MERSEYSIDE
Violence
Reduction
Partnership

DELIVERING VIOLENCE REDUCTION LEARNING IN SCHOOLS WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

A GUIDE FOR MERSEYSIDE SCHOOLS

CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Our schools can play a pivotal role in preventing violence. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises that by simply accessing an education system, children are less likely to become involved in aggressive behaviour or violence.[1] From an early, impressionable age, schools have the opportunity to influence many children at any one time. Teachers and support staff can act as significant role models outside of family or community life and can challenge harmful social and cultural norms that may tolerate violence towards others. Schools also have a key role in reaching out to parents and in doing so, guide on practices that may be harmful to their children's health and education.

1.2 To be effective, the values and behaviours that combat violence should be evident within the school itself, through its ethos and the day-to-day running of the establishment. A whole school approach complementing a meaningful Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum is essential. Many educational establishments also recognise that external contributions and associated resources can add great benefits.

1.3 Because of the difficult and complex issues raised in violence reduction activities and the reactions these may elicit from pupils and the community, there are sensitivities that need to be recognised when involving third parties or accessing external resources. The pan-Merseyside Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Group (MACE) has noted the need for schools to ensure external organisations, or lived-experience trainers, deliver in a trauma-informed way and that they demonstrate viewing safeguarding as an ultimate priority.

1.4 In light of the many potential inputs and resources available to schools in Merseyside, this guidance has been prepared to help support schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRU) and organisations in ensuring violence reduction activities contribute positively and safely to the fabric of school life.

1.5 This guidance has been developed through consultation with local authority leads, schools and organisations working in this field of work and from various publications from the World Health Organisation, Home Office (HO), Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), and the PSHE Association.

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[1] School Based Violent Prevention, WHO, 2019

2. IMPACT OF DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES

2.1 A whole school approach is required within our education establishments if serious violence initiatives are to be effective. The World Health Organisation identified nine elements which contribute to this – developing leadership and policies; use of curriculum-based activities; collecting violence data; reviewing the environment; staff training on beliefs and positive discipline; providing clear responses to violence; involving parents; involving the community; and regularly evaluating work undertaken. The enormity of addressing these various elements indicates it would be helpful for a member of staff to take lead responsibility for the co-ordination of this work.

2.2 The Youth Endowment Fund recently published a list of activities and their view of how useful these were in preventing young people from becoming involved in serious violence. While acknowledging the lack of evaluation studies in England, they identified behavioural work in school (developing social and emotional skills), cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), restorative justice conferencing and anti-bullying programmes as clearly successful. What was promising – but currently lacking in evidence – was mentoring, teachable moments (intervening when a crucial life event occurs), classroom management and sports-based interventions if linked with additional support. A mixed response was given to after-school clubs, police officers in schools, school-based approaches to reduce sexual violence and alternative education (PRUs). Boot camps, deterrence-type lessons and the use of scare tactics were identified as 'not working' and potentially making matters worse.[2]

2.3 This concern around 'scare tactics' was further developed as a principle for the PSHE Association in which a positive approach was encouraged which, 'does not attempt to induce shock or guilt but focuses on what children and young people can do to keep themselves and others healthy and safe'.[3]

2.4 WHO also identified the key strategies which support children in this area, and they are: the development of life skills, teaching children about safe behaviour, challenging social and cultural norms, and the promotion of equal relationships.

2.5 WHO supports the theory that curriculum–based activities through PSHE are more impactful than one-off events. The Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) concurs with this, recognising teaching that forms part of a suite of learning where a number of sessions explore subject matter more deeply is more beneficial to children. While standalone inputs are often impactful, generate energy and provide an immediate response, the longer-term benefits remain unproven. The need to feed into additional learning opportunities is therefore a priority.

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[2] 'What Works', YEF Oct 2020
[3] 10 principals of PHSE Education, PHSE Association, May 2014
[4] INSPIRE; WHO, 2016

2.6   It is helpful for a school leadership team to annually identify particular themes around violence or behaviour which connect with issues within their settings, wider community or PSHE programmes. Alongside ensuring any materials are age and need appropriate and culturally relevant, having targeted themes can lead to choosing inputs from external sources which are complementary. MVRP can support schools with understanding its local area profile by use of the data hub provided by Liverpool John Moores University's Trauma Injury and Intelligence Group, TIIG.

