

## What can I do?

**TALK/LISTEN** - encourage open conversation, tell them your concerns, be prepared to listen, don't judge, encourage them to reach out for help and tell them how

**MONITOR** - impose curfews, monitor their social media/bank accounts/phone where possible. Report any concerns immediately. If they do not return home report them as 'missing' to police on 101

**STAY 'IN THE KNOW'** - listen to what they're listening to, research about gangs/exploitation, be aware of what is going on locally and nationally (incidents in other areas can impact young people here), use [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com) for slang word definitions

**SHARE CONCERNS** - reach out for help, share concerns with professionals, make notes of names/dates/concerns

## Know the signs



Persistently missing from school/home, being found out of area



Unexplained money, clothes or mobile phones



Excessive receipt of phone calls and texts



Relationships with controlling/older individuals, gang association



Leaving home or care without explanation



Suspicion of self-harm, physical assaults or unexplained injuries



Significant changes in emotional wellbeing



Significant decline in school performance

## Information for parents/carers

Gangs operate across Thurrock - it is important for parents and carers to be aware of the signs of gang activity, recruitment and grooming as well as criminal exploitation. Thurrock differs from London and other parts of Essex and so spotting the signs early will help your child stay safe.

If you have any issues or concerns please contact  
**Gangs & Criminal Exploitation Lead**  
**Ceryl Marsh**  
**07565 620637**  
[ceryl.marsh@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:ceryl.marsh@thurrock.gov.uk)

## Alternatively, you can reach out to any of the support contacts below:

**MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub)**  
01375 652802  
[thurrockmash@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:thurrockmash@thurrock.gov.uk)

**PASS (Prevention & Support Service)**  
[pass@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:pass@thurrock.gov.uk)

**YOS (Youth Offending Service)**  
01375 652990

**Police**  
Emergency 999  
Non Emergency 101

**Crimestoppers**  
0800 555 111  
[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)

**Childline**  
0800 1111  
[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**NSPCC**  
0808 800 5000  
[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**Modern Slavery**  
0800 0121 700  
[www.modernslavery.gov.uk](http://www.modernslavery.gov.uk)

# Gangs and Exploitation

Support and information for parents across Thurrock



## What is criminal exploitation?

Children and young people can be exploited by criminal gangs. They may be pressured into committing offences such as drug dealing, stealing or carrying weapons/drugs. They might be at risk of, or in fear of violence, be forced to travel away from their home, and 'work' for the gang. They might not realise that they are victims and, at times, it might seem that they are choosing that lifestyle. This is exploitation!

### County Lines

County lines is the process of transporting drugs from one area to another—crossing police and local authority borders. Children and young people are the primary targets to work for 'lines'. This is also known as 'going country', 'cunch', 'OT' (out there), 'trapping' or 'running'.

The line relates to the main phone number that sends/receives orders for drugs. Drug lines will have their own identifiable name. The line will send orders to 'runners' who will be in the local area of where the drugs are sold. The 'line' will not be in the local area usually and will be operated by an 'elder/owner' elsewhere.

Vulnerable adults are targeted for their accommodation - a process known as 'cuckooing'

where the dealers/runners will take over their property and use it as a base to supply drugs from. This can be known as a 'trap house'.

Young people can be targeted by their own associates or by others gangs and are at risk of serious violence, robbery, sexual violence, intimidation and debt-bondage (where they are robbed for cash/drugs and have to work for free to repay the debt. This can be substantial sums of money. Their families may also be threatened.

### What attracts young people?

There are many reasons why children and young people become involved with gangs. This can include any of the following:

- Protection from others (gangs/groups/peers)
- To be accepted
- Feel part of a 'family'
- Respect/sense of identity
- Siblings/family members/friends are involved
- Status
- Gangs are common in the area
- Fear, intimidation and threats
- Peer pressure
- Lack of family/emotional support
- Cultural identity
- Limited positive role models
- Boredom
- Financial gain and rewards

### What should I consider?

**FRIENDS** - do you know them? Where do they live? Are you worried about them? Where do they hang out?

**SOCIAL MEDIA/MUSIC** - do you know what their usernames are? How many phones do they have? Can you 'follow' them? Do you monitor what they are posting? Who are they listening to? What apps are on their phone?

**CURFEW** - do they come home on time? Are they staying out overnight? Where/who with?

**LANGUAGE** - are they talking about gangs/gang culture? Are they talking in slang a lot? Do you know what they are saying?

**BANK ACCOUNTS** - have you got access to their account? Can you monitor what is coming in/going out?

**TRAVEL** - how are they getting around?

**WEAPONS** - do you know how many knives are in the kitchen? Would you notice if one was missing?

### Spotting the signs

Behaviour of young people involved with/being exploited by gangs can include some of the following:

- Withdrawing from family
- Secretive behaviour
- Unexplained injuries
- Unaccounted for money/new clothing/new phone
- Absconding from home, going 'missing'
- Breaking family rules/pushing boundaries
- New friends
- Poor attendance/engagement at school/college
- Loss of interest in hobbies/normal routines
- Aggression
- Being picked up in unknown cars/taxis
- Increase in incoming telephone calls
- Knives going missing from the kitchen
- Unaccounted for money coming in/going out of bank account
- Carrying/concealing weapons
- Carrying/concealing drugs
- Concerns raised by professionals