



TRADING
WITH
SCHOOLS

Understanding and Responding to Critical Incidents Involving Serious Youth Violence

Guidance for Schools and Settings

August 2025



Bristol Educational Psychology Service

Dr Clare Sowman, Anna Sutherland and Kate Warwick

With contributions from The Safer Connections Team and The Safeguarding in Education Team

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Introduction

In recent years, Bristol has seen a rise in serious youth violence. Schools, colleges, and early years settings in Bristol have found themselves having to respond to events that were previously far beyond the realm of what might be expected. The Educational Psychology Service have supported settings during this time, as part of our wider Critical Incident work. With the change in prevalence of such events - we have identified a need for guidance for schools.

This document is intended to support schools to provide a sensitive and timely response to Serious Youth Violence (SYV). It aims to help settings promote feelings of safety and connection, which in turn can reduce escalation and retaliation. It is not intended to address the far wider issue of harm prevention and reduction. This is a separate topic, on which there is already extensive literature.

This guidance:

- i. Suggests how educational settings might respond to an incident of SYV within their community.
- ii. Explains the possible impacts of SYV on a community and typical responses seen in children and young people and adults to traumatic events.
- iii. Gives information around appropriate responses in the short and longer term and to signpost to resources and further information.

For a quick checklist of actions to follow following a Critical Incident please see the DfE Checklist available here:

[Post incident support checklist](#)

For the most up-to-date links, support and resources from the Safeguarding in Education Team please see:

[Critical Incident Support and Guidance](#)

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Statutory response

This guidance is primarily about responding to an incident after an event. Sometimes, schools may assume that reports to agencies have been made. Before you begin responding you need to check, **that the incident has been reported?**

If you are aware of an incident involving or related to serious youth violence the starting point is that this should be reported to police immediately regardless of the age of criminal responsibility.

This must be reported directly to the police via 101, unless in an emergency when this will be reported via 999.

A concurrent referral to children social care must also be made. A strategy can be requested where education can voice explicitly concerns of criminalisation in a multi-agency context.

Bristol First Response: 0117 903 6444

South Gloucestershire Access and Response Team: 01454 866000

North Somerset First Response Team: 01275 888690 (weekdays) 01454 615165 (out of hours)

BANES: 01225 396111 (weekdays) 01454 615165 (out of hours)

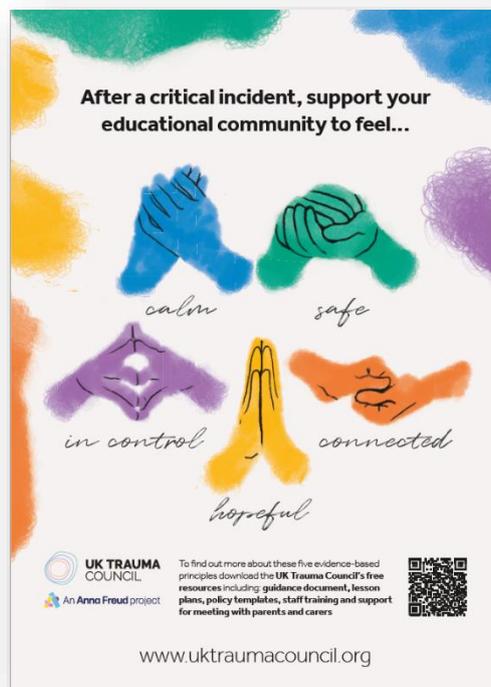
Schools should follow the advice and guidance given by the police following an incident being reported. Schools should contact the Officer in Charge of the investigation to get regular updates about the progress of the investigation.

If unable to get hold of the investigating officer the Direct Operation phone number is 01278 647546.

In addition, referrals should still be made through correct channels via safeguarding leads through to the police lighthouse safeguarding unit.

