



What are County Lines?

'County Lines' is a term used when drug gangs from big cities expand their operations to smaller towns, often using violence to drive out local dealers and exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs. These dealers will use dedicated mobile phone lines, known as 'deal lines', to take orders from drug users. Heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine are the most common drugs being supplied and ordered. In most instances, the users or customers will live in a different area to where the dealers and networks are based, so drug runners are needed to transport the drugs and collect payment.

National Crime Agency 2019



The Phoneline

There are over 2000 individual deal lines in the UK. These are linked to approximately 1000 branded county lines.

Cheap disposable phones are used, however the sim cards inside of the phones can be worth upwards of £75,000.

If lost or stolen this can lead to debt bondage or punishment.

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Scale of County Lines



Cities Towns and rural areas across the UK are supplied with drugs from numerous county lines. Currently the main areas county lines originate are Greater London, West Midlands and Merseyside

- 15% Greater London
- 9% West Midlands
- 7% Merseyside

However, the numbers are likely to be a lot higher as new lines are created, it's also important to remember county lines can be operating in any area.

91% of individuals associated with county lines offending are male.

However, females can be under represented as both victims of exploitation and offenders.

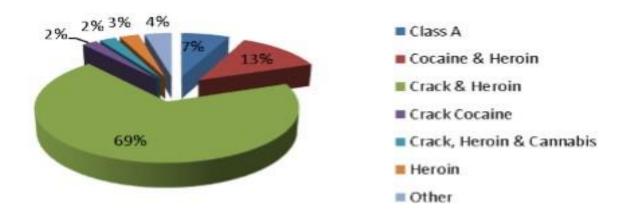
There are links to human trafficking and child sexual exploitation.



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Drugs Supplied by Branded County Lines 2018



National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLC, 2018)

County lines offenders use mass marketing text messages to advertise the supply and availability of drugs. They often provide deals such as buy one get one free or offer free samples to expand their customer base.

The use of social media to advertise varies, some groups and individuals use social media to recruit members, promote their identity, and to intimidate their rivals. Other groups and individuals avoid social media to avoid identification and detection.

The demand for and the supply of drugs underpins the County Lines offending but exploitation is integral to the business model. Offenders recruit, transport and exploit vulnerable individuals to carry out criminal activity essential to their operations.

Potential victims from 2018 findings where aged between 11 and 56, with the highest number of referrals relating to children between the ages of 15 and 17 years.



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Words/Terms Commonly Used When Describing County Lines Activity

If you hear someone using these words, then they might be involved in or might know of county lines activity.

Cuckooing

This is when drug gangs take over the home of a vulnerable person through violence and intimidation, using it as their base for selling/manufacturing drugs.

Going Country

This is the most popular term that describes county lines activity. It can also mean the act of travelling to another city/town to deliver drugs or money.

Trapping

The act of selling drugs. Trapping can refer to the act of moving drugs from one town to another or the act of selling drugs in one.

Trap House

A building used as a base from where drugs are sold (or sometimes manufactured). These houses usually are occupied by someone (usually adult drug users but sometimes young people are forced to stay in trap houses) location.

Trap Line

This refers to when someone owns a mobile phone specifically for the purpose of running and selling of drug.

Street names

Street names are generally used. Often, other members will not know each other's real names. This creates a reputation – a 'rep' – as names can be chosen because they represent a threat or talent, but they are also used so gang members can't be identified.



