



It's a Scam!

It isn't just older people in our community that are seen as vulnerable to scammers. Recent research conducted by the UK Safer Internet Centre found that exposure to scams is a regular part of online life for young people, with 79% of children aged **8 - 17 year olds** coming across scams online at least once a month. As always, there are often good tips to help manage these issues, such as these:

- Spend time online with your child to understand how they are using technology and talk together about the good and the bad parts of being online. Talk about your own experiences and find other opportunities to get the conversation started, like stories in the news. Make sure your child knows they can talk to you about anything that they see or experience online.
- Online Security: Use strong and separate passwords for online accounts and set up two step verification (2SV) where it's available. You may also be able to set parental controls to prevent unwanted online purchases and limit children's access to harmful content.
- Stay vigilant and report fraud and cyber crime to Action Fraud: <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/> or telephone 0300 123 2040
- Tell your children: "Looks too good to be true? It probably is!"



For **3 – 7 year olds**, advice centres around establishing positive Internet use habits:

Talking regularly about what they love doing online, as well as any worries they may have, will help establish this habit and mean they're more likely to come to you for help as they get older.

- Avoid child purchases by making sure in-app purchases or new downloads require a passcode, and don't set card details to autofill on devices your child has access to.
- Start simple and talk about the difference between real and make believe. Help them recognise that not everything online is true and that some things they see or hear could be stories, jokes or tricks.
- Encourage them to talk to you if anything they experience makes them feel worried or upset, and show them they can trust you to stay calm, listen and help make things better.

County Lines – How Does This Impact Our Community?

County lines is the name given to drug dealing across the country, where organised criminal groups (OCGs) use phone lines to move and supply drugs, usually from cities into smaller towns and rural areas, like those in our local community.

They exploit vulnerable people, including children and those with mental health or addiction issues, by recruiting them to distribute the drugs. This is often referred to as 'drug running'.

Children in particular are vulnerable to the grooming processes that criminal gangs use to befriend, form relationships with and eventually ask young children do them favours, such as delivering packages for cash or gifts in return. It has been known, for example, for gang members to frequent places like local parks and community areas to employ tactics such as stealing and then 'helpfully finding' a child's toy / property a few days later, making the 'grateful' child then indebted to the criminal, who will typically ask for a favour in return for their 'kindness'.

Stay alert to signs that your child, an older sibling or your child's friends in our community may be involved in County Lines if you notice:

- **repeatedly going missing from school or home and being found in other areas**
- **having money, new clothes or electronic devices and they can't explain how they paid for them**
- **getting high numbers of texts or phone calls, being secretive about who they're speaking to**
- **decline in school or work performance**
- **significant changes in emotional or physical well-being**



In December, Northamptonshire Police arrested 28 people and seized drugs and weapons as part of a national week of action, called: County Lines Intensification Week, where police forces from across the UK focus their attention on criminals who move around the country to sell illegal drugs. As Kettering is located in the midlands, with good road and rail networks, it is a favourable location for drug distribution by drug gangs. As the weather improves and children begin to visit parks and other outdoor spaces again, it is something to be mindful of.

This film gives a good overview of the challenges that County Lines presents to children and families:

<http://www.northamptonshirescb.org.uk/health-professionals/cse-information-for-professionals/county-lines/>

Safeguarding Concerns Within Our County

Family and cost of living crisis, mental health of parents and guardians and the aftereffects of covid have been highlighted as the predominant reasons why more children are coming to the attention of social workers in Northamptonshire. The children's trust received more than 46,000 calls by people concerned about the safety of a child in the year to April 2023, a six per cent rise on the previous twelve months, and these issues remain concerns in Northamptonshire in 2025.

What can we do?

Being mindful as a community can often help to spot the signs that somebody may be struggling with issues that could affect the safety or wellbeing of a child, despite there sometimes being no genuine intention to cause harm.

Designated safeguarding leads and our Family Support Worker at school are always available to discuss any concerns that you may have for a family, and can provide great support. Please ask to speak to someone if you feel that somebody in our community may benefit from help.



Out of Hours Safeguarding

If you are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child, who is not in immediate danger of harm, please speak to one of our Designated Safeguarding Leads.

If you are concerned about the safety or welfare of a child outside of school hours, please contact the MASH team on 0300 126 7000 (option 1) or e-mail them at MASH@nctrust.co.uk . If you think a child is in immediate danger or missing, please contact the police and/or an ambulance directly by phoning 999