Responding in a trauma informed way

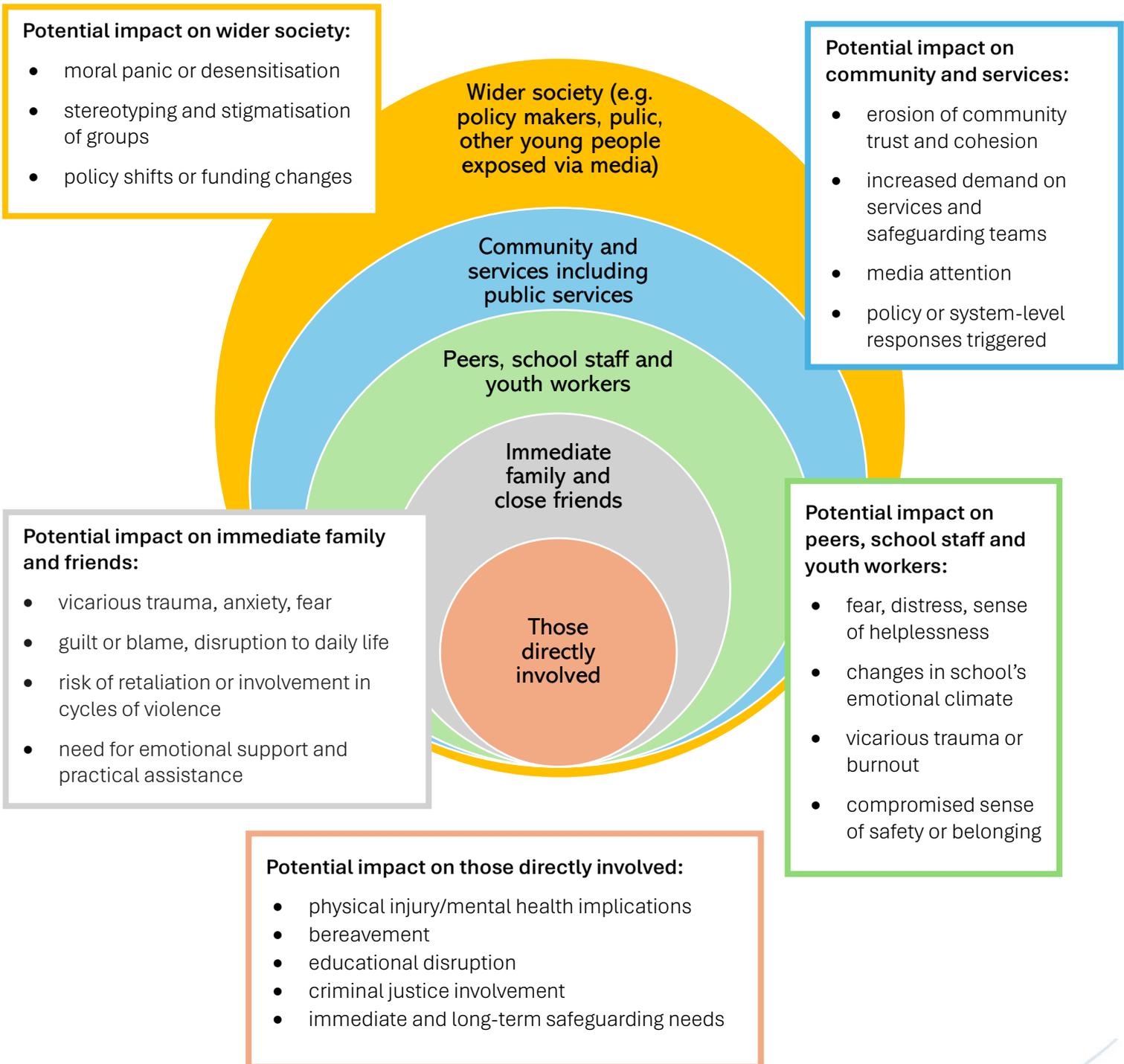
Following a Critical Incident people are best helped by being in an environment that is designed to support recovery. The UK Trauma Council outline five principles for recovery which can support this. These principles can provide a helpful framework from which to develop a response.



1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Identifying those who may need support

The impact of serious youth violence is wide ranging and pervasive. The below tool can help us to conceptualise how the impact of SYV radiates outward from those directly involved to wider networks. Each circle reflects a different level of proximity to the incident, with those closest typically being the most affected, though secondary and tertiary effects can also be significant.



1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Working with key agencies

Bristol City Council Educational Psychology Service

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to provide short term support to educational settings responding to incidents of SYV. This work falls within our wider critical incident response work and the approaches and resources typically used are both relevant and useful in this context. The EP role does not specifically extend to preventative work. Our focus is on supporting settings to cope and to be as resilient as possible in the aftermath of a critical incident.

The role of the EP within this work is to support and guide a setting's Senior Leadership Team with the delivery of an appropriate and evidence led response that can underpin an environment for recovery. In practice, this could include helping settings to understand the impact of trauma and typical responses to it and how to communicate with their wider educational community. It could highlight some of the particular complications of SYV and how setting communities can be supported to cope and to feel emotional safer at such a challenging time.

In the event of a critical incident, there are two ways in which the EPS can be contacted for support:

- 1) Typically, the [Safeguarding in Education Team](#) will inform the EPS about the critical incident and we will arrange for a member of our team to make contact with the school.
- 2) Alternatively, for schools and settings with a link Educational Psychologist you can email them directly.

Bristol City Council Press Officer

You can contact the Bristol City Council Public Relations team via email at: public.relations@bristol.gov.uk (this inbox is regularly monitored) or on: 0117 9222 650. If you have an **urgent** matter outside of normal working hours you can contact us via our on-call number: 07467 335790 (this phone line is 24 hours).

In the first instance the PR team can respond to your query or concern providing advice and guidance about how to deal with a difficult issue relating to serious youth violence, this could include help with communications to families and stakeholders and how to manage media interest.

In the longer-term the PR team can provide help and support with:

- Raising awareness about youth crime prevention
- Facilitating partnerships between schools, police, and community groups
- Help with communicating clear guidance on reporting and intervention strategies
- Showcasing success stories to promote positive youth engagement

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Working with Key Agencies

Safer Connections

Safer Connections refers to the specialist *Harm Outside the Home* Team within the First Assessment Service at Bristol City Council. The team includes a Children's Practice Team, which works intensively with children and families where risks outside the home have been identified, and a Partnership Team, which focuses on strengthening multi-agency partnerships and enhancing contextual safeguarding practices across the network of services supporting children and families.

Following a critical incident, Safer Connections plays a central coordinating role within a shared multi-agency response. The team is committed to enabling effective, joined-up responses that depend on all partners working together. Safer Connections supports services across the partnership by fostering open communication, encouraging shared decision-making, and promoting a strong collective commitment to safeguarding children, families, and communities.