Gang Structure

- Teenies generally those under the age of 10 below the age of criminal responsibility – who are used to carry drugs and weapons, or move parcels between older members
- Runners, Shotters generally aged between 12 and 15-ish, those who
 move drugs between older members, sell drugs in the streets, arrange
 street deals, stay in 'trap' houses where drugs are sold or made
- Youngers generally aged under 18, they have some level of authority over teenies and shotters, are street dealers of class A or B drugs, can set up trap houses, recruit teenies, runners and shotters, report directly to elders
- Links, Baby Mama, Bae, Wifey girls used by members as girlfriends, used for sex, exploited, they will carry or hide weapons, drugs and money for members of any age
- Elders generally aged over 18, they are in charge of running street operations and trap houses, deal in larger amounts of class A and B drugs, facilitate purchase of firearms and other weapons, have authority over street dealers and youngers, respected
- Faces, Olders those at the top or higher end of the chain, limited contact with street level operations, not often seen or known by street level members



Recruitment

Children and adults displaying vulnerabilities are targeted by county lines offenders as their vulnerabilities make them more likely to be attracted by the lure of belonging, provided by being part of a group/gang.

Offenders will target and exploit any vulnerability that an individual may have. Victims are recruited, face to face and by social media. Victims will also be used to recruit other victims.

Some examples of children's vulnerabilities are:

- Poverty
- Family breakdown
- Looked after children
- Dug involvement
- Previous involvement in criminality
- Parental drug and alcohol misuse
- Family member involved in county lines
- Attending a PRU school (pupil referral unit)

Children with stable backgrounds are also targeted, also children without a criminal background in attempts to reduce attention and detection from police.

There has been a rise in White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade police detection but a person of any ethnicity or nationality may be exploited

Adult vulnerabilities include:

- Drug addiction
- Criminal history (often low level such as shoplifting)
- Mental health conditions
- Physical or learning disability
- Homelessness
- Prior experience of neglect/abuse



- Low income
- Single parents
- Sex workers
- Care leavers
- Alcohol users

Offenders build up relationships with individuals before exploitation takes place. This means that children can be approached before the age of 11 for future exploitation. Also, regarding adult victims, they may have been recruited and or exploited as children.

This process of befriending for exploitation is called grooming. Offenders may offer money or expensive gifts to attract victims who are then given a false sense of being involved as a lucrative way to make money. Social media emphasises this by showing off expensive clothes, jewellery, cars etc. Victims however then become indebted to the offender known as debt bonding.

Some children and adults understand the illegality of joining county lines but the perceived rewards out weigh any fears they may have. For example, if a person is homeless, they may be offered a home on the condition that it can also be used to store drugs. Others can be coerced into offending by debt bonding or other forms of control.

Vulnerable females are targeted by male offenders who portray the image of a romantic relationship, providing affection and gifts before exploiting the victim in county lines activity. This can leave some women being sexually exploited but unaware as they believe they are in a relationship.

To ensure compliance and control of the victims, offenders use a variety of often violent methods.

Debt bondage, debts are often inflated through supply of drugs, staged robberies etc making it impossible to pay what is owed to try and leave the gang. Also threats of kidnapping, actual kidnapping, violence, including the use of weapons, both physical and sexual violence.



The Stages of Grooming for the Purpose of Criminal Exploitation

Criminal exploitation often occurs without the child's immediate recognition, with the child believing that they are in control of the situation.

The Targeting Stage

This is when an exploiter targets a young person who is vulnerable. Exploiters pick their targets based on things like your age, strength or situation.

Signs include an exploiter:

- Observing a young person
- Finding out a young person's vulnerabilities, needs and wants
- Selecting a young person as a target
- Glamourizing their lifestyle
- Gaining and developing a young person's trust
- Sharing information with other members of their gang
- Recruiting a young person to their gang or friendship group
- Marking a young person out as someone to watch

The Experience Stage

This stage is where an exploiter might try to get a young person used to their lifestyle, or train them up in what they're doing.

At this stage an exploiter may:

- Make a young person feel wanted.
- Give them gifts and rewards.
- Include them in their activities.
- Test out a young person's loyalty.
- Listen to a young person and remember what they say.
- Offer a young person protection.
- Relate to a young person and offer them advice.
- Give them a sense of belonging.
- Praise a young person.
- Give them a weapon.



- Introduce a young person to more established members of their gang.
- Ask to see and test a young person's skills.

The Hooked Stage

This is the stage where an exploiter will make a young person feel like they're a member of their gang, even though they're just exploiting them.

