SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Secondary | October 2025

In this issue:

- Vapes
- Child Criminal Exploitation

What parents need to know about vaping

Vaping has become increasingly common among teenagers, and many parents are understandably concerned. E-cigarettes were originally designed to help adults quit smoking but they are not safe for children or young people.

The rise in brightly packaged, sweet-flavoured disposable vapes has made them particularly appealing to young people, despite the health risks.

Research shows that more teenagers are experimenting with vapes each year, often without realising how addictive and harmful they can be.

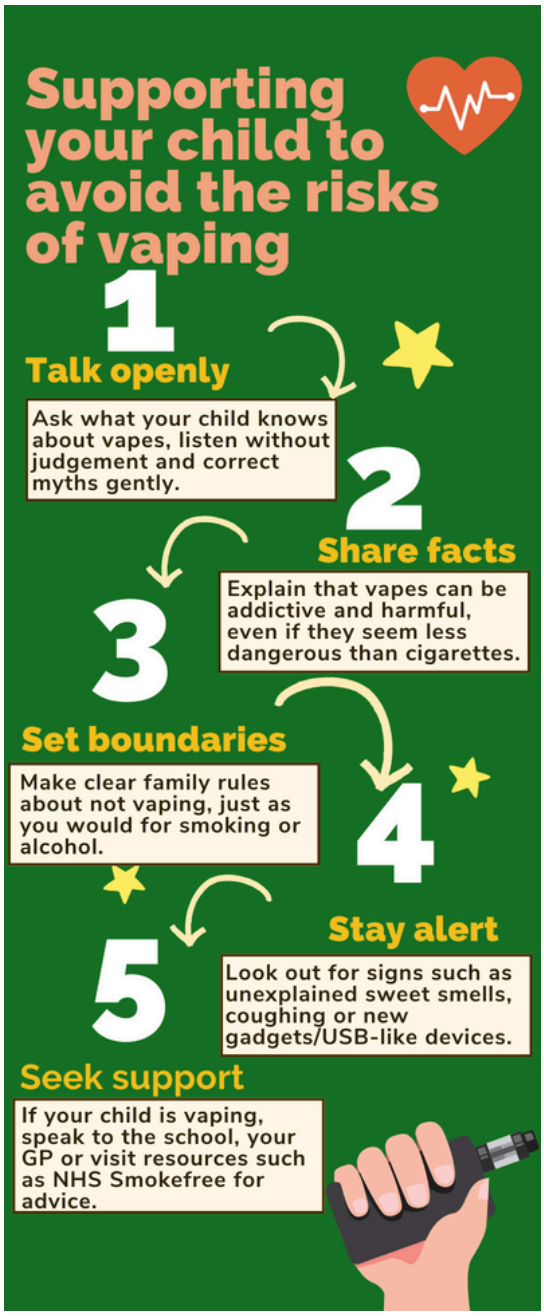
Why vapes are dangerous for children

Although often marketed as 'safer than smoking', vapes still carry serious risks:

- **nicotine addiction** – many vapes contain high levels of nicotine, which can cause dependency and affect brain development in young people
- **harmful chemicals** – new research shows vapes can contain toxic substances such as formaldehyde, acrolein and metals like lead. These can damage the lungs and cardiovascular system
- **respiratory effects** – vaping can irritate airways, trigger asthma and cause long-term lung problems
- **unregulated products** – some disposable vapes, especially those bought online or from informal sellers, may exceed legal nicotine limits or contain banned substances. More recently, tests have even found some vapes laced with illegal drugs such as Spice, making them extremely dangerous.

Why young people are drawn to vapes

- Bright packaging and sweet flavours – flavours such as bubblegum, mango and cotton candy make vapes seem harmless and child-friendly, masking the fact that they often contain addictive nicotine.
- Peer pressure and social media trends – vaping is frequently shown on TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram, making it appear fun, fashionable, or a way to fit in with friends.
- Belief that 'everyone is doing it' – many young people think vaping is common and safe, not realising the health risks or that many of their peers actually choose not to vape.



