A GUIDE FOR MERSEYSIDE SCHOOLS



Delivering violence reduction learning in schools with external partners.

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Partnership


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Background



1.1 Schools play a pivotal role in preventing violence. We all recognise, and the Department for Education consistently emphasises, that school is a significant protective factor for children and young people. It provides the stable relationships, predictable routines and sense of belonging that help pupils feel safe, supported and ready to learn. The World Health Organisation's School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook [1] recognises that by simply accessing an education system, children are less likely to become involved in aggressive behaviour or violence.

1.2 From the earliest years, schools have a powerful opportunity to shape children's lives in positive ways. Teachers and support staff routinely act as trusted role models beyond the family or community, reinforcing the social norms that promote kindness, respect and safety. In doing so, they are well placed to challenge attitudes or cultural expectations that may normalise harm or tolerate violence. Schools also play a vital role in engaging parents and carers, offering guidance and support that strengthens children's wellbeing, learning and healthy development.

1.3 To be effective, the values and behaviours that prevent harm and reduce violence must be visible throughout the school itself, reflected in its ethos, relationships and day-to-day practice.

1.4 A whole-school approach, working in harmony with a meaningful PSHE curriculum, helps establish the expectations of respect, kindness and responsibility that shape how children see themselves and others. As our statutory safeguarding curriculum, PSHE provides a structured, consistent framework through which these values are taught, reinforced and embedded across the school community.

1.5 We know that pupils' own teachers understand them better than anyone and are best placed to provide the statutory, universal entitlement delivered through PSHE. When delivered through a well-planned, spiral curriculum, PSHE enables pupils to revisit, strengthen and overlearn key concepts within a safe and supportive environment.

1. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/school-based-violence-prevention-a-practical-handbook

1.6 We also recognise that some schools may value the contribution of carefully selected evidence-based external partners so as not to normalise the use of external contributors. When thoughtfully integrated, these contributions can add depth, specialist expertise and real-world relevance, further strengthening the protective environment that schools create for all young people.

1.7 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.

1.8 The Youth Endowment Fund's Education Guidance [2] goes one step further, highlighting

"where unproven strategies are delivered, this should be with great caution. There are also approaches that have been shown to cause harm; these should always be avoided."

1.9 In light of the wide range of programmes, inputs and resources available to schools across Merseyside, this guidance has been developed to support schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and partner organisations in ensuring that violence-reduction activity contributes positively and safely to the fabric of school life. Its purpose is to help you make informed decisions so that the approaches used strengthen protective factors, uphold safeguarding responsibilities and do not expose young people to practices that may be ineffective or potentially harmful.

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2. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/

Impact of different activities



2.1 A whole school approach is required within our education establishments if serious violence initiatives are to be effective. Youth Endowment Fund [3] identifies five core themes that contribute to effective school-based violence prevention: keeping children engaged in education; ensuring access to trusted adults; developing children's social and emotional skills; targeting efforts at the places and times where violence is most likely to occur; and cautiously considering unproven strategies while avoiding harmful approaches.

2.2 As with any coordinated approach, having a dedicated member of staff, ideally within the safeguarding team, to support, oversee and evaluate this work offers significant benefits. A clear lead helps ensure consistency, maintains momentum and enables schools to embed these practices in a meaningful and sustainable way. They can also keep the school informed of emerging regional and national developments and help staff connect with wider professional networks, for example the Merseyside Schools Network [4] ensuring that practice remains current, evidence based and aligned with local priorities.

Aligning with the DfE Preventing Serious Violence in Education Guidance [5]

The Department for Education's Preventing Serious Violence in Education guidance [5] highlights that educational settings play a vital role in preventing violence through four key pillars:

- Building a strong culture
- Supporting inclusion
- Teaching key skills
- Creating safe environments

These principles align closely with the Youth Endowment Fund's recommendations and the approach outlined throughout this guidance. Together they reinforce the importance of keeping children engaged in education, providing access to trusted adults, developing social and emotional skills, using local intelligence to identify need and prioritising evidence-informed practice.

Violence prevention is not a single lesson, assembly or intervention. It is the culture, relationships, skills and opportunities that schools create every day.

3. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/

4. https://www.merseysidevrp.com/what-we-do/education-2/merseyside-schools-network/

5. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-and-preventing-serious-violence-in-education/preventing-serious-violence-in-education



2.3 DfE guidance requires schools to use local public health data and student needs assessments to shape their PSHE curriculum, including statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE). It is therefore important for school leadership teams to identify, on a regular basis, the themes around violence or behaviour that reflect issues within their setting, the wider community, or their existing PSHE provision. Alongside ensuring that materials are age-appropriate, needs-led and culturally relevant, having clearly defined priorities enables schools to select external inputs that genuinely complement and enhance their curriculum. The selection of external inputs should be undertaken jointly by the PSHE lead and safeguarding team (where these are separate roles) to ensure alignment with curriculum intent, identified need and the school's wider safeguarding approach. MVRP can support schools with understanding their local area profile through the TIIG data hub [6]. Schools can also access a wide range of public health data through Local Authority Health Profiles on Fingertips [7].