Signs a young person is in the hooked stage include:

- Having an identity in the group.
- Being given a bigger role in the group (eg people running for them).
- Getting more responsibilities within the group eg more money.
- Engaging in thrill seeking behaviour/ committing low level crimes.
- Feeling more powerful (although this may not be the reality).
- Feeling they've made a progression in the group (although this may not be the reality).
- Others may know their name, helping them feel more powerful (but this can result in rivalry).
- Having a dependency created by their exploiter.
- Being exposed to possible consequences to their actions.
- Being given access to information.
- Engaging in activities such as drugs, alcohol and sexual behaviour.
- Being asked for favours/to keep recruiting others to the gang.
- Becoming involved with trap houses.

The Trapped Stage

At this stage children and young people feel dependent on the group, their relationship with their exploiter may start to become unpleasant, as their exploiter's true intents or character is revealed.

At this stage they may experience:

- Threatening behaviour.
- Attempts to reinforcing their dependency/make them indebted to their exploiter.



- Blackmail include 'fake' mugging organised to create a debt.
- Physical violence and sexual assaults including strip searches, drugs being inserted for running (plugging).
- People playing on their guilt, shame and fear and attempting to isolate them from their family, friends and society.
- People forcing them to abuse others, assault or even shoot people.
- People humiliating them, either sexually or by exposing their mistakes to others.
- Being made to feel trapped.
- Involvement in Class A drugs (cooking or running).
- Running a trap house.
- Drug addiction (encouraged by others) or dependency on their exploiter (resulting in them having less money).

Risks to Children, Young People, their Family and Friends, as a Result of Experiencing Criminal Exploitation

- Physical injuries, including risk of serious violence and death.
- Emotional and psychological trauma.
- Sexual violence, including sexual assault, rape, internally inserting drugs, indecent images being taken and shared as part of initiation, revenge, or punishment.
- Debt bondage, where a child or young person and their families are 'in debt' to the exploiters, which is then used to control the young person.
- Neglect, and the child or young person's basic needs not being met.
- Living in unclean, dangerous and/or unhygienic environments.
- Tiredness and sleep deprivation, where the child or young person is expected to carry out criminal activities over long periods and through the night.
- Poor attendance and/or attainment at school/college/university



Exploitation of Young and Vulnerable People

Child criminal exploitation is increasingly used to describe this type of exploitation where children are involved, and is defined as:

Child Criminal Exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where 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. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Both male and female victims are recruited as runners, this means that they are responsible for transporting large amounts of drugs, cash or weapons. Being a runner carries the most risk of any county lines role and often the runner will be exposed to techniques such as plugging, where their anal and/or vaginal cavity is used to transport drugs.

Other roles include the cutting and bagging of drugs, collection of debts and crimes outside of drugs such as shoplifting to increase profits.

Victims can also be exploited through cuckooing, this is where gangs form a secure base in the homes of vulnerable adults. Children can also be forced to occupy cuckooed properties in supply areas. Gang members have entered into relationships with vulnerable females in order to use their properties for drugs.

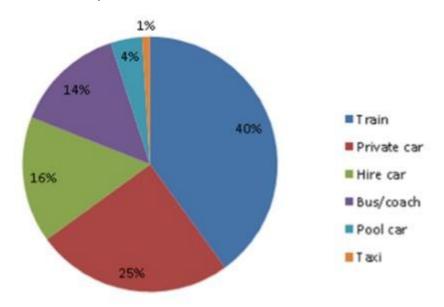
Victims are also subjected to sexual exploitation through forced engagement in sexual activities. This is largely restricted to female victims who may also be subjected to sexual exploitation for financial gain, or as payment for debts but males are victim too. Females have also been trafficked along county lines in the same way that drugs are.

Children and young people are raped orally or anally by one older or multiple gang members, as a punishment or initiation. Victims can also be forced to conceal drugs in their vagina's and anus's, also to be stripped naked to check for the concealment of drugs in their body.