2.7   Whatever means of delivery, the importance of creating a safe environment for these messages to be successfully delivered should not be understated.

2.8   MVRP is constantly testing and evaluating educational activities and the latest examples of these are available to view here **www.merseysidevrp.com**.

3. KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER

3.1 There are currently many opportunities for educational establishments to access violence reduction activities in Merseyside. Some are at little or no cost and funded through government, such as the education activities funded by the MVRP. There is still a responsibility on the part of a school to reflect on the suitability of each offer and how it fits within the wider improvement plans of the school. For a subject as complex as serious violence, all offers need considering within the wider picture of the schools' needs. Attainment and achievement considerations are required just as they would be with other educational inputs i.e. the need for baseline (initial) and summative assessments to measure progress and support evaluation. Schools knowing and understanding their pupils and their influences are key to this.

3.2 Timing of such inputs also needs consideration– in the immediate aftermath of a knife attack in an area, certain approaches may raise feelings of anxiety for young people rather than provide reassurance. This guidance has already highlighted that messages are better received when taught in a planned series of lessons where active participation is encouraged to help learners absorb the information. The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme is a good example of this – a peer education and leadership initiative where older pupils deliver sessions to younger peers on violence-related topics, encouraging an active bystander approach.

3.3 The knowledge, values and belief system of trainers and organisations offering educational services should always be easily evident for schools to see, alongside additional information detailing their safeguarding approaches and views around minimising potential trauma from delivery of their activities. Charismatic trainers and those with lived-experience often provide engrossing inputs and it is important that their motivations for delivery are clear and that the messages are steeped in the approaches evidenced earlier.

3.4 If class or year activities are commissioned, whole staff awareness is required regarding the activity's subject matter. Pupil discussions may overflow into other year groups or classes and ignite reactions from young people not directly involved in the original session as well as from parents and carers.

3.5 Many organisations also provide targeted work for specific cohorts and this can be enormously beneficial to both the establishment and young people. From a school's perspective, the rigour around considering such offers should be as commensurate as for those with Special Educational Needs. If a young person is receiving additional external support to address behavioural issues and is known to be vulnerable to external influences and criminality, efforts should be made to ensure no other programme distracts, or potentially contradicts, the support provided.

3.6 From September 2020, the Department for Education recognised Relationships, Sex and Health Education as statutory elements of the curriculum. Inputs which support these elements of a school's PSHE programme will no doubt be welcomed. In relation to serious violence, the role of active bystander – responding to problematic situations/behaviours in a safe way – is mentioned in both the primary and secondary schemes. As a support for delivery of the curriculum, the PSHE Association identifies a comprehensive list of learning opportunities which are used by schools. Those specifically supporting serious violence have been selected and highlighted in **Appendix A**.

3.7 Some organisations offer online opportunities as additional educational support and the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has seen a growth in services using this medium. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is the data and information regulator and they have launched an Age Appropriate Design Code or Children's Code to audit those responsible for designing, developing or providing online services like apps, social media platforms, online games, educational websites and streaming services that use, analyse and profile children's data. The code sets out 15 standards for designers of online services and products and how they should comply with data protection law and schools should ensure that any provider is compliant with this. More information available at **www.ico.org.uk**.

3.8 Assembling this guidance has led to producing a **Checklist** which provides pertinent questions in four key areas to help schools in their discussions with external providers, or to consider themselves when viewing resources:

APPROPRIATENESS OF ACTIVITY/RESOURCE

a) Does the activity either support wider school pastoral, community issues or PSHE learning outcomes for this academic year?

b) Is there duplication in the activity offered by various organisations?

c) Are young people being consulted around the type of activities they would most value and what is their knowledge base about any subject to be introduced?

d) Is the activity universal or targeted?

e) Where is the evidence base which demonstrates that this activity is beneficial?