2.4 The Youth Endowment Fund Toolkit [8] provides an evidence-based overview of which approaches are most effective in preventing young people from becoming involved in serious violence, rating approaches by cost, evidence-quality and impact. Their findings highlight that developing children's social and emotional skills, focussed deterrence, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and sports programmes all have high impact and a good evidence base. The Toolkit is also clear that some strategies are not effective and may even cause harm. These include boot camps and prison awareness programmes that deploy scare-tactic approaches, all of which have been shown to increase the likelihood of negative outcomes.

2.5 This concern around scare tactics was further developed as a principle for the PSHE Association in their Key principles of effective prevention education [9] 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. It goes on to emphasise that negative consequences, harsh realities, or boot-camp-style discipline is ineffective and may even increase the likelihood of offending.

2.6 The World Health Organisation identifies several key areas of prevention for children and young people, including developing life skills, teaching safe behaviours, challenging harmful social and cultural norms, and promoting equitable relationships.

2.7 The World Health Organisation also highlights that curriculum-based learning delivered through PSHE is more effective than isolated, one-off sessions. The MVRP echoes this position, noting that teaching embedded within a broader programme where topics are explored across multiple sessions provides greater long-term benefit. Although standalone inputs can be engaging, energising, and capable of generating an immediate response, their lasting impact remains unproven. It is therefore essential that such sessions are connected to wider, ongoing learning opportunities.

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

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

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6. https://tiig.ljmu.ac.uk/
7. https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/data#page/1/gid/1938132694/pat/6/par/E12000002/ati/302/are/E08000012/yrr/3/cid/4/tbm/1
8. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/?sort=quality_of_evidence%3Aasc&reduction_in_offending-max=1
9. https://pshe-association.org.uk/evidence-and-research-key-principles-of-effective-prevention-education

Key issues to consider



3.1 Educational settings in Merseyside have access to a wide range of violence-reduction activities, many of which are free or funded through government programmes such as the MVRP. Schools still need to judge how each offer fits their wider improvement priorities. Because serious violence is a complex issue, every intervention should be considered in the context of the school's specific needs. As with any educational input, schools should use baseline and summative assessment to understand impact and support evaluation. Strong knowledge of pupils and the influences around them remains essential.

3.2 The timing of violence-prevention inputs is crucial. Through our social norms approach, we recognise that serious-violence incidents are uncommon, but we also understand the significant impact they have when they do occur. Delivering sensitive content immediately after a local or regional incident can unintentionally heighten anxiety; instead, we would encourage colleagues to seek the right support for their school communities through organisations such as Home: Victim Care Merseyside[10].

3.3 Schools should be able to clearly see the knowledge base, values and belief systems of any trainers or organisations offering educational inputs, along with transparent information about their safeguarding practices and how they minimise potential trauma during delivery. Charismatic trainers and those with lived experience can be highly engaging, but it remains essential that their motivations are clear and that their messages align with the evidence-based approaches outlined earlier. Statutory RSHE guidance also emphasises that schools should be particularly cautious about using resources from organisations with a wider interest in promoting harmful products or those holding strong partisan views on contested issues.

3.4 If class- or year-group activities are commissioned, all staff need a clear understanding of the subject matter. Discussions often spill into other classes or year groups and can trigger reactions from pupils who were not part of the original session, as well as from parents and carers. The DfE goes further in its statutory RSHE guidance, stating that schools must consult with parents when developing policy, delivery and resources for sensitive topics, and must be able to share any requested materials.

3.5 Many organisations offer targeted work for specific cohorts, and this can be hugely valuable for both schools and young people. The level of scrutiny applied to these offers should match the rigour used when determining whether an intervention is the right one, delivered by the right person, at the right time. When a young person is already receiving external support for behavioural needs or is known to be vulnerable to external influences and criminality, a graduated and coordinated response is essential. All adults and agencies around the child should be aligned in their messaging, understand the purpose of each intervention, and work collectively toward positive, consistent outcomes for that young person.

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10. https://victimcaremerseyside.org/

3.6 As well as in-person delivery you may consider signposting young people to a range of digital mental health and supportive platforms (Fearless/Crimestoppers/Kooth/Frank). These platforms can be hugely beneficial, with many providing a safe space for young people to seek support and raise concerns. While safeguarding is central to many of these services, children and young people should always be encouraged to speak to a trusted adult whenever possible. Only approved local initiatives should be signposted to, ensuring that support remains safe, appropriate, and accountable. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) have produced a 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 Information Commissioner's Office[11].

