

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe



In this month's issue:

- County lines
- Disordered eating
- App focus: Kik

Secondary | April 2024

County lines- what is it?

County lines is the term used to describe the approach taken by gangs, originating from large cities, who want to transport drugs and weapons to other counties and smaller towns. The 'line' refers to the phone lines used to take the drug orders. The gangs, also known as OCGs (Organised Crime Gangs), use a business model with a clear hierarchy.

The gang members are perpetrators of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and the children are their victims.

How do children get involved in county lines?

OCGs recruit young people by grooming them. They create friendships or relationships and then convincing them, using methods of bribery, to carry drugs to the necessary destination. These relationships can begin online, using social media or in person. They will target children who seem vulnerable and who don't already have a criminal history.

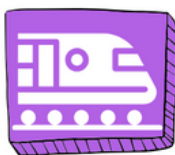
Who is vulnerable to county lines?

Any child or young person can be a victim of county lines, and, although according to the National County Lines Coordination Centre, most of those involved are between 14-17 years old, primary school children and vulnerable adults are also targeted. Boys and girls may be targets and girls often perform different roles in an OCG and experience other harms such as sexual abuse and exploitation.

Key terminology connected to county lines:

- Bando/trap house: a base where drugs are sold from.
- Clean skin: a young person with a clean criminal record, unknown to the Police
- Cuckooing: drug dealers take control of the home of a vulnerable person and use it as a base
- Debt bondage: when a young person believes they are in debt to the perpetrators
- Elders: older, senior members of an OCG
- Going country/cunch: the act of travelling to another town/county
- Plugging: when a young person is forced to carry drugs internally.

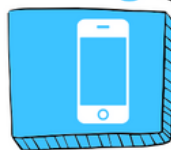
Spotting the Signs of County Lines



Travelling Around

A young person may be travelling around alone, either during the day or in the evenings.

Consider this: What does your child do straight after school?



Phones

The most common method for a gang member to initiate and maintain communication with a victim is through a phone.

Consider this: When was the last time you monitored your child's social media and messaging apps?



Possessions

Those who are recruited are often enticed with new items like trainers, clothing, and money.

Consider this: Have you noticed new items of clothing that you did not buy for your child?



Unknown Adults

The young person might be befriended by an older person who begins to have control over them.

Consider this: Have you noticed your child mentioning or spending time with an unfamiliar, older individual?



Withdrawn

The young person may become distant from you and their usual friends.

Consider this: Have your child's social activities changed?

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What is Disordered Eating?

Disordered eating is a coping mechanism that some young individuals adopt during challenging periods. It is a mental health condition that can impact anyone.

This behaviour may involve restricting food intake, consuming large amounts of food in one sitting, using unhealthy methods to eliminate food (such as inducing vomiting, abusing laxatives, fasting or excessive exercising), or a mixture of these actions.

Talking To Your Child About Disordered Eating

Starting a conversation might seem difficult so opening the conversation with an observation might help. An example of this is "I've noticed you are going to the gym a lot at the moment, is everything ok?"

What to do if your child does have disordered eating

It is important that your child knows that you are there to support them and that the first step is for you to speak to your GP. It is important for you to inform school but let your child know that this will be kept confidential and other children will not find out.

There is a huge amount of support on the Internet for parents. A leading charity for eating disorders that also has lots of guidance and advice is [BEAT](#).

Kik Messenger

What is Kik?

Kik messenger is another direct messenger app available for young people to download for free. It has more than 300 million registered users. The app allows the sending of text, video and GIFs. You can also play games in Kik and access a number of internal apps.

The risks around Kik

Kik makes it very easy for unknown users to contact each other and even has an internal dating app where you can find a list of all users in your age range. This makes it very easy for adults, posing as a teenagers, to contact children. Explicit images can be sent through Kik which can lead to young people sharing inappropriate images of themselves, as well as adults sending sexual abuse imagery.

Parental controls

Kik does not have any specific parental controls but it does have some chat privacy and blocking settings which can be accessed. Chat is only stored on the phone and cannot be accessed by Kik.



4 signs associated with disordered eating



Self-conscious when eating

Not wanting to eat around others. This may be at school or at home.

Social withdrawal

Not wanting to spend time with friends and family, doing the things they used to enjoy.



Feelings of shame, guilt and anxiety

These feelings may be during, before or after eating.

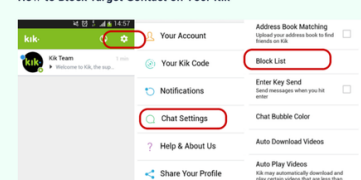


Secretive or obsessive behaviour

Hiding the food they are eating and/or eating large amounts of food. This may also include obsessively talking about food.



How to Block Target Contact on Your Kik



Blocking feature on Kik.

