Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Modern-Day Slavery

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) is a form of child abuse where a child or young person is groomed, manipulated, pressured, coerced or forced into criminal activity for someone else's benefit. This can include carrying or selling drugs, transporting money, stealing, carrying weapons or allowing their home or another property to be used for criminal activity. A common form of CCE is County Lines, where organised criminal networks exploit children and vulnerable adults to move, store or sell drugs and money.

Children may initially be offered friendship, attention, money, gifts, clothing, food or a sense of belonging. Over time, those exploiting them may use threats, violence, intimidation, blackmail or supposed "debts" to control them. A child may therefore appear to be making their own choices while, in reality, they have been groomed and may feel unable or frightened to leave. Children involved in criminal activity through exploitation need safeguarding, support and protection.

CCE can also be connected to trafficking and modern-day slavery, particularly when children are recruited, moved, harboured or controlled for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation can happen both online and in person, and it can affect children from any family or community.

Signs for parents and carers to be aware of

Changes on their own do not necessarily mean a child is being exploited, but parents should be alert to signs such as:

- regularly going missing from home or school;
- unexplained money, expensive clothing, gifts or possessions;
- having additional mobile phones or SIM cards;
- travelling to unfamiliar places without a clear explanation;
- new friendships or relationships that cause concern;
- a sudden change in behaviour, friendships or school attendance;
- becoming unusually secretive, anxious, withdrawn or fearful;
- carrying drugs, large amounts of cash or weapons;
- unexplained injuries or signs of threats and violence.

If you are worried about your child, please speak to school. Sharing concerns early can help us work together to safeguard your child and access appropriate support.

If a child is in immediate danger, contact 999.

Parents can also contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 for advice and support.

Most importantly, exploitation is never a child's fault. A child who has been groomed or coerced into criminal activity needs adults around them to recognise the signs, listen without judgement and help keep them safe.