3.7 The updated RSHE guidance (2025) places stronger emphasis on the attitudes and behaviours that underpin risks linked to serious violence, including misogyny, violence against women and girls, sexual harassment, online harm and unhealthy peer dynamics. It expects schools to equip pupils to recognise harmful behaviour, understand consent, manage conflict safely and seek help early.

3.8 By the end of primary school, pupils should have developed the knowledge, skills and attitudes that help them stay safe, build positive relationships and make responsible choices. This includes understanding and managing feelings, treating others with respect, resolving conflict calmly, recognising unsafe or harmful behaviour (including online) and knowing how to seek support from trusted adults. These foundations strengthen empathy, self-control and confidence, reducing vulnerability to harmful influences and supporting long-term violence prevention.

3.9 By the end of secondary (KS3 and KS4), pupils are expected to apply a more mature and critical understanding of relationships, safety and personal decision-making. They should be able to recognise and challenge harmful behaviours such as misogyny, harassment, coercion and exploitation; understand consent and the law; identify unhealthy or abusive dynamics both online and offline; and critically evaluate peer, media and online influences. These skills build digital resilience, assertiveness and help-seeking behaviours, all of which contribute to preventing serious violence and safeguarding young people.



11. https://ico.org.uk/


16 123
FREE
number is FREE to call round the clock
amaritans.org
SAMARITANS
A registered charity
This Vehicle is Equipped with CCTV

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Assembling this guidance has led to the production of a **Discussion Prompt**, which provides pertinent questions across five key areas to support schools in their discussions with external providers, or to consider when reviewing resources themselves.

4.1 Educational settings play a vital role in preventing children and young people from becoming involved in violence. As highlighted in the DfE's Preventing Serious Violence in Education[12] guidance, schools are uniquely placed to build strong cultures, support inclusion, teach key skills and create safe environments that strengthen protective factors and reduce vulnerability.

The MVRP remains committed to supporting schools, colleges and alternative provision settings through evidence-based, trauma-informed and safeguarding-led approaches. Working alongside education, safeguarding and community partners, we recognise that no single organisation can prevent violence alone.

In line with DfE guidance [12] and the Youth Endowment Fund's evidence base [13], we encourage approaches that keep children engaged in education, provide access to trusted adults, develop social and emotional skills, use local intelligence to target support, and prioritise interventions that are proven to be effective. Equally, we encourage educational settings to remain reflective and discerning when selecting external inputs, ensuring that all activity is aligned to safeguarding responsibilities, whole-school priorities and the needs of children and young people.

By working together, we can create safer, more inclusive environments where children and young people are supported to thrive, build resilience and achieve positive futures.

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.



12. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-and-preventing-serious-violence-in-education/preventing-serious-violence-in-education

13. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/

Discussion Prompt for Engaging with External Partners

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Curriculum relevance & identified need

Key Consideration: *The right intervention, for the right pupils, at the right time.*

1. How does this activity support identified school priorities, PSHE curriculum outcomes, safeguarding priorities, or violence prevention objectives?
2. What evidence, data, pupil voice, or local need demonstrates that this activity is required and likely to benefit young people?
3. Is the activity universal or targeted, and are the intended outcomes clearly defined?
4. Does the activity complement existing provision and avoid unnecessary duplication with other programmes or services?



External provider suitability & safety

Key Consideration: *Is this the right organisation to deliver this content safely, effectively, and credibly?*

1. Is the organisation or facilitator appropriately qualified, experienced, DBS checked, trauma-informed, and safeguarding trained to deliver this content?
2. Are the provider's values, aims, key messages, and motivations aligned with the school's safeguarding, inclusion, and violence prevention principles?
3. Does the provider understand and agree to work within school policies, including safeguarding, child protection, PSHE, behaviour, and referral pathways?
4. Has the provider shared all session content and resources in advance, and has the school reviewed them to ensure they are accurate, age-appropriate, evidence-informed, and do not rely on fear, shock, shame, or sensationalism?



Planning & preparation

Key Consideration: *Have we planned together to maximise impact and minimise risk?*

1. Has joint planning taken place between the school and provider, including clear roles, learning objectives, session content, risk management, and follow-up arrangements?
2. Have the needs of the pupils been considered, including age, developmental stage, SEND, trauma experiences, cultural factors, vulnerabilities, and protected characteristics?
3. Have arrangements been made to support any pupils who may be affected by the content before, during, or after the session?
4. Have relevant staff and, where appropriate, parents/carers been informed about the content, purpose, and support available?