Transport

Drugs, money, weapons and sometimes females are transported through various ways.



NCLCC, 2018

To avoid detection by being reported as missing, gangs often supply train tickets for children and vulnerable adults to enable them to carry out the transaction and return within a day, known as day tripping.

Children can travel to London from Newcastle carry out a deal and return within 7 hours.

Children and young people being exploited in this way are likely to be being trafficked, as they are having their travel arranged or facilitated for the purpose of them being exploited.

It is helpful to draw on the definition of human trafficking in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to understand this:

- A person commits an offence if the person arranges or facilitates the travel of another person ('V') with a view to V being exploited.
- It is irrelevant whether V consents to the travel (whether V is an adult or a child).



- A person may in particular arrange or facilitate V's travel by recruiting V, transporting or transferring V, harbouring or receiving V, or transferring or exchanging control over V.
- A person arranges or facilitates V's travel with a view to V being exploited only if — the person intends to exploit V (in any part of the world) during or after the travel, or the person knows or ought to know that another person is likely to exploit V (in any part of the world) during or after the travel.
- 'Travel' means arriving in, or entering any country, departing from any country, or travelling within any country.



How to Know if County Lines Drug Dealing is Happening in Your Area?

County Lines can happen in any are. Signs that County Lines drug dealing is happening in your area include:

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g. different accents compared to local accent)
- Change in resident's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community
- Unexplained injuries



How do you know if County Lines drug dealing is happening to your child or young person?

- Going Missing
- Joining a gang
- Possession of drugs or weapons
- Unexplained amounts of money
- Increased interest in money making
- Change in behaviour
- Missing school, college or work
- Reports being taken to parties, people's houses, unknown areas, hotels, nightclubs, takeaways or out of area by unknown adult
- Entering or leaving unknown vehicles
- Self-harm
- Changes to emotional wellbeing
- Repeated STI'S, pregnancy
- New friendships/peers
- Disclosure or detection of a sexual or physical assault
- Fear of reprisal from 'gang' members or violence from young people or adults
- relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- excessive receipt of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple handsets
- Change of language use /terminology

It is important to remember that if the child or young person is new to the gang, they may be treated really well to avoid detection. This can make it difficult to spot the signs.

The best advice is to trust your instincts. Even if someone isn't involved in county lines drug dealing, they may be being exploited in some other way, so it's always worth speaking out.



Impact on Parents/Carers

When a parent or carer discovers that their child or young person has been exploited, they can experience psychological and emotional distress.

The child or young person will be suffering with the effects of trauma, which can be displayed by often challenging or distressing behaviours such as flash backs, self-harm and aggression.

Whilst dealing with their own distress, parents and carers also want to support their children and young people but can feel overwhelmed and helpless.

Therefore, in addition to understanding the impact of trauma on their child, parents and carers also need support to deal with the trauma they have experienced and to promote and protect their own emotional well-being.

In some cases, parents and carers can be faced with intimidation and abuse from perpetrators or their associates. Also, Parents and carers may need to take sickness leave and unpaid leave, to care for or attend appointments for child, young person or self which in turn can lead to financial pressure and additional stress.

Discussing Exploitation with Children and Young People

THIS GUIDANCE HAS BEEN GRATEFULLY PRODUCED WITH SUPPORT AND MATERIALS DEVELOPED BY NWG AND LAWRENCE JORDAN, SOCIAL WORKER, MILTON KEYNES.

COPY CAN BE FOUND HERE:

https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Guidance%20App%20Language%20 Toolkit.pdf

It is crucial that appropriate terminology is used when discussing with children and young people who have been exploited or are at risk of exploitation.

Language implying that the child or young person is complicit in any way, or responsible for the crimes that have happened or may happen to them, must be avoided.

Language should reflect the presence of coercion and the lack of control young people have in abusive or exploitative situations and must recognise the severity of the impact exploitation has on the child or young person.