Following a critical incident the Police will notify Safer Connections of the incident, after which the team will initiate information sharing with internal partners, who will in turn collaborate with key internal partners to disseminate key details to relevant agencies, such as the education settings of involved children. Working jointly, Safer Connections and the First Assessment Service will arrange an urgent strategy meeting, chaired by a HOtH Children's Lead or Deputy Service Manager. They will ensure that key representatives from all relevant partners are invited. The strategy meeting will determine the appropriate collective actions required to safeguard the affected children and families, as well as to support impacted partners and communities.

Children who have experienced or are at risk of significant harm will be allocated to a Social Care Unit under Section 47 or Section 17. Safer Connections will work alongside Social Care teams to support the development of effective safety plans to address immediate and ongoing risks. The Partnership Team will assist affected education settings by facilitating appropriate risk mitigation measures, including coordinating multi-agency support from key partners such as the police.

They will also work collaboratively with Community Safety and Public Health partners to help develop a community rapid response plan as appropriate. Additionally, they may conduct peer and location assessments as part of a shared, targeted contextual safeguarding response to improve safety across affected places, spaces, and groups.

If you require any advice or guidance in the event of a critical incident or would like consultation on your current processes and contextual safeguarding measures, please contact

saferconnections@bristol.gov.uk

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Working with Key Agencies

Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Partnership

The Violence Reduction Partnership provide a package of support for young people who have been found in possession of an offensive weapon on the premises of an education setting. The 'Weapons in Schools Pathway' aims to support young people involved in these incidents, prevent further offending and to keep them safe.

- Education settings should submit a referral to First Response and contact Safer Connections (saferconnections@bristol.gov.uk) to report weapons in school incidents and provide the details and circumstances surrounding the incident.
- A Safer Connections Advisor will determine whether the young person meets the criteria for the 'Weapons in Schools Pathway' and coordinate the response with the Police and Youth Justice Service.
- If the criteria are met, the Safer Connections Advisor will complete an assessment alongside a Youth Justice Practitioner, school staff, the young person and their parent or carer.
- A Youth Justice Practitioner will be allocated to deliver six sessions of educational and diversionary intervention.
- If the criteria for a Weapons in School intervention is not met (in situations where there is evidence of threat or direct harm), a Safer Connections Advisor will support the school to take the appropriate measures for reporting and mitigating ongoing risk.

Safer Connections also coordinate a similar pathway to support young people who have been found in possession of a controlled substance on the premises of an education setting. **The 'Drugs in Schools Pathway'** is a partnership process between Safer Connections and Bristol Drugs Project's New Leaf service.

- Education settings should submit a referral to First Response and contact Safer Connections (saferconnections@bristol.gov.uk) to report a drugs in school incident.
- A Safer Connections Advisor will make contact with the school to discuss the appropriate next steps for disposing of the substance and any other reporting requirements to the police.
- The Safer Connections Advisor will complete an assessment alongside a New Leaf worker, school staff, the young person and their parent or carer.
- A New Leaf worker will be allocated to deliver six to twelve sessions of educational harm reduction intervention.

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Working with Key Agencies

Avon and Somerset Police

Avon and Somerset Police has provided guidance for schools and college staff following an incident of serious violence on the school site, the guidance outlines: When to contact the police, how to report an incident, what to do after an incident has been reported to police

The following link provides detailed information in how to respond in accordance with police guidance <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/report/incidents-at-school-college/>

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Managing information and sharing difficult news

In the aftermath of a critical incident involving serious youth violence, it is likely that children, young people, and families may turn to school for information. Whilst we might want to protect children from difficult information, providing them with honest, factual information is important in helping people to make sense of events. When high-profile violent events occur, information can be interpreted in different ways leading to rumours which are not always trustworthy or helpful. Education settings are a trusted source of information and sharing information in a sensitive and age-appropriate way can:

- Help people to see that their reactions are normal,
- Increase feelings of control,
- Avoid misinformation,
- Build feelings of safety, and
- Foster a supportive environment.

Before sharing information, consider:

Other agencies: Police

You will need to liaise with your contact at the police for guidance around what you can say about events. It is important that only factual information, in the public domain is shared in a way which will not impact any ongoing investigations.

Family wishes

If a member of your setting's community has died, you may wish to inform the family or gain their agreement before sharing a statement.

Audience proximity

It is likely that different members of your educational community will have different social, geographical and psychological proximity to what has happened. With this in mind, identify whether any groups of children, young people or staff will need to be told individually or in very small groups (e.g. 2-3 people).

Audience comprehension

Your communication will need to be tailored to the needs, age and developmental stage of the child. Some audiences may need information presented in more simplified terms, repeated, or supported with symbols (e.g. the supporting agencies). Consider also, the accessibility of your communications for parents and carers.

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Managing information and sharing difficult news

Preparing what to say

It is important to plan communications to agree a consistent message before then delivering this in stages. When writing this script, there is a balance to be struck between providing enough information for people to understand what has happened and not overwhelming people. Sometimes it is helpful to have a shorter script and then a few pre prepared responses to questions which children, young people or staff may have. Remember, that it is better to be honest if you do not know the answer to something; this is to be expected. **Elements you could include in your statement are outlined on the next page.**

As noted above, you should liaise with other involved agencies (e.g. Police, Safeguarding in Education) for guidance around your message.

Preparing how to inform students and staff

When sharing difficult news, you will first need to speak with those most impacted either individually or in small groups. When speaking to the majority of your school community, we would advise that you do this in class-sized groups (or smaller) and use a consistent script. Where possible, try to support staff to deliver messages in pairs - this might involve a member of SLT supporting tutors.