Safe delivery

Key Consideration: *Will pupils feel safe, supported, and able to engage meaningfully in learning?*

1. Will a member of school staff be present throughout the session and take responsibility for behaviour management, safeguarding, and embedding learning?
2. Have clear ground rules and expectations for safe discussion been established and communicated to pupils?
3. Does the delivery promote critical thinking, healthy relationships, help-seeking, and protective behaviours rather than providing instructional, harmful, or potentially triggering content?
4. Are staff able to identify and respond appropriately if a young person becomes distressed, discloses information, or requires additional support?

Avoid

- **Shock tactics**
- **Fear-based messaging**
- **Sensationalism**
- **Glamorising violence**
- **Harmful stereotypes**
- **Instructional content**

Impact & follow-up

Key Consideration: *How will we know this intervention has made a meaningful difference?*

1. How will the impact of the session be measured, including pupil learning, confidence, attitudes, and intended outcomes?
2. Have opportunities been built in for reflection, discussion, pupil feedback, and follow-up learning within the wider curriculum?
3. Does the activity provide clear signposting to ongoing support, trusted adults, and relevant services if pupils require further help?
4. Have arrangements been made to share learning, evaluation findings, and any safeguarding concerns arising from the activity?

What should an effective intervention achieve?

1. Increase safety and wellbeing
2. Build resilience and protective factors
3. Promote healthy relationships and positive decision-making
4. Increase confidence to seek help and support others
5. Reduce vulnerability to violence, exploitation and harm
6. Strengthen connections with trusted adults and support services
7. Contribute to a safer school and community environment

The most important question

How does this intervention help children and young people become safer, healthier, more resilient, and less vulnerable to violence, exploitation and harm?

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4-Minute Briefing

Educational Approaches to Violence Prevention

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1 Why the protective role of school matters *(1 minute)*

Violence is not inevitable – it can be prevented

Schools are one of the strongest protective factors in a young person's life. Evidence shows that when pupils feel connected to school, attend regularly, build positive relationships, and develop social and emotional skills, they are less likely to become involved in violence.

Violence prevention is not an additional programme

It is embedded in the culture, relationships, expectations and experiences that shape a young person's day-to-day life. Every interaction is an opportunity to strengthen protection and support positive outcomes.



Schools are uniquely placed to do this through: Education Guidance poster final [1]

Implementing the DfE Guidance on Preventing Serious Violence in Education

For further information on implementing a whole-school approach to violence prevention, professionals are encouraged to review the Department for Education's Preventing Serious Violence in Education guidance [2], which provides practical recommendations on building a strong culture, supporting inclusion, teaching key skills and creating safe environments.

2 A Social Norms Approach *(1 minute)*

Most young people do not carry weapons or engage in serious violence. However, many overestimate how common these behaviours are, which can influence attitudes and decisions.

A social norms approach helps to challenge these misconceptions by reinforcing that safe, positive behaviours are the norm. Education settings can support this through consistent messaging, positive role models, celebrating prosocial behaviour, and ensuring discussions about violence are proportionate and evidence-informed.

In practice:

- Challenge myths with facts and pupil voice.
- Promote positive role models and behaviours.
- Use consistent prevention messages across the setting.
- Avoid sensationalising rare incidents.

3 Implementing this Briefing *(1 minute)*

Do:	Ask:
Consider your local context, data and student voice.	Is this an evidence-based approach?
Brief staff before delivery.	Does it avoid shock and scare tactics?
Provide clear signposting to Fearless, Childline and safe, trusted adults.	Is this the right intervention?
Align universal and targeted support.	Delivered in the right way?
Review the Youth Endowment Fund education practice guidance [3].	For the right pupils?
	At the right time?

4 Using External Partners Effectively *(1 minute)*

Evidence based and carefully considered external partners can strengthen violence prevention by bringing expertise, lived experience, and real-world context. Their impact is greatest when integrated into a wider whole-school approach rather than delivered as stand-alone sessions.

- Ensure partners are evidence-informed and align with your school's values and safeguarding approach.
- Integrate their input into the whole-school approach.
- Choose partners with relevant expertise, lived experience, and proven impact.
- Be cautious of approaches that rely on fear, shock, graphic content, or oversimplified messages.

Work with partners to complement and enhance your existing approach.

"Prevention isn't one lesson, one assembly, or one campaign. It's the culture, relationships, and opportunities we create every day."

1. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Education-Guidance-poster-final-3.pdf
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-and-preventing-serious-violence-in-education/preventing-serious-violence-in-education
3. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/



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Any queries relating to this guidance should be directed to the Education lead for Merseyside's Violence Reduction Partnership.

Contact us

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