PRE-CONSIDERATIONS

f) If external people are facilitating the work, are they appropriately qualified, trauma-informed and safeguard trained?

g) Have potential trainers clearly set out their key messages, motivations and how they will minimise any trauma prior, during and after delivery?

h) Is there a risk assessment available which identifies the safety measures in place to support any difficulties which may emerge?

i) Are trainers familiar with the school/setting and Local Authority's safeguarding procedures and referral pathways?

j) Is there a need to inform parents/carers of the activities to be provided?

k) Have all school and support staff, including those not in attendance of the session, been made aware of the subject matter and point of contact should any issues arise e.g. through whole school briefings or digital updates?

THE ACTIVITY

l) Has all pre-activity planning taken place?

m) Have ground rules been agreed with young people; e.g.
- Everyone has the right to be heard and respected.
- Using language that won't offend, stereotype or upset anyone.
- Using correct terms, and if not known, to ask.
- Comment on what was said, not the person who said it.
- Avoid sharing own, or friend's personal experiences but instead use hypothetical or fictitious examples to discuss key ideas.
- No-one to be put on the spot and having the right to pass.
- Not to judge or make assumptions about anyone.

n) Are measures in place to ensure already identified vulnerable young people are supported to minimise any potential trauma?

o) Has additional consideration and support been given to differentiating and personalising the messages for those with special educational needs or disabilities?

p) Are school staff alert to signs indicating young people are being impacted by the activity and require additional support?

POST-EVENT

q) Does the activity signpost appropriate additional support beyond the session?

r) Have school staff been alerted to any longer-term signs or indicators which may suggest young people require further support?

s) If a visiting organisation is offering supplementary online content, are materials compliant with the Age Appropriate Design Code?

t) How will the school measure the impact of the evaluation, test learning objectives and assess any progress made?

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 There is much to be gained from organisations and trainers providing face-to- face, written and virtual resources that support educating our children and young people around serious violence, exploitation, knife crime, child criminal exploitation and drug use. Our schools must meet the highest standards in these areas by holding an inquisitive and challenging mindset which ensures activities are effective, proven, trauma-informed and safeguarded, with learning outcomes that complement the ethos and whole-school goals of each establishment.

APPENDIX A

PERSONAL, SOCIAL, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC CURRICULUM (PSHE)

There are many key learning opportunities identified from the PSHE Association guidance which link to the themes and issues surrounding serious violence. A small selection of these are shown below that may support activities provided by external organisations and resources.

KEY STAGE 1

Health and wellbeing	H16:	About ways of sharing feelings; a range of words to describe feelings.
	H19:	To recognise when they need help with feelings; that it is important to ask for help with feelings; and how to ask for it.
	H32:	Ways to keep safe in familiar and unfamiliar environments (e.g. beach, shopping centre, park, swimming pool, on the street) and how to cross the road safely.
	H34:	Basic rules to keep safe online, including what is meant by personal information and what should be kept private; the importance of telling a trusted adult if they come across something that scares them.
Relationships	R5:	That it is important to tell someone (such as their teacher) if something about their family makes them unhappy or worried.
	R8:	Simple strategies to resolve arguments between friends positively.
	R19:	Basic techniques for resisting pressure to do something they don't want to do and which may make them unsafe.
	R24:	How to listen to other people and play and work cooperatively.

KEY STAGE 2

Health and wellbeing	**H20:**	Strategies to respond to feelings, including intense or con-flicting feelings; how to manage and respond to feelings appropriately and proportionately in different situations.
	H29:	About how to manage setbacks/perceived failures, including how to re-frame unhelpful thinking.
	H38:	How to predict, assess and manage risk in different situations.
	H41:	Strategies for keeping safe in the local environment or unfamiliar places (rail, water, road) and firework safety; safe use of digital devices when out and about.
	H47:	To recognise that there are laws surrounding the use of legal drugs and that some drugs are illegal to own, use and give to others.
Relationships	**R15:**	Strategies for recognising and managing peer influence and a desire for peer approval in friendships; to recognise the effect of online actions on others.
	R18:	To recognise if a friendship (online or offline) is making them feel unsafe or uncomfortable; how to manage this and ask for support if necessary.
	R19:	About the impact of bullying, including offline and online, and the consequences of hurtful behaviour.
	R28:	How to recognise pressure from others to do something unsafe or that makes them feel uncomfortable and strategies for managing this.