Preparing how to inform parents and the wider school community

Educational settings are often regarded as safe havens that can be respected and trusted to give accurate information. Clear and reassuring communication is key following an incident of youth violence, as parents are likely to be particularly concerned about retaliation and the ongoing safety of their children. Writing to parents or holding a parents' meeting - perhaps jointly with your link police officer - gives an opportunity to give a strong safeguarding message that can help contain any parental fears. This message can explain how settings are linking with external agencies, and it can share actions being taken to support both the physical and emotional safety of all students.

On occasions, settings will have students who may have carried out acts of violence as well as having students who may be victims. Acknowledging the complexity of this and how the setting has a responsibility and duty of care and inclusion to all students can be helpful. Additionally, it gives parents an opportunity to come together and to voice any concerns or queries they may have. Addressing the wider school community as a group may also reduce the likelihood of inaccurate narratives circulating as all have received the same message.

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Managing information and sharing difficult news

Planning communications

Validate feelings

We can support others by validating how they might feel, this can be as simple as acknowledging: what has happened is very sad and it is okay to be feeling upset, worried or angry. Confusion, shock and uncertainty can also be important to acknowledge particularly with older children.

“We don’t know why this happened, but it shouldn’t have. Many of you may be feeling really shocked about what has happened. Things like this can’t always be explained and it’s okay to be finding that frustrating and confusing.”

Children don’t normally die. We feel surprised and sad.”

“We are working with X youth organisation to keep everybody safe”

Affirm safety

It is important to let children and young people know what people are doing to keep people safe. For younger children, you might also wish to explain that the event was unusual and reaffirm that school and home are safe places. For older children, it can also be helpful to share information about multi-professional agencies who are supporting the educational setting and any arrangements which have been put in place to support pupils to feel safe in the community.

Talk about rumour

Although it is important to reinforce the idea that it is healthy to talk to others about how you are feeling, older children (e.g. upper key stage two and or secondary) are likely to be able to understand the concept of rumours and you may wish to address this with them. You can also encourage children to think about what they share online and not collude with any rumours.

“You might hear or read different things about what happened from other people or online. Remember that this information might not be true. If you are worried about something you have seen, heard or read, then talk to a trusted adult.”

continued overleaf

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Managing information and sharing difficult news

Planning communications

Discussing the media

You may wish to inform older children that there are strict guidelines on media intrusion enforced by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). Encourage older children (e.g. secondary) and their families to let school staff know if they are approached by the media and discourage them from making any statements about what can be emotional and fast-evolving events.

“People who work for newspapers or television have to follow strict rules, they are not supposed to talk to or photograph children without their caregiver’s consent”

“Where there is a live police investigation posting information can be problematic and potentially lead to legal consequences, including contempt of court”

Social media

You may wish to remind children and young people to be vigilant in their use of social media. It is important to emphasise the importance of respecting privacy and minimising intrusive attention for those affected. In addition, social media posts can be inaccurate and perpetuate unhelpful narratives and rumour.

“Sometimes, a loss in someone’s life may make it difficult for them to cope. If you are worried about one of your friends, then we are here to support you. You can talk to...”

Signposting and support

Ensure that you inform children, young people, and staff members who they can turn to for support. When speaking with older children, you might also want to emphasise the importance of supporting and listening to one another. See ‘fostering connection’ below for guidance around supporting students to listen to one another. Let older children know who they can turn to if they are worried about a friend or peer.

Other considerations around information sharing

- Ensure that staff answering phones have two pre-prepared scripts which can be used when responding to media and when responding to parents/carers.
- Ensure that everyone on school site knows how to respond to media interest on school property.

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Building feelings of safety

After an incident of SYV, you will likely be reflecting on how to build feelings of safety amongst key groups of students, the wider student community, parents, and staff. These actions are all part of a safeguarding response and primarily, we would encourage schools to see guidance from safeguarding partners around this. The Safeguarding in Education Team regularly update their website with current information and resources to support schools in responding to incidents.

Please see www.bristolsafeguardingineducation.org in the first instance.

In consultation with the Safeguarding in Education Team, we have also highlighted some key information below including:

Safety planning

These are resources for working with:

- Individual children including [safety mapping local areas](#)
- Parents and carers including gathering their understanding of [what's happening](#)
- School teams to support self-assessment and a whole-school approach around [contextual safeguarding and extra-familial harm](#)
- For specific advice, guidance and support regarding safety planning or contextual safeguarding contact saferconnections@bristol.gov.uk

Building confidence, knowledge and skills around how to respond

Safer Connections offer a range of training and workshops on the subject of harm outside the home and contextual safeguarding processes. Please contact saferconnections@bristol.gov.uk to enquire about relevant training materials and workshops.

Crime stoppers offer a range of resources and guidance under their 'Fearless' programme which aims to break down barriers for young people regarding reporting crime. Within this, there is information for young people around how to report concerns or crimes anonymously - [Fearless: Anonymous Reporting for a Safer Community | Crimestoppers](#).

If you have any intelligence and are or aware of any risk of serious youth violence/exploitation – please do share with the police via 101 and or submit any info on the [Public Portal \(mipp.police.uk\)](http://Public Portal (mipp.police.uk))

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Building feelings of safety

Staying safe out of school

A selection of resources and further information to support safeguarding children when they're out of school, e.g. keeping safe during the holidays, safety online, reporting concerns, or joining youth clubs.

