that can be provided to insulate our young people from the risk of exploitation.

- At a universal level, schools can provide packages of lessons and activities that help all young people to understand what exploitation is, and how they can spot exploitation of themselves or their peers.
- At the point of specific low level concerns being identified non-specialist, light touch targeted interventions can be employed e.g. a series of after school sessions, containing sports activities, accompanied by some information sessions on relevant content.
- At the point of significant need, being identified more specialist and statutory involvement and interventions are provided for example child protection procedures and police enforcement of protective legislation.

¹² <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/disrupting-exploitation-slang-dictionary.pdf>

Examples of such diversionary programmes can be found in many of the resources collected in this toolkit and across all local communities including:

- entrepreneurial schemes run in connection with local businesses, housing associations and third sector groups;
- sporting activities and mentorship schemes run alongside local football club outreach teams;
- arts and crafts development in association with local artists and arts promotion schemes;
- vocational training at local colleges;
- community gardening projects.

Useful resources and links

Source	Title	Topic(s)	Age	Description	Weblink
Fearless	Gangs (County Lines)	Gangs and county lines	Young people	Educational resource for professionals working with young people. Provides films and an educational resource (including case studies and exercises) that professionals can use to challenge young people's perceptions, stimulate debate and encourage good citizenship.	https://www.fearless.org/en/professionals/resources/gangs-(county-lines)
Home Office	Child exploitation disruption toolkit: disruption tactics	Abduction, trafficking, sexual offences, victim care, behaviour and best practice	Children and young people	A toolkit aimed at frontline staff, including education staff, working to safeguard children and young people under the age of 18 from sexual and criminal exploitation.	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794554/6.5120_Child_exploitation_disruption_toolkit.pdf
Infed	Serious and organised crime toolkit	Serious and organised crime	11-18 ears	The toolkit was developed to provide information for practitioners working with young people to help them: (1) understand why young people get involved in serious and organised crime; (2) understand how organised criminals operate; (3) spot risks and identify when young people need support; (4) help young people at risk to access the support they need. The toolkit and series of films can be used as the basis for interactive sessions with young people.	https://infed.org/mobi/soctoolkit/

Source	Title	Topic(s)	Age	Description	Weblink
NSPCC	Criminal exploitation and gangs	Criminal exploitation and gangs	Children and young people	Information and advice about how to spot the signs of criminal exploitation and involvement in gangs and what support is available for children and young people.	https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/gangs-criminal-exploitation/
Rochdale Borough Council	Blurred Lines	Child criminal exploitation, county lines, child sexual exploitation and modern slavery	12 years +	A film created by students at Oulder Hill School in Rochdale with M6 Theatre Company and accompanying resources (lesson plans and a resource pack).	http://www.rochdale.gov.uk/safeguarding
The Children's Society	Criminal exploitation and county lines resources	Child criminal exploitation, grooming and trafficking	Children and young people	Child criminal exploitation resources for parents and professionals (e.g. stages of grooming, appropriate language and a toolkit for professionals).	https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/tackling-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines/county-lines-resources
	Child criminal exploitation: Teacher's resource	Criminal exploitation, trafficking and county lines	Children and young people	Toolkit for professionals, training videos produced by the University of Greenwich, podcast, intelligence guidance, discussion points for classrooms.	https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/tackling-criminal-exploitation-and-county-lines/county-lines-resources
Youth and Policing Education Hub	County lines	County lines, drugs, violence, gangs, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery and missing persons	11-15 years	Resource packaged aimed at raising awareness about the county lines problem and helping young people to maintain resilience against becoming involved. A series of lesson plans, activities and worksheets.	https://www.youthandpolicing.co.uk/plans/county-lines/



LANCASHIRE
VIOLENCE REDUCTION
NETWORK



+44 (0) 1772 537026



@LancsVRN



LancsVRN.co.uk



LancsVRN@lancashire.pnn.police.uk



Lancashire Violence Reduction Network
County Hall, fishergate
Preston PR1 8XB