**Assessing Youth Violence and Safety in the Community**

Assessing the needs of young people who navigate different forms of risks in their communities is a dynamic and complex task. We can make a big difference with teenagers by thinking holistically about what young people need but this guide suggests some elements of assessment that workers need to be additionally curious about.

All young people have some needs in common:

* support for their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
* a sense of belonging and hope
* good friendships and opportunities
* protection from groomers, abusers and organised crime, and support with their relationships with parents, carers and families
* adults (professionals, families, community members) who feel able and equipped to be there for them when they need them

**The below prompts for assessment are not an exhaustive list of questions to ask. Assessment is a professional task that should always include triangulating known history, information from other sources / professionals and include a robust analysis and a plan about what should happen next.**

**Child’s Needs**

Health

* Has young person been hurt in youth violence – if so to what extent, when, what is known about who / what caused it and what was the context of the incident
* How is young person’s mental health in the day-to-day, if they have low mood or anxiety for example, do they have any coping strategies, who supports them – professionally or personally
* If they are using drugs – what, how much, how often, with whom and where are they getting it from. What’s the impact on them, their behaviours, feelings and ability to navigate trouble, confrontation or other social situations (e.g. makes them feel calmer vs more elevated) and in what contexts are they using (and is this a sign of being groomed for exploitation)
* Do they have any underlying conditions which may impact how they present socially or engage with others around them – e.g. ASD, ADHD – if so do all service know how to respond appropriately
* Are they in general good health, have they got access to appropriate sexual health advice, including decent education about consent, contraception and someone to talk to?

Education

* How do they get on at school - with peers as well as with people in authority
* Are they more likely to be a leader, follower, a by-stander – are they easily led or a strong character
* Do they have goals for the future, and a meaningful and fulfilling way of spending their time if they are not in school
* Are they NEET or at risk of being so – do they need extra support to make plans for their future
* Attendance and access to trusted adults – are they attending and is school able to provide at least one good working relationship / trusted adult in school whom the young person can ‘connect’ with
* Does the child have an EHCP – if so have you seen a copy to help you understand the child’s communication needs
* Research indicates that a peak time in the day for serious youth violence is just after school, often as children are walking home. Does the young person feel safe getting too and from school in the context of youth violence?

Emotional and behavioural development

* In response to youth violence - did they feel goaded into a fight, was it pre-meditated, impulsive, did they feel they couldn’t backdown without losing face or being physically hurt
* When and where did it take place – is there anything specific which is relevant
* What do you think was the behaviour trying to achieve – e.g. to inflict injury, to make others feel scared, to stick up for someone else, to feel powerful, feeling bored, ridiculed or shamed or feeling a need to self-protect / protect others – it might be hard for young people to identify this and tell us, so we might need to listen carefully to what they do and what they don’t about an incident
* What’s been the consequences for them of the incident – negatives for example being in cells over night, losing respect of peers etc – what’s the impact on them?
* Does the young person have a history of violent or intimidating behaviour? Against who?
* What worries them right now– for example how do they feel about exam stresses, getting a job, impact on their family or siblings, contact with the police, or future reprisals from other young people?
* Be wary of signs in behaviour that may indicate exploitation – carrying weapons, carrying drugs, large amounts of cash, being driven around by others whom seem to be sketchy or don’t seem to have a proper reason to have a relationship with the YP (like a parent, a mate’s mum or dad etc), being trafficked, adults associating with them for no obvious reason, going missing

Identity

* Does young person have good role models in their lives (often an adult just outside of the nuclear family group)
* Where do they feel they ‘belong’ best – and is this a strength or concern?
* Have they experienced discrimination due to their sexuality, gender, ethnicity, disability – are they able to connect with others like them where they feel supported and accepted
* What do they think they are they good at
* Are there examples or evidence that the YP might end up normalising youth violence in their value set (I.e. lack of remorse, unable to see consequences, no empathy for others impacted by what has happened)
* What might they be accessing online and how is that forming their sense of norms and identity (I.e. high levels of media violence, porn, hate speech), how are they supported in the face of this?
* What do you know about children’s ethnic identity? Do you see aspects of “adultification” bias in your own assessment or the views of others?