[Safeguarding in Education - Staying Safe out of School](#)

See also below regarding fostering connection.



Informing children about their rights

With the potential for an increased in interactions with the police following an incident of SYV, you can empower students by giving them tools and understanding about how to interact with the police safety. As part of this, you can give practical information about how to handle a stop and search.

www.y-stop.org

[Stop and search guidance for children](#) from the Early Intervention Team - Avon and Somerset Police.

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Fostering connection

Following a traumatic event, supporting connection is often especially important. The following reflections can help you to guide your setting around connection:



Flexibility

Whilst maintaining consistent routines, schools can consider where some flexibility (e.g. seating arrangements, break times) and attention to social activities (e.g. lunch clubs or after school clubs) can foster social support.

Peer support

In adolescence, young people are often more likely to turn to their peers for support. Schools can upskill students to feel more confident in listening to and empathising with one another. The goal of this is to enable students to better understand emotional wellbeing so that they can respond to their needs and those of peers. Samaritans have a brilliant range of resources called 'Developing Emotional Awareness and Listening' or 'DEAL' which can be accessed here: www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/deal/

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Fostering connection

Staff and student relationships

Maintaining positive relationships with students at times of difficulty is key in supporting them to feel safe and connected. Think about the way that adults at school confer 'signs of safety' to students through facial expression, warmth, kindness and connection. Reflect on approaches to behaviour management and relational practices.

To support the above, this you may wish to consider:

- Ensuring that staff have sufficient time for pastoral care
- Ensuring that all students know who key adults they can contact are
- Look at flexible timetabling to consider space for connection (e.g. longer tutor time)
- Create identified spaces where pupils can find trusted staff
- Making time to check-in with pupils not attending or attending on a reduced basis

When pupils aren't at school owing to school holidays

It is important to plan ahead to ensure that support is available during school holidays/INSET. Make sure pupils and their families know what to do, who to call, or who to approach, if they feel worried or scared.

Be mindful, that many families may not feel comfortable to contact the police, so signpost to alternative sources of support. Think ahead to identify any particularly vulnerable pupils and consider working with them ahead of the holidays to identify trusted and familiar people they can talk to.

Ahead of holiday periods, ensure you have a plan for contacting staff in case of critical incidents.

When pupils aren't at school owing to reduced timetables or alternative learning provision

Consider how you will connect with pupils who are on-roll at alternative learning provision or attending school on a part-time basis (e.g. visits, telephone check-in, fostering peer support, invitations to school, increased attendance if helpful/supportive).

Consider what specific support these pupils – and their families – might require to ensure safety and connection (e.g. transport, pastoral support, home visits, safety planning).

1 Responding to a critical incident involving serious youth violence

Staff wellbeing

Responding to a Critical Incident is demanding, tiring and emotionally draining work. Looking after staff and maintaining their resilience and strength at such times is of key importance in ensuring that high quality support can be offered to the wider setting community. Ensuring that staff are adequately informed and feel supported is crucial, alongside reminding them of strategies that can help coping skills.

The BASIC PH Model of Coping and Resilience

Mooli Lahad's BASIC PH (2017) is a framework which can help us to understand and enhance resilience in the face of trauma and stress. In his model, Mooli outlines six coping channels.

Coping channel	Description
Belief	Belief system and/or core values are used as a means of coping
Affect	People express themselves through their feelings and emotions
Social	Support is sought from social relationships, friends, family, community
Imagination	Fantasy, humour, improvisation, creative thinking, play
Cognition	Problem solving approach is adopted. Focus on the reality, knowing the facts, thinking logically, planning and organising
Physiology	Behaviour that is physically driven e.g. eating, drinking, relaxing, exercise

2 Background and definitions

Safeguarding and definitions

Safeguarding

When reading this guidance, it is important to hold in mind that child on child harm is a safeguarding issue. Children's involvement in violence is complex and relates to a range of contextual safeguarding concerns. We would encourage colleagues to visit www.bristolsafeguardingineducation.org for advice and guidance around keeping children safe.

In this guidance, we refer to 'serious youth violence' and consider this as relating to the concept of child-on-child harm. The language we use and way that we refer to children is constantly evolving. For more information on language use related to safeguarding see '[Why language matters](#)' by the NSPCC.

Definitions

How is serious youth violence defined?

Bristol Serious Violence Executive and The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership

- *"Violence that occurs among young people aged 25 and under, outside of the home. It is between young people who are not related, and who may or may not know each other."*

The World Health Organisation

- *"Violence that occurs among individuals aged 10–29 years who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other. It generally takes place outside of the home. It includes a range of acts from bullying, both offline and online, and physical fighting, to more severe sexual and physical assault, gang-related violence or homicide. Youth violence results in deaths, injuries, disability and long-term health consequences including mental health problems and increased health-risk behaviours, which can lead to chronic diseases. It is further associated with higher rates of school-dropouts, negative impacts on cognitive development and opportunities to contribute to their communities."*

The Avon and Somerset Violence Reduction Partnership

- *"Violence in a public space for under 25's (children and young people); including homicide, attempted homicide, robbery, wounding, grievous bodily harm, knife and gun crime, alcohol and drug related violence and areas of criminality where serious violence or its threat is inherent, such as county lines and modern slavery."*

