

# Bitesize Briefing: Cuckooing

## Associated Crimes

- Human Trafficking
- Sexual Exploitation
- Modern Slavery
- Weapons Storage
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Financial Exploitation
- Fraud/Identity Theft

## 1 What is Cuckooing?

Cuckooing is a form of exploitation, where criminals take over the home of a vulnerable person to carry out illegal activities. It is commonly associated with **county lines (drug trafficking/dealing)** but can also involve other crimes and forms of abuse.



## 2 Signs and Characteristics of Cuckooing

### Victim Profile

Victims are often vulnerable adults:

Elderly

Socially  
Isolated

Previous  
Victim of  
Abuse or  
Exploitation

Learning  
Disabilities

Financial  
Hardship

Mental  
Health  
Needs

Substance  
Misuse

Housing  
Instability

## 3 Why Are Individuals Targeted?

Victims are targeted due to their circumstances, which make them easier to manipulate or coerce. They may:

- Lack awareness or understanding of exploitation;
- Be more receptive to attention or companionship due to loneliness;
- Live alone in properties with low security or oversight, or have tenancies which are easy to manipulate or take over;
- Be on benefits or low income;
- Be tempted by offers of money, drugs or gifts;
- Be less likely to report due to fear or past trauma;
- Not understand their rights or how to seek help.

### Perpetrator Grooming Tactics

- Befriending the individual and offering help and/or gifts;
- Creating dependency through drugs, money or emotional manipulation;
- Isolating the victim;
- Using threats, intimidation or violence to control the victim.



### *What to look out for...*

#### **Changes in the Individual's Presentation:**

- Do they appear anxious or fearful?
- Do they have unexplained injuries or do they display signs of physical abuse?
- Have they stopped engaging with support services?
- Do they seem confused or unable to explain who is staying at their home?
- Do they appear anxious, withdrawn or fearful?



#### **Changes in the Property:**

- Are strangers loitering outside the property?
- Has there been a sudden increase in visitors to the property, especially at unsociable or odd times?
- Is there evidence of property damage or neglect?
- Are the windows covered or are the curtains always closed?
- Are there unusual smells in/ around the property?



#### **Financial, Social and Criminal Indicators:**

- Missing possessions or money;
- Unexplained bank transactions;
- Loss of control over finances or tenancy;
- Isolation from family, friends or caregivers;
- Evidence of drug use or dealing in the property/immediate area;
- Weapons or other suspicious/illegal items in the property;
- Police or community reports of anti-social behaviour.

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## 4 Identifying and Responding to Cuckooing



### 1. Build Trust and Rapport

*Communication with vulnerable adults should be consistent and empathetic.*

*Trust can take time to build – be patient!*

### 2. Raise Awareness

*Support vulnerable adults to understand exploitation and their rights; ensure that communication is open and accessible.*

### 3. Assess and Monitor Risk

*Use tools like the Cuckooing Risk Identification tool below and regularly review care plans. Always consider mental capacity and consent in decision-making.*

### 4. Be Trauma-Informed

*Recognise the impact of past trauma on behaviour and avoid re-traumatisation through respectful engagement. Prioritise emotional safety and autonomy.*

### 5. Empower Through Support Services

*Link adults to advocacy, counselling and peer support groups; help them to access resources and encourage independence whilst offering consistent support.*

### 6. Explore Safe Housing Options

*Support with emergency accommodation, relocation or tenancy sustainment if required.*

### 7. Multi-Agency Collaboration

*Work with partner agencies to share information appropriately and protect the adult.*

### 8. Use Safeguarding Tools and Legal Frameworks

*Consider legal protections under the Care Act (2014) and the Modern Slavery Act (2015). Involve statutory safeguarding partners early.*

## 5 Further Learning and Resources

*The Gateshead Safeguarding Adults Board would like to acknowledge and thank West Yorkshire Police and Leeds University for their contribution to this briefing.*

West Yorkshire Police:  
Cuckooing.  
(Video)



Leeds University:  
Preventing and Disrupting  
Cuckooing Victimisation  
(Professional Toolkit)



## Conversation Starters

How are things at home lately? Do you feel you have enough support?

Have you had any new people staying with you recently?

Are you managing your money okay at the moment?

Has anyone asked for your bank or benefit details?

Do you feel in control of who comes and goes from your home?

Have you ever felt pressured to do something you didn't want to?

Is there anyone you can talk to if you are worried about something?