Victim-blaming language may reinforce messages from perpetrators around shame and guilt. This in turn may prevent the child or young person from disclosing their abuse, through fear of being blamed by professionals.

When victim-blaming language is used amongst professionals, there is a risk of normalising and minimising the child's experience, resulting in a lack of appropriate response.

Putting themselves at risk - This implies that the child is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator and that they are able to make free and informed choices.

Suggested alternatives-

- The child may have been groomed.
- The child is at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited.
- A perpetrator may exploit the child's increased vulnerability.
- The child is not in a protective environment.
- The situation could reduce the child's safety.
- The location is dangerous to children.
- The location/situation could increase a perpetrator's opportunity to abuse them.
- It is unclear whether the child is under duress to go missing.
- There are concerns that the child may be being sexually abused. It is unclear why the child is getting into cars.
- There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child to act in this way.
- There are concerns regarding other influences on the child.

Sexual activity with - This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. If it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context this term is not appropriate.

Suggested alternatives:

The child has been sexually abused.



- The child has been raped.
- There are reports of sexual abuse.
- The child has described sexual activity; however, concerns exist that they child may have been groomed and/or coerced.

Sexually active since [age under 13] - A child under 13 cannot consent to sex and is therefore being abused. This should be reflected in the language used.

Suggested alternatives:

- The child has been raped.
- The child has been/may have been sexually abused.
- Concerns exist that the child may have been coerced, exploited, or sexually abused.

Has been contacting adult males/females via phone or internet- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the communication and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.

Suggested alternatives:

- Adult males/females may have been contacting the child.
- The child may have been groomed.
- There are concerns that the adult is facilitating communication with a child. The child is vulnerable to online perpetrators.
- There are concerns that others may be using online technology to access or abuse the child.
- Adults appear to be using a range of methods to communicate with the child.

Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.



- The child is being sexually exploited.
- There are concerns that the child has been raped.
- Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child.
- The child is being sexually abused.
- The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them.
- The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency.

In a relationship with...- This implies that the child or young person is in a consensual relationship and does not reflect the abusive or exploitative context.

Suggested alternatives:

- The young person says that they are in a relationship with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation and/or offending.
- The young person has been/is being groomed, exploited and controlled.

Involved in CSE- This implies there is a level of choice regarding the child being abused. A five-year-old would never be referred to as being involved in sexual abuse for the same reasons.

Suggested alternatives:

- The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited.
- The child is being sexually exploited.

Promiscuous- This implies consensual sexual activity has taken place. Promiscuous is a judgemental term which stereotypes and labels people. It isn't appropriate in any context when discussing children and young people, but particularly if it occurs within an abusive or exploitative context.



- The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited.
- The child is being sexually exploited.

Prostituting themselves- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the abuse and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context. Changes in legislation have meant that child prostitution is no longer an acceptable term and should never be used.

Suggested alternatives:

- The child is vulnerable to being sexually exploited.
- The child is being sexually exploited.

Drug running – He/she is drug running This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.

Suggested alternatives:

- Child criminal exploitation (CCE).
- The child is being criminally exploited. The child is being trafficked for purpose of criminal exploitation.

Recruit/run/work- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.

Suggested alternatives:

• The child is being criminally exploited.

He/she is choosing this lifestyle- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.



- The child is being criminally exploited.
- The child is being sexually exploited.

Spending time/associating with 'elders'/ 'bosses'- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.

Suggested alternatives:

- The young person says that they are friends with a person and there are concerns about that person's age, the imbalance of power, exploitation, offending.
- The young person has been groomed, exploited, controlled.

Offering him/her drugs seemingly in return for sex or to run drugs- This implies that the child or young person is responsible for the exploitation and has the capacity to make a free and informed choice. It does not recognise the abusive or exploitative context.

- The child is being sexually/ criminally exploited.
- The child is being criminally exploited through drug debt.
- There are concerns that the child has been raped as they do not have the freedom or capacity to consent.
- Perpetrators are sexually abusing the child. The child is being sexually abused.
- The child's vulnerability regarding drug use is being used by others to abuse them.
- The perpetrators have a hold over the child by the fact that they have a drug dependency.