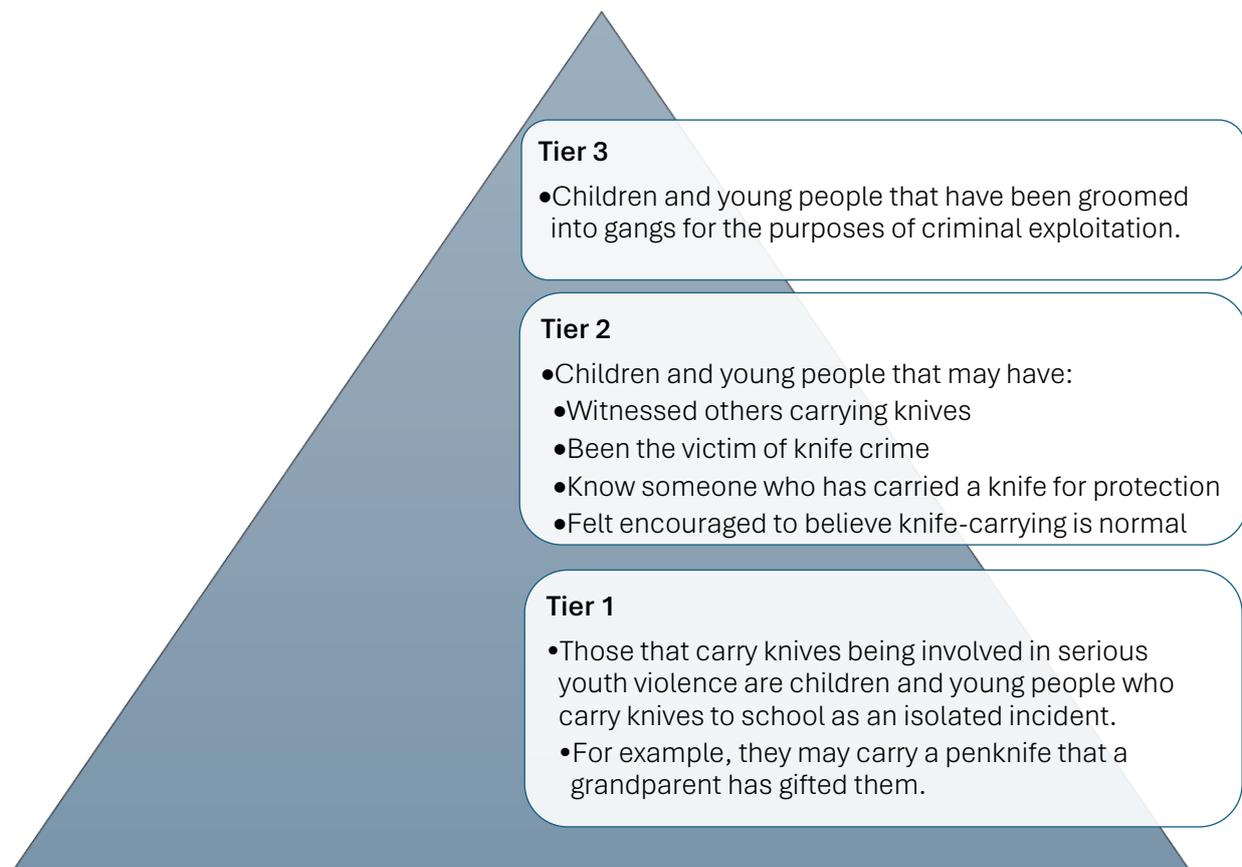
2 Background and definitions

The context of serious youth violence

Cases of SYV have increased significantly over recent years (Ministry of Justice, 2024). One of the most common forms of serious youth violence is knife crime (Ofsted, 2019). Various reports have highlighted concerning statistics around youth violence:

- 4% of young people between the ages of 13-17 have carried a weapon between 2022-2023, equivalent to over 140,000 young people in England and Wales (Youth Endowment Fund, 2023).
- In 2023, an estimated 3,400 knife and offensive weapon incidents were committed by children and or young people in the UK, a 23% increase over the last 10 years (Ministry of Justice, 2024).
- Within the last year, children under 18, committed 18% of all proven knife or offensive weapons offences (Ministry of Justice, 2024), making them an at-risk age group for serious youth violence.
- 78 young people under the age of 25 were murdered with a knife or sharp object between March 2022-2023 (Office for National Statistics, 2024)

In order to make sense of the ways knife crime can occur, Ofsted (2019) produced a report informed by the research they conducted with children, young people, and their families in attendance at London Pupil Referral Units. The report shows the differing levels of knife crime within a tiered system.