Family and social relationships

* What’s known about friendship and peer groups – conflict in group dynamics, or behaviours which take place in a group that otherwise wouldn’t have taken place if YP was on their own
* Does YP have friendships, peers or partners that aren’t involved in anti-social behaviour or youth violence (ECOMAP could be used here to map friendships and influences)
* How do the young people involved all know each other and is there likely future contact in person or online
* What’s known about the other parties – group dynamics, older, younger, does the YP feel scared or frightened of future incidents
* Any concerns about how the YP interacts with their younger siblings – how do they fit in with their family (bearing in mind that some teens will definitely NOT try and fit in with their family and some of this can be normal)

**Parenting capacity**

Ensuring Safety and Emotional Warmth

* Is home a safe place, free of abuse and neglect?
* If YP goes missing does a parent report them as such
* Do parents or carers have any information about the other young people which they should tell us so we can share with others
* Are parents aware of any drug or alcohol use – what are their rules about this and how do they monitor to keep them safe

Guidance and Boundaries

* How does the young person and parent negotiate rules on curfews, behaviour at home and what’s the parent’s expectations on how their kid behaves in the community – what sanctions do they apply at home in response to their teen’s behaviour in the community in response to any incident which triggered the assessment
* Does the family limit the opportunity for YP to gain access to weapons at home if necessary – e.g. who did the baseball bat / knife / object belong to? What boundaries are put in place to stop this access.

Stimulation

* What does the young person do when they’re bored?
* Have they got opportunities? Someone to talk to, something to do, somewhere to go – where they feel safe?

Family History and Functioning

* What’s known about any wider support that the family / parent needs in relation to their own needs eg mental health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, learning needs / neurodiversity
* Has the young person seen violence in the past as normal or exposed to other trauma, ACEs or significant life events like bereavement, bullying, isolation – if so have they been offered time with someone to talk this through or process it if they want to?
* Contact with wider family – grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends who support parenting?
* Are the family been involved in violence / pro-criminality?

Income and Employment

* There’s a strong link between poverty and youth violence – what benefits are being claimed, income, free school meals, work both in the family and by the YP

Housing and neighbourhoods

* Is housing appropriate to need? Does the young person and family feel safe in their home and in their community

Community Safety

* Are there places and spaces that the YP feels safe or unsafe in the community in relation to youth violence?
* What’s the ongoing contact between the young people – face to face and online
* What are the regular places they go / hang out that might be hot spots for trouble or not – can they avoid them, can information be shared with community policing for awareness and to disrupt any harm before it happens and think in a more contextual way
* Safety plan with YP for community risk – if they are approached or confronted or cross paths who to call, where to go, how to minimise contact or the potential risk of harm

We have to remember that risk is dynamic and that working with adolescents and risk in the community is complex. An assessment is only ever a snapshot of what we know at any given time and we should listen to what YP do and don’t say, work with families and our partners to understand what issues and risks young people may be needing to navigate both at home, at school, in their peer groups and in the community. We can make a big difference by thinking holistically about what young people need – to support their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, a sense of belonging and hope, good friendships and opportunities, protection from groomers, abusers and organised criminals, and parents, carers, families and professionals who feel able and equipped to be there for them.

**Practice Tools and Guidance**

**Developing a safety map**

Using a printed out map of the local area ask children to indicate where do children feel safe in their communities, where do they sometimes feel safe, are there spaces / places they can never feel safe – and discuss the differences. Are there specific times of the day or the presence of particular individuals who make places / spaces safer / less safe?

An example from Hackney is below:

[3l-safety-mapping-exercise.pdf (contextualsafeguarding.org.uk)](https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/media/0zvff1t5/3l-safety-mapping-exercise.pdf)

**Using Ecomaps**

Developing an understanding of young people’s peer networks can be done through using Ecomaps:

[Ecomap Activity - Free Social Work Tools and Resources: SocialWorkersToolbox.com](https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/ecomap-activity/)

**Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour**

We know that adolescent peer groups can be a context where harmful sexual behaviour can occur. Understanding what age-appropriate childhood sexual behaviour is can help to understand how concerned to be. The NSPCC have an online tool regarding HSB which can be accessed below and Children’s Social Care have a How We Do Things Here guid to HSB:

[Sexual development and behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-health-development/sexual-behaviour)

If you are concerned or unsure about HSB then the Youth Justice Team can be contacted to take advice.

**Exploitation**

If concerned about any form of exploitation, you should speak to a manager and commence a Risk Indicator Screening Tool in Mosaic. Further advice can be accessed via the Make Safe Team.