The law on vaping

·It is illegal to sell vapes or e-cigarettes to anyone under 18.
·It is also illegal for adults to buy vapes on behalf of under-18s.
·Schools treat vaping on site in the same way as smoking – it is strictly prohibited.

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What parents need to know about Child Criminal Exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) happens when children and young people are manipulated, coerced or forced into committing crimes for someone else's benefit. It can affect boys and girls from all backgrounds and often begins without a child realising they are being exploited. Understanding how CCE works is key to protecting children and knowing when to step in.

What is Child Criminal Cxploitation?

CCE is when adults, gangs or organised networks exploit children to take part in criminal activities. This can include:

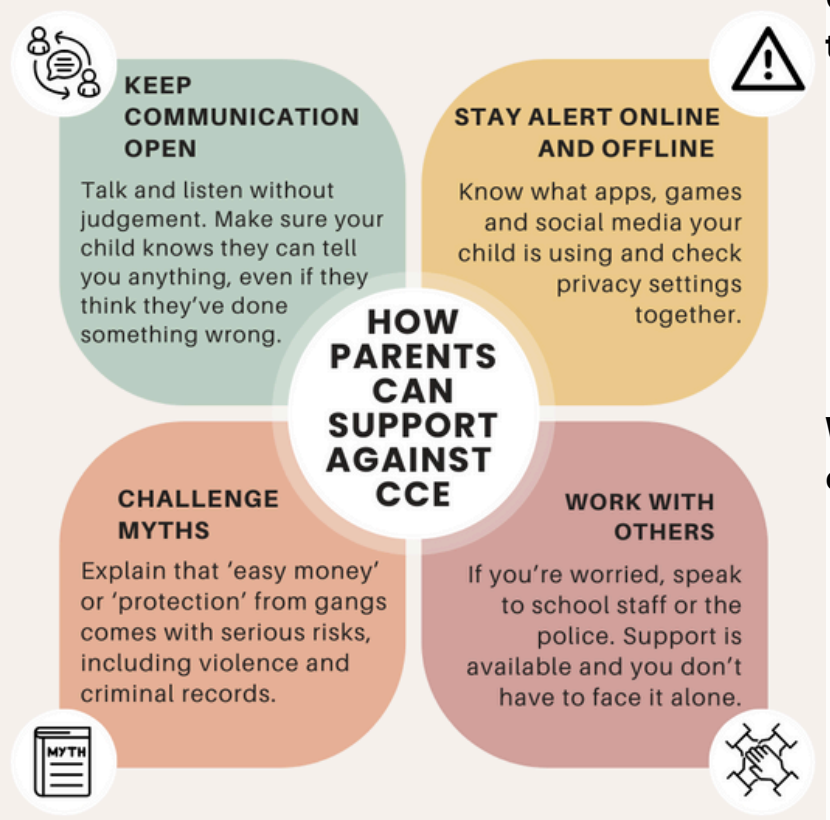
- **County Lines drug dealing** – transporting or selling drugs between areas
- **carrying weapons** – being pressured to hold or use knives or other weapons
- **theft, burglary or shoplifting** – committing crimes on behalf of others
- **online exploitation** – being recruited or directed through apps, social media or gaming platforms.

The role of the online world

Criminals don't always approach children in person – many now use the internet to make contact. Social media, messaging apps and gaming chats are common recruitment tools. Exploiters may:

- start with friendly conversations to build trust
- use games or group chats to identify and target vulnerable young people
- offer money, free items or a sense of belonging online
- move conversations to private messaging, where they apply pressure or give instructions.

Because online communication is hidden, parents may not see what's happening until the child is already involved.



Criminals often exploit children, targeting those who seem vulnerable. They may:

- offer gifts, money, food or clothes
- create a sense of owing a debt in exchange for the gifts. The debt is paid by undertaking criminal activities
- provide friendship or a sense of belonging
- use threats of violence.

Watch for signs of exploitation in your child, such as:

- unexplained money or new possessions
- secretive behaviour about online interactions
- sudden changes in friendships, including unfamiliar adults
- signs of anxiety or reluctance to explain actions.