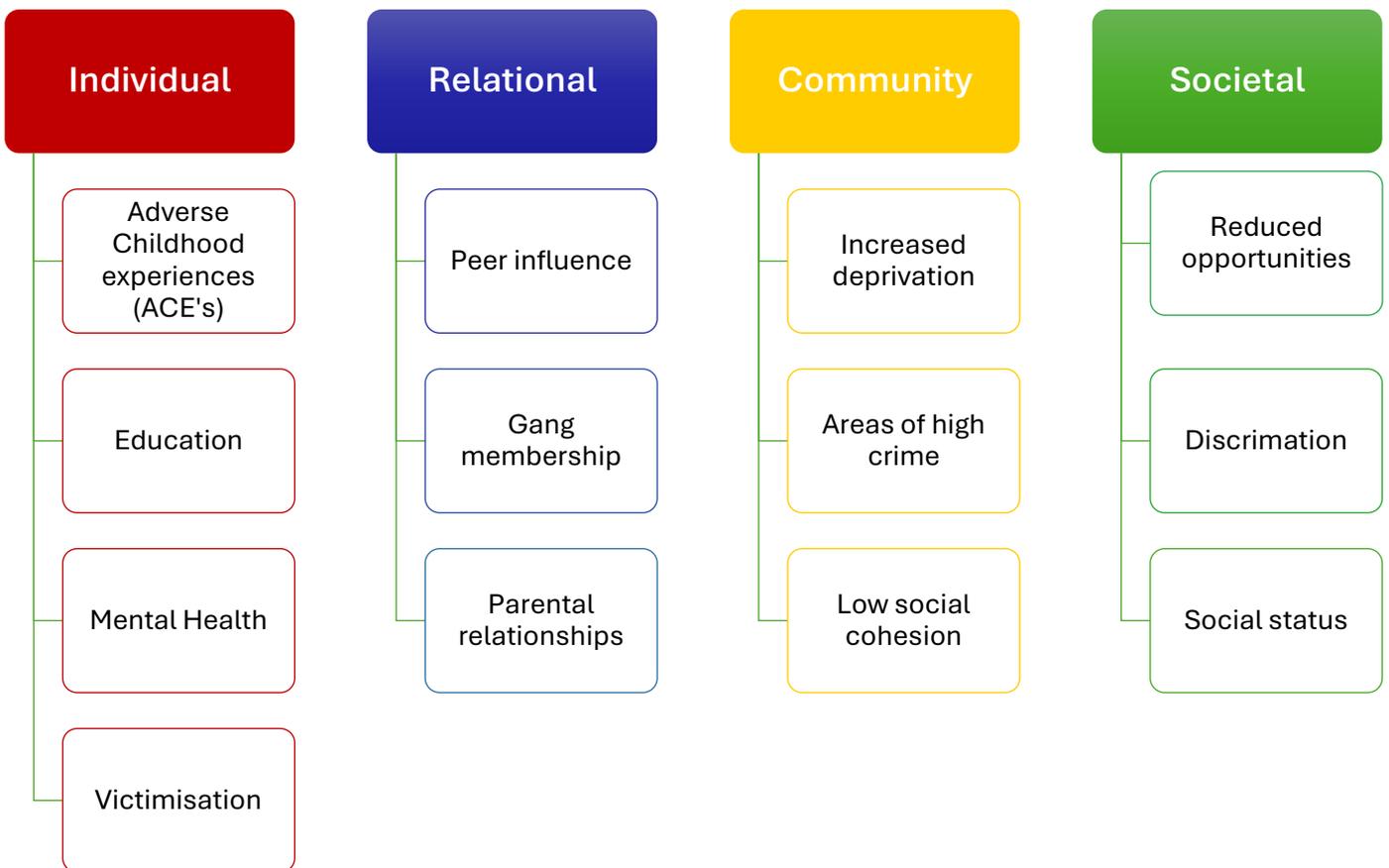


Ofsted, 2019

2 Background and definitions

Risk factors associated with serious youth violence

The diagram below outlines risk factors associated with knife-crime in the UK among young people aged between 10-24 years. It is based on a review of 16 papers by Haylock et al (2020):



As highlighted, experiences such as *neglect, abuse, and family instability* strongly correlate with youth involvement in violent crimes. Alongside this, *poor mental health* was found to be a significant factor in knife crime. Interestingly, a bidirectional relationship was noted between being a victim and a perpetrator of knife crime, suggesting that many offenders had previously been victims themselves. High-risk peer groups and gang affiliation were significant influences, with many youths involved in knife crime due to peer pressure. Knife crime was strongly linked to socioeconomic factors such as deprivation, unemployment and economic inequality.

3 The impact of serious youth violence

The Impact of Serious Youth Violence

Following incidents of SYV, the emotional response of your school community may differ from that which might be observed, following a typical bereavement. For example, in addition to sadness, peoples' emotions including overwhelming distress, anxiety, anger and frustration, low mood, and isolation might be more pronounced. On occasions, these heightened emotions can lead to incidents of retaliation and escalation.

Incidents of SYV can be deeply distressing for staff who, whilst processing their own emotions, are required to respond and support their setting community. Settings affected by SYV, can also face additional pressures from the media, external agencies (e.g. police) and concerned parents which can all impact upon the coping capacity of the setting. Ripple effects following an incident of SYV (e.g. retaliation or fear about retaliation, anniversaries, and criminal investigations) can lead to ongoing cycles of distress and recovery.

Traumatic bereavement

Serious youth violence can sadly all too often lead to bereavement and loss. In addition to any bereavement, there may also be a loss of a sense of safety or life as it previously was. This can require significant re-adjustment to a 'new normal'.

Whilst the loss of a significant other is a major life stressor for anyone to cope with, most bereaved people recover without significant difficulties. However, some bereavements are what researchers might define as a 'traumatic bereavement' (Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 2020).

In a traumatic bereavement, trauma can interfere with natural grieving processes, making it hard for a person to process their loss (Cohen, Mannarino, & Knudsen, 2004). People who have experienced traumatic bereavement, are at greater risk of struggling with complicated or prolonged grief and trauma symptomology (Shimshon, Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 2020). Traumatic bereavement and post-traumatic stress disorder are not the same thing but may overlap.

