

QAP	3.11
ISSUE DATE	Jul 2005
AUTHOR	D Hankey
SHEET	1 of 3
FORMS	0
REVIEWED	Sep 2026
REVIEWED BY	H Young
CHECK BY	Sep 2027

Quality Assurance Policies & Procedures

SAFEGUARDING AND PREVENT POLICY

CHILD AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION

Appendix K

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), Including County Lines

CCE is a form of extra-familial harm in which an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child into criminal activity. This may be in exchange for something the child needs or wants, for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator, and/or through violence or the threat of violence. The child may have been exploited even where the activity appears consensual. CCE does not always involve physical contact and can occur through technology.

County lines is a form of CCE in which gangs and organised criminal networks use children to transport and store drugs or money and to facilitate supply through a dedicated mobile phone line or other communication method. Children may be moved or trafficked locally or across police and local-authority boundaries and may be exposed to violence, intimidation, debt bondage, threats to family members, and the takeover of a vulnerable person's home ("cuckooing"). Missing episodes can be an important warning sign, but their absence does not rule out exploitation.

- Any child under 18 can be criminally exploited; vulnerability may increase risk but is not a prerequisite.
- Exploitation can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, including adults and other children, and can occur within or outside the child's community and online.
- Apparent consent should not be taken at face value where coercion, control, deception, fear, dependency or an imbalance of power may be present.
- Children who are exploited should be recognised and responded to as children in need of safeguarding, even where they may also have committed offences.
- Indicators should be considered cumulatively and in context; no single sign proves exploitation.

How Exploitation Can Occur

Children may be targeted in person or online and may be drawn in through friendship, gifts, money, status, protection, accommodation, substances or a sense of belonging. Perpetrators may then use intimidation, violence, blackmail, debt, isolation or threats against the child or others to maintain control.

Factors that perpetrators may exploit include:

- a need for friendship, belonging, recognition or protection;
- financial hardship, debt or the promise of money, gifts or status;
- family difficulties, unstable accommodation, missing episodes or social isolation;
- special educational needs, disabilities, mental-health needs or other unmet needs;
- previous abuse, neglect, exclusion from education or involvement with offending peers;
- access to the child through social media, gaming, messaging platforms or other technology.

QAP	3.11
ISSUE DATE	Jul 2005
AUTHOR	D Hankey
SHEET	2 of 3
FORMS	0
REVIEWED	Sep 2026
REVIEWED BY	H Young
CHECK BY	Sep 2027

- Staff should remain professionally curious about changes in a child's presentation, relationships, attendance, behaviour or circumstances. Concerns may emerge from a pattern of low-level indicators as well as from a single incident.

Possible Indicators of CCE and County Lines Include:

- frequent or unexplained absence, missing episodes, disengagement from education or a marked decline in attainment;
- travelling to unfamiliar locations, being found away from home, or using transport or accommodation without a clear explanation;
- unexplained money, clothing, phones, bank activity or other possessions;
- multiple phones, frequent SIM changes, receiving frequent calls or messages, or secretive online activity;
- relationships with controlling individuals or groups, including older people, or a sudden change in peer group;
- unexplained injuries, fearfulness, threats, carrying weapons, or concern for the safety of family or friends;
- substance use, self-harm, deterioration in wellbeing, or a change in behaviour or appearance;
- being found with drugs, large amounts of cash, weapons or items associated with supply;
- increased use of hotels, short-term lets or addresses linked to vulnerable adults.
- CCE can affect children of any sex, gender, background or community. Presentation will vary, and stereotypes must not prevent recognition. Children may not recognise themselves as victims, may feel loyalty to or dependence on those exploiting them, may fear retaliation, or may believe that they will not be believed. Staff should respond with professional curiosity, avoid blame and seek to understand the child's lived experience.

Staff Action:

- Listen to the child, take the concern seriously and do not promise confidentiality.
- Report the concern immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a deputy, following the College safeguarding procedure.
- Make a clear, factual and timely record of what was seen, heard or disclosed, including the child's own words where possible.
- Do not confront an alleged exploiter or investigate beyond what is necessary to establish immediate safety.
- Where there is immediate danger or a crime may be in progress, contact the police on 999 and inform the DSL as soon as practicable.
- The DSL will consider referral to children's social care, police and relevant multi-agency or exploitation services, information sharing, risk assessment and a plan for ongoing support.
- If a child is missing from education, follow the College's attendance and children-missing-education procedures alongside safeguarding action; do not wait for repeated episodes before sharing a concern.
- The welfare and safety of the child are paramount. A child's involvement in offending behaviour must not prevent a safeguarding response or result in the child being treated solely as an offender. Support should be coordinated, proportionate, trauma-informed and regularly reviewed.

QAP	3.11
ISSUE DATE	Jul 2005
AUTHOR	D Hankey
SHEET	3 of 3
FORMS	0
REVIEWED	Sep 2026
REVIEWED BY	H Young
CHECK BY	Sep 2027

Cleveland Police County Lines Advice

County lines | Cleveland Police

County lines: criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/county-lines-criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults>

Knife Crime

Possession or use of a weapon may be linked to fear, coercion, exploitation, retaliation or a perceived need for protection. Staff must prioritise immediate safety, follow the College's procedures for weapons and serious incidents, and report safeguarding concerns without delay to the DSL or a deputy. Police and children's social care should be contacted where the threshold for referral is met; emergency services must be contacted where there is an immediate risk of serious harm.

Review and Staff Awareness

This appendix should be read with the main Safeguarding and Prevent Policy, the staff reporting procedure and current statutory guidance. Staff should receive regular updates on local exploitation patterns, referral pathways and online methods used to target children.