KEY STAGE 3

Health and wellbeing	**H5:**	To recognise and manage internal and external influences on decisions which affect health and wellbeing.
	H9:	Strategies to understand and build resilience, as well as how to respond to disappointments and setbacks.
	H25:	Strategies to manage a range of influences on drug, alcohol and tobacco use, including peers.
	H28:	The law relating to the supply, use and misuse of legal and illegal substances.
	H30:	How to identify risk and manage personal safety in increasingly independent situations including online.
Relationships	**R2:**	Indicators of positive, healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships, including online.
	R16:	To further develop the skills of active listening, clear communication, negotiation and compromise.
	R37:	The characteristics of abusive behaviours, such as grooming, sexual harassment, sexual and emotional abuse, violence and exploitation; to recognise warning signs, including online; how to report abusive behaviours or access support for themselves or others.
	R38:	To recognise bullying, and its impact, in all its forms, the skills and strategies to manage being targeted or witnessing others being bullied.
	R40:	About the unacceptability of prejudice-based language and behaviour, offline and online, including sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism, ableism and faith-based
	R42:	To recognise peer influence and to develop strategies for managing it, including online.
	R43:	The role peers can play in supporting one another to resist pressure and influence, challenge harmful social norms and access appropriate support.
	R44:	That the need for peer approval can generate feelings of pressure and lead to increased risk-taking; strategies to manage this.
	R45:	About the factors that contribute to young people joining gangs; the social, legal and physical consequences of gang behaviours.
	R46:	Strategies to manage pressure to join a gang, exit strategies and how to access appropriate support.
	R47:	Motivations, misconceptions and consequences of carrying weapons and strategies for managing pressure to carry a weapon.

KEY STAGE 4

Health and wellbeing	**H4:**	Strategies to develop assertiveness and build resilience to peer and other influences that affect both how they think about themselves and their health and wellbeing.
	H20:	Wider risks of illegal substance use for individuals, including for personal safety, career, relationships and future lifestyle.
	H23:	Strategies for identifying risky and emergency situations, including online; ways to manage these and get appropriate help, including where there may be legal consequences (e.g. drugs and alcohol, violent crime and gangs).
Relationships	**R3:**	To respond appropriately to indicators of unhealthy relationships, including seeking help where necessary.
	R19:	About the impact of attitudes towards sexual assault and to challenge victim blaming, including when abuse occurs online.
	R29:	The law relating to abuse in relationships, including coercive control and online harassment.
	R30:	To recognise when a relationship is abusive and strategies to manage this.
	R37:	To recognise situations where they are being adversely influenced, or are at risk, due to being part of a particular group or gang; strategies to access appropriate help.
	R38:	Factors which contribute to young people becoming involved in serious organised crime, including cybercrime.
Living in the wider world	**L29:**	To recognise the shared responsibility to challenge extreme viewpoints that incite violence or hate, and ways to respond to anything that causes anxiety or concern.

KEY STAGE 5

Health and wellbeing	H14:	To assess and manage risk and personal safety in a wide range of contexts, including online; about support in place to safeguard them in these contexts and how to access it.
Relationships	R8:	To use constructive dialogue to support relationships and negotiate difficulties.
	R19:	To recognise and manage negative influence, manipulation and persuasion in a variety of contexts, including online.
	H20:	To recognise and manage different forms of abuse, sources of support and exit strategies for unhealthy relationships.
	H23:	Strategies to recognise, de-escalate and exit aggressive social situations.
	H24:	To evaluate the dangers and consequences of being involved in gangs, serious organised crime or carrying a weapon.

Any queries relating to this guidance should be directed to the **Education lead for Merseyside's Violence Reduction Partnership**. Use the '**contact us**' link at **www.merseysidevrp.com**