

ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD VULNERABILITY, CRIME AND JUSTICE

Guide for Child Health Colleagues

The problem

- Children involved in crime have often faced extreme adversity, including poverty, trauma, school exclusion, and unmet special educational needs and disability (SEN(D)).
- Disproportionate criminalisation of children from ethnic minorities and those in care reflects systemic inequality.
- Public services working in silos, with a focus on punishment rather than prevention, limits their ability to effectively reduce harm, and address vulnerability.

What you can do as a child health practitioner

- **Collaborate with schools to identify and support vulnerable children**, particularly those experiencing exclusion, trauma, or neurodivergence.
- **Help embed trauma-informed services into schools, youth centres, and community hubs**, and ensure mental health, social care, and safeguarding services are available within each.
- **Advocate for diversion over prosecution**, especially for first-time or vulnerable youth, by supporting early intervention and restorative justice.
- **Support children and families with a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** through integrated care, including therapy, parenting, and housing advice.
- **Advocate for the sharing of local data across services** to proactively identify risk factors (e.g., poor attendance, safeguarding flags) and coordinate timely interventions.

Evidence-based insights

In 2019, approximately **3.1 million** adults aged 18-74 years reported experiencing sexual abuse before the age of 16.

8 in 10 children in the youth justice system are identified as having SEN(D).

Examples of good practice you may wish to explore:

Revolving Doors

Revolving Doors works to prevent individuals from being criminalised due to unmet health and social needs, such as poverty, homelessness, mental ill health, problems with drugs and alcohol, or domestic abuse.

Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) Pathway

Tackling youth violence by embedding social work in communities, prioritising child safeguarding over criminal justice responses through stronger local partnerships.

Co-designing community resilience to online child sexual exploitation and abuse

Local priorities in response to online child sexual exploitation and abuse were co-developed with local practitioners, parents, and children and young people, helping to support community-focused interventions.

Trauma-informed policing in child sexual exploitation cases

A trauma-informed simulation training tool to improve police responses to child sexual exploitation through collaborative, research-informed practices.

Check out the innovative approaches outlined in this briefing and **consider taking inspiration from these approaches to reflect on how you can help create positive change.**



Scan the QR Code for the report

Please share this guide and start a discussion with your colleagues about how we can all play our role in building a country that works for all children and young people.