What to Do if You Suspect a Child or Young Person is Being Criminally exploited

- Report or share intelligence with the police for them to investigate the offences committed (i.e Modern Slavery and trafficking offences)
 - You can speak to your local police by dialling 101, or in an emergency 999.
 - If you would rather remain anonymous, you can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.
 - o If you notice something linked to the railways, you can report concerns to the British Transport Police by texting 61016 from your mobile. In an emergency dial 999.
 - If you are a young person who is worried about your involvement, or a friend's involvement in county lines a good option is to speak to an adult you trust and talk to them about your concerns. Or you could call Childline on 08001111.
- A referral made to Children's Social Care- trafficking and exploitation constitute significant harm and Child Protection processes need to be followed.
- A referral must be made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), recognising the child as a victim

What to Do if You Suspect an Adult is Being Exploited

- Report or Share intelligence with the police
 - Same as for a child
- Raise an Adult Concern with Adult Social Services in your Local Authority



Useful Contacts

Crimestoppers – 0800 555 111 **Crimestopper Fearless** – Fearless.org

Safe Call – 116 000

Force Intelligence mailbox – <u>forceintelligence@northumbria.pnn.police.uk</u>

Edge North East

https://edgenortheast.co.uk/

Edge offer Mentoring packages to Young People involved or at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation, Serious Youth Violence, Gang Activity and Organised Crime.

STRIDE

The Stride Project is a support service for boys and young men who are at risk of or are being internally trafficked for criminal exploitation.

Stride practitioners provide intensive therapeutic one to one support and group sessions for boys and young men to ensure they are given the most appropriate support to enhance their mental health and well-being.

Contact information

Email: Jeffreywilliams.baah@childrenssociety.org.uk

Phone: 07850500633

C.A.R.E. (Children at Risk of Exploitation)

The C.A.R.E. team can only work with young people aged 8-24 who are unable or unwilling to engage with statutory services, where the exploitation risk is medium or high (using the ECSB toolkit to help identify level) and that live in Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock).

One to one intensive support, targeted group work sessions and parenting support. Service Manager: <u>Leanne.Fuller@childrenssociety.org.uk</u>

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Phone: 01245 493 311 and ask to speak to a member of the C.A.R.E. team.

Hand in Hand

Service in North Yorkshire and the City of York providing one to one support to help children and young people in the area who are at risk of, or victims of, child sexual or criminal exploitation.

Phone: 0113 387 6410/07715 122569.

Email: handinhand@childrenssociety.org.uk

Fearless

www.fearless.org

National website to access non-judgemental information and advice about crime and criminality. Uniquely, Fearless provides a safe place to give information to about crime - 100% anonymously.

Disrespect Nobody

www.disrespectnobody.co.uk

National campaign to help young people understand what a healthy relationship is and to help re-think their views of controlling behaviour, violence, abuse, sexual abuse and what consent means within their relationships.

Rape Crisis (England & Wales)

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Tel: 0808 8029999

Organisation that exists to promote the needs and rights of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, to improve services to them and to work towards the elimination of sexual violence



National Crime Agency

www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk

National law enforcement agency to protect the public from the most serious threats by disrupting and bringing to justice those serious and organised criminals who present the highest risk to the UK.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP)

www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

National Crime Agency Command that exists to bring online child sex offenders, including those involved in the production, distribution and viewing of child abuse material, to justice.

Thinkuknow

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

CEOP's educational programme that aims to empower and protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Men's Advice Line

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

(webchat available) info@mensadviceline.org.uk Tel: 0808 801 0327 National help and support site & line for male victims of domestic violence

Someone Cares

www.someonecares.org.uk

SomeOne Cares based in North Shields, North East England offers a free counselling service for survivors and supporters of abuse, specialising in childhood sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault.