

CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION

What is child criminal exploitation (CCE)

Child Criminal Exploitation occurs when 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. Even where the activity appears consensual the victim may have been criminally exploited. Child Criminal Exploitation does not need to have physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and includes, for instance, children forced to carry out violent acts, work on cannabis farms or commit theft of other crimes.

County lines is a form of exploitation where gangs and organised criminal networks involved in the distribution of illegal drugs within the UK. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move, store and sell the drugs and money to distance the criminals from the activity to evade detection. To achieve this they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. This type of movement of children falls within the legal definition of [trafficking](#) in the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#). Child trafficking is defined as the 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt' of a child for the purpose of exploitation.

CCE needs to be viewed in the context of broader vulnerabilities and other forms of exploitation and abuse. This could be within families, communities or more sophisticated organised crime groups.

Who is affected by CCE

Vulnerable children and those who do not have support networks are particularly at risk.

Exploiters target children with special educational needs, mental health difficulties or disabilities. Those exploiting children and young people also look for emotional vulnerability, such as children experiencing problems at home, absent parents and bereavement. Exploiters seek to fill that emotional gap for the child and become their 'family'.

Boys are more likely to be exploited in this way but girls can also be affected. The most common age for children to be exploited is between the ages of 15 and 16 but it can also affect children below the age of 11.

Exploiters are increasingly looking to recruit 'clean skins' i.e. children with no previous criminal record who are unlikely to be stopped by the police. Looked after children, particularly those in residential children's homes and those who have been placed out of their home area, are often targeted for exploitation.

Risk indicators for CCE

Anyone working with children and young people should be aware of the following risk indicators to help identify CCE:

- In possession of multiple phones or phones for which they have no contract and which they have not purchased themselves
- persistently going missing from school or home or being found outside of the area where they live
- unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- excessive receipt of texts or phone calls
- relationships with controlling or older individuals or groups
- regularly leaving their home without explanation
- suspicion of physical assault or unexplained injuries
- parental concerns
- carrying weapons
- significant decline in educational attainment and attendance
- arrested for possession and intent to supply of significant quantities of drugs, particularly heroin and crack cocaine
- arrested away from their own home area
- arrested on public transport, particularly on trains