

ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD VULNERABILITY, CRIME AND JUSTICE

Guide for education colleagues

The problem

- Children involved in crime often face 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.
- Education settings often lack the resources and joined-up support needed to effectively protect children most at risk of exploitation or harm.

What you can do as school staff

- **Identify early signs of distress or risk**, including changes in attendance, behaviour, and wellbeing – especially among vulnerable groups (e.g., young people in care, neurodivergent children etc.). Use a multiple vulnerabilities register or equivalent to ensure no child falls through the cracks.
- **Develop partnerships with youth, social care, and mental health services** to provide wraparound support for pupils at risk. Ensure data sharing protocols exist to make partner support as responsive as possible.
- **Include contextual safeguarding and exploitation awareness** in staff training and pastoral care policies.
- **Provide enrichment opportunities** (e.g., after-school clubs, mentorships, arts and sports programmes) that build trust, skills, and positive peer relationships. Build local partnerships with third sector providers to seek out funding and expand opportunities.

Evidence-based insights

85% of boys in young offender institutions have been excluded from school.

While **94%** of looked after children in England and Wales do not get into trouble with the law, approximately **half** of children in custody have previously been in care at some point.

Examples of good practice you may wish to explore:

Revolving Doors

A programme which 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

A DfE-funded pilot programme that tackled youth violence by embedding social work in communities and prioritising child safeguarding over criminal justice responses through stronger local partnerships.

The Boathouse Youth

A youth-led initiative in Blackpool that supports disadvantaged young people to gain youth work qualifications, life skills, and employment within a safe, trusted environment to break cycles of deprivation and build a locally-rooted youth workforce.

Getting Out for Good

A programme providing enhanced sporting and cultural activities for vulnerable young women to contribute towards resilience building, enhancing personal aspirations, facilitating teamwork, and fostering positive peer networks.

Check out the innovative approaches outlined in this briefing and **consider implementing these practices into your school.**



Scan the QR Code for the report

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