County Lines Drugs & Exploitation Spot the Signs

County Lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phones or ‘deal lines’. It involves child criminal exploitation as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as ‘cuckooing’.

A young person’s involvement in county lines activity often leaves signs. A young person might exhibit some of these signs, either as a member or as an associate of a gang dealing drugs. Any sudden changes in a young person’s lifestyle should be discussed with them. Some indicators of county lines involvement and exploitation are listed below, with those at the top of particular concern:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area;
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls
- Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- Leaving home / care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries
- Parental concerns
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results / performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

If you have safeguarding concerns ring the Integrated Front Door on 0151 606 2008. If you believe a child is being harmed called 999

Intelligence and information about crimes can be reported anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555111 or by phoning the police on 101