

Mate Crime

There is no statutory definition of mate crime in UK law. The term is generally understood to refer to the befriending of vulnerable people for the purposes of taking advantage of, exploiting and/or abusing them.

The perpetrator is likely to be perceived as a close friend, a carer or a family member and will use this relationship for exploitation.

Example: 'Tuesday Friends'

A typical story is a young person with Asperger's who had, what he called, his 'Tuesday Friends' The day when his benefits arrived, a Tuesday, a particular group of people would turn up at his flat, 'help' him to the cashpoint and then to the pub where they 'helped' him spend his money.

What are the signs?

The Perpetrator might try to exploit the following forms of abuse:

- Financial Abuse - lend or steal money or exploit labour.
- Physical Abuse - exert force to control the individual.
- Emotional Abuse - manipulate or mislead the person, make them feel worthless.
- Sexual Abuse – coerce the person into prostitution or sexually exploited them.
- Criminal exploitation - coerces or grooms the person to commit criminal offences.

Victims of mate crime might display noticeable changes in behaviour, such as:

- Unexplained injuries
- Bills not being paid/sudden loss of assets
- Weight loss
- Isolation from usual contacts
- Withdrawal from services
- Changes in behaviour or mood
- Changes in friends or noticeable forms of control

What should be done?

- In many situations mate crime will be an example of disability hate crime and this should be reported to the police as such.
- Contact Social Services.
- Seek advice from your local Safeguarding team.

County Lines

According to a leading youth charity about 4,000 teenagers from London are being exploited and trafficked every year to sell drugs in rural towns and cities. Known as "county lines", gangs use children as young as 12 to traffic drugs, using dedicated mobile phones or "lines".

Example:

A 13 year old young boy was approached by a friend at school about selling drugs. Lured in by the prospect of making money, he began selling in his local area, but things escalated quickly. The gang was soon sending him on jobs out of London with the promise he could make around £500 a week. He was sent to the house of a vulnerable drug user that the gang had taken over in the Midlands (cuckooing). This was used as his base whilst out selling heroin and crack cocaine, day and night.

"I was actually scared," he says. "But from the time you see the money, you're just thinking, 'OK, I can just bear a bit more.'" He had a normal upbringing and a close relationship with his family who would be frantic about his long absences, he says, they would try to stop him by taking away his mobile phone - but as soon as he left his house, the gang would start hassling him again.

Despite living with a group of drug users, the 13 year old says he "didn't really recognise the risks" and that he once ended up staying in a graveyard after being left stranded hundreds of miles from home with nowhere to stay.

After being arrested for possession of drugs, Michael decided to stop selling, but says it was not easy to leave the gang behind. "They were trying to get at me but I moved away from the area, so I think that helped me a lot.

What are the signs?

- Withdrawing from the family/secretive behaviour
- Blocking family and friends on social media/New friends that you do not know
- Unexplained injuries
- Not sticking to agreed times to come home when they go out
- Going missing from home/Truanting or long term absences from school
- New expensive clothes or other items/Large sums of money that can't be accounted for
- Aggressive or difficult behaviour/Showing a lack of respect towards peers and teachers
- Arriving in taxis or unknown vehicles

What should be done?

- If immediate danger is suspected call the police
- Information sharing by key stakeholders i.e. housing, schools, care/fostering and other frontline practitioners.
- Contact Social Services.
- Seek advice from your local Safeguarding team

Cuckooing

The crime is named after the Cuckoo birds' practice of taking over other birds' nests for its young.

It is a form of crime in which drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to use it as a base for dealing drugs. The victims are often left with little choice but to cooperate and are often battling their own drug addictions. The dealers are often in their teens and sent to towns across Britain by drug bosses in London.

Example:

According to a professional "It's a growing problem and for families it's absolutely devastating," he said.

"We've had one girl, four foot nothing; she's sitting at home with her two toddlers. She's an ex-user trying to stay clean.

"An old friend has knocked on the door and said, 'Can I come in and use the phone?' She has said, 'Course you can', and two huge guys have come in with her and have taken over the flat for two weeks."

What are the signs?

- It usually takes place in a multi-occupancy or social housing property
- There may be an increase in the number of comings and goings, including people you haven't seen before
- There might be new vehicles outside the property
- A possible increase in anti-social behaviour in and around the property
- It can happen anywhere.....

What should be done?

- Inform the Police
- Contact Social Services
- Seek advice from your local Safeguarding team.

In all cases of County Lines, Cuckooing and Mate Crime the perpetrators are likely to target:

- People with mental health problems
- Disabled
- Young people
- Lonely
- Drug addicts
- People in debt

Please note that none of the lists are exhaustive and you should seek advice if you are concerned