Traumatic bereavements are those where bereavements occur under traumatic circumstances for example homicide, suicide or another interplay between trauma and grief.

Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 2020

3 The impact of serious youth violence

How grief can differ following a traumatic bereavement

In our [bereavement and loss guidance for schools and settings](#), we outline some key models of grief. In their [guidance for practitioners](#), The UK Trauma Council have used some of these models to explore how bereavement processes can be different following traumatic bereavement.

The Task-Based Model of Grief

Worden (2018) outlines four tasks which – as part of an active process – bereaved people engage with, including:

1. accepting the reality of their loss
2. feeling and processing the pain of their grief
3. adjusting to a world without the person who has died, and
4. maintaining an enduring connection with the person who has died, even when moving forward with their life

[The UK Trauma Council](#) (2021) explored how traumatic bereavement might impact upon tasks within Worden's Task Based Model of Grief (2018):

Accepting the reality of their loss

- It might be hard to think about what has happened.
- It might be hard to believe it was real.
- It might be difficult to have open conversations.
- It might be difficult for adults to provide a shared narrative.

Feeling and processing the pain of their grief

- This can conflict a bereaved person's desire to push feelings of horror, fear and guilt from their minds.
- Other strong trauma-related emotions (e.g. anger) may interfere with time to experience the grief.

Adjusting to a world without the person who has died

- It can be hard to stop going over what has happened.
- There might be pervasive reminders in your environment from others who have been affected.

Maintaining an enduring connection with the person who has died, even when moving forward with their life.

- It might be hard to remember the person instead of their death or circumstances around this.

3 The impact of serious youth violence

‘Growing around grief’

Similarly, Tonkin (1996) suggests that grief does not lessen over time or become smaller but instead, the bereaved individual adjusts their lives to accommodate the pain. This in turn leads to the grief being less dominant and all-encompassing in their lives; other people and new experiences help the person to live with the grief, although it is not forgotten. Making new friends, having new experiences are all examples of ‘Growing around Grief.’



Image source: www.whatsyourgrief.com

For children and young people experiencing traumatic bereavement, growing your life around grief is often more difficult. The UK Trauma Council (2021) explain how:

“For bereaved children and young people, ‘growing your world’ might mean encouraging them to find things that bring comfort and to re-engage with activities. For those affected by traumatic bereavement, this can be particularly hard, as the trauma may trigger the development of a range of mental health needs. These might act as barriers to ‘growing your world’. For example, anxiety may have an impact on re-engagement, low mood may result in a lack of motivation and difficulty finding pleasure, and trauma symptoms may make the world frightening. (p.26-27)”

Resources

Organisations



The **Ben Kinsella Trust**

[The Ben Kinsella Trust](#)

The Ben Kinsella Trust is a charity which aims to tackle knife crime in the United Kingdom providing resources and workshops for young people, parents/carers, and schools.



[Child Bereavement UK](#)

Child Bereavement UK supports children and families when a child grieves or when a child dies. They also provide training and resources for professionals.

Specific resources such as [supporting others in cases of sudden death](#) and [scripts](#) have been created by Child Bereavement UK to assist school staff in providing appropriate care for children during difficult times.



[Young Minds](#)

Young Minds provides support for young people experiencing social, emotional, mental health difficulties. The organisation provides a range of resources to support young people's mental health.

Helpful school based guidance for such as [as Trauma-Informed practice](#) can be found on the Young Minds website.



[Education, Children and Violence Prevention](#)

The Youth Endowment Fund have created guidance for school, college and alternative provision leaders to help prevent children's involvement in violence.



[HEAL: Helping Empower Adolescents Lives via Barnardos](#)

HEAL is a Mental Health and Wellbeing Service which works to educate and support those affected, indirectly, by serious violence in their community.

HEAL deliver a three-tier support model for young people across Bristol:

- Tier 1 - HEAL offers timely trauma-responsive, community-based interventions to those most affected by incidents of high harm.
- Tier 2 – Targeted interventions to friendship groups of young people currently accessing services in Bristol.
- Tier 3 – Using the data available across Bristol and working closely with Bristol City Council’s Education Team, the service identifies schools and alternative learning settings with high levels of youth violence and deliver mental health programmes to affected pupils.

Safety mapping with young people



[Guidance on contextual safety mapping](#)

(please note this is localised to Hackney however can be adapted using localised maps)

Hackney Borough Council, Hackney Contextual Safeguarding, Contextual Safeguarding Network in collaboration with the University of Bedfordshire for provided a free to use tool to use with young people called Safety Mapping. This tool helps young people assess their own risks and safety points associated with localised areas.

[Guide to coroner services for bereaved people](#)

The Ministry of Justice have formed guidance for bereaved people regarding the role of the coroner service.



Ministry
of Justice



[Relational practice](#)

Education Scotland have formulated a helpful and easy to assess guide explaining how to implement Relational Practice into schools.



[Supporting feelings of safety](#)

The Anna Freud centre have produced a range of resources in order to support schools in promoting the feeling of psychological safety for all of their students.



[Sudden death - including accidents, suicide and homicide](#)

The Child Bereavement charity have responded to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about sudden deaths providing practical support concerning a range of incidents.



[Guidance for those working with young people following a traumatic community event](#)

The National Youth Agency (NYA) have created guidance targeted at youth worked providing practical support and reflections on how to promote a psychologically safer environment following a traumatic community event.

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