

# **Dorset & Wilts RFU County Lines Policy and Information.**

We at Dorset & Wilts Rugby Football Union are committed to protecting all children throughout our clubs in the area. We have a zero tolerance to any exploitation of children, any form of drug use will not be tolerated, and the full force of the law will be used to protect any child within our rugby family.

Dorset & Wilts RFU will support any child or parent needing help and advice for any issues related to County Lines.

If you have any concerns for a family member, a team member, or a parent of a child at your club, please speak to someone, they may be your coach or team manager, your safeguarding officer or anyone at your club you feel comfortable talking to.

## **What are county lines?**

County lines is a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns). It can happen in any part of the UK and is against the law and a form of child abuse.

## **Risks.**

County lines is a cross-cutting issue that often overlaps with other forms of abuse and criminal exploitation. It can lead to serious physical and emotional harm to young people.

## **Recognising.**

### **Grooming.**

The grooming process involves the gang:

- seeking out a child to exploit.
- observing the child for vulnerabilities.
- finding out what the child's needs and wants are.
- manipulating the child into believing that being in the gang can fulfil these needs.

Once they have identified a child, the gang will make some form of contact and the grooming process will begin. This could be in person or via mobile phone. Social media profiles may also be used to glamourise gang life and entice young people. Some children are groomed through family members, for instance if they have a sibling or relative who is already involved with a county lines gang. County lines gangs offer money and status to attract young people. Children may also be attracted to joining a gang by the prospect of belonging to a 'family' that will protect them if their own family feels unstable or unsafe.

The following have been identified as key places where county lines gangs target and approach vulnerable young people:

- schools and further and higher educational institutions.
- special educational needs schools.
- places for alternative provision outside of mainstream education.
- foster homes.
- homeless shelters.

Once a child is part of a county lines gang their loyalty and commitment will be tested. The gang will begin to trap the child by making them feel powerless to leave. This might include threats of violence if they leave, making the child feel like they are betraying their new 'family', or telling the child they will get in trouble if they seek help because they have committed a criminal offence.

### **Who is vulnerable to county lines exploitation?**

Any child could potentially be at risk of criminal exploitation by a county lines gang.

Factors that make a county lines gang more likely to target, groom and exploit a child include:

- the child having experienced neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse in the past.
- social isolation or social difficulties.
- Poverty.
- homelessness or insecure accommodation status.
- connections with other people involved in gangs.
- having a learning disability.
- having mental health problems.
- having substance misuse issues.
- being in care or having a history of being in care.
- being excluded from mainstream education.

Permanent exclusion from mainstream education has been identified as a critical event that can lead to young people becoming vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

County lines gangs can take advantage of the lack of structure, loss of a sense of belonging and feeling of rejection that exclusion can elicit in a young person.

The average age of young people who are exploited through county lines activity is 15-16 years old, but children as young as 12 have also been reported to have been involved (Home Office, 2020a).

### **Signs that a young person may be involved in criminal exploitation.**

The following signs may indicate that a child is being exploited by a county lines gang:

- frequently going missing from school, home or care.
- travelling to locations or being found in areas they have no obvious connections with, including seaside or market towns.
- unwillingness to explain their whereabouts.
- acquiring money, clothes, accessories or mobile phones which they seem unable to account for.
- receiving excessive texts or phone calls at all hours of the day.
- having multiple mobile phone handsets or sim cards.
- withdrawing or having sudden changes in personality, behaviour or the language they use.
- having relationships with controlling or older individuals and groups.
- unexplained injuries.
- carrying weapons.
- significant decline in school results or performance.

- being isolated from peers or social networks.
- associating with or being interested in gang culture.
- self-harming or having significant changes in mental health.

### **Responding to concerns about county lines exploitation.**

If you're worried that a child or young person might be or is at risk of being exploited by a county lines gang, you must share your concerns.

### **Reporting.**

If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on **999**. If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

**Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or by emailing [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk). Trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.

**Childline.** If a child or young person needs confidential help and advice about gangs or anything else that's worrying them, you can always direct them to [Childline](https://www.childline.org.uk). Calls to 0800 1111 are free and children can also contact Childline online.

### **References.**

(Home Office, 2018)

(Home Office, 2020a).

(Children's Society, 2019).

(Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020).

(Ministry of Justice, 2019).