Department for Education

Guidance

Preventing serious violence in education

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Applies to England

Contents

Protecting pupils from involvement in violence
Evidence-based resources
Creating a culture of good behaviour
Monitoring school attendance
Recognising the signs of grooming, coercion and criminal exploitation
Understanding emotions and healthy relationships

Education settings play a vital role in preventing children and students from becoming involved in violence.

Working alongside safeguarding and community partners, educational establishments do this by:

- building a strong culture
- supporting inclusion

- teaching key skills
- creating safe environments

Protecting pupils from involvement in violence

This section contains evidence-informed recommendations, which are not statutory requirements, but can help settings make proportionate decisions about preventing violence.

The evidence-informed Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) education practice guidance provides school, college and alternative provision (AP) leaders across England and Wales with 5 evidence-based recommendations on how to help prevent children's involvement in violence.

These recommendations provide actions which are more likely to show results based on the underpinning evidence.

> Your professional judgement and knowledge of local contexts are critically important in determining which recommended actions are appropriate to your circumstances and how you should implement them.

The recommendations are:

1. Keep children in education

Being in education can protect children from violence.

Recommended actions:

- deliver evidence-based attendance improvement strategies, such as meetings with parents or carers and having breakfast clubs
- implement whole-school and targeted behaviour support to reduce the need for exclusion
- provide appropriate support for temporarily suspended and permanently excluded children

2. Provide children with trusted adults

Meaningful relationships with trusted adults can protect children from violence.

Recommended actions:

- provide one-to-one mentoring by trained adults to support vulnerable children
- engage vulnerable children in sports with coaches who can support them

3. Develop children's social and emotional skills

Effective social and emotional skills can protect children from violence.

Recommended actions:

- develop children's social and emotional skills with a universal curriculum, targeted support and whole-school strategies
- provide relationship violence reduction sessions to secondary-age children
- implement and maintain an anti-bullying strategy
- support access to therapy for those children who require additional support

4. Target efforts at the places and times where violence occurs

Violence happens more often in certain places and at certain times.

Recommended actions:

- survey children and talk to staff to determine where to focus your efforts
- meet with partners to understand the local context and coordinate your safeguarding response

5. Cautiously consider unproven strategies and avoid harmful approaches

Resources are best spent on evidence-based strategies.

Recommended actions:

- cautiously consider unproven strategies, such as knife education programmes and trauma-informed practice training
- avoid approaches that have been proven to cause harm, such as prison awareness programmes

Evidence-based resources

Self-assessing your practice

YEF's education practice insight creator (EPIC) is a free, digital, self-assessment tool for education leaders to periodically use to:

- assess their practice against this evidence-informed guidance
- receive immediate insights that highlight strengths and pinpoint areas for improvement

Violence prevention webinars

The DfE and YEF have partnered to run 4 webinars on how schools, colleges and AP settings can help prevent children's involvement in violence. These webinars present the YEF's education practice guidance recommendations in depth.

Practical tools, templates and training materials

Settings may want to develop a local toolkit to support consistent practice, possibly including:

- a decision tree for responding to concerns
- a referral checklist for the designated safeguarding lead (DSL)
- an incident-recording template
- a pupil safety and support plan template
- a staff briefing or continuing professional development (CPD) slide pack covering early signs, de-escalation, information sharing and local referral pathways

Case studies or worked examples can help staff apply the guidance to common

scenarios, such as possession of a weapon, a fight following online conflict, concerns about criminal exploitation, violence on the journey to school, or repeated dysregulated behaviour linked to unmet needs.

Creating a culture of good behaviour

Establishing and maintaining a calm and safe environment helps create good behaviour, which can reduce the likelihood of incidents escalating into serious violence. Calm environments can help pupils and staff feel safe and create good conditions for pupils to learn and thrive.

The Behaviour in schools guidance sections on ‘specific behaviour issues’ and ‘responding to behaviour’ cover:

- setting clear expectations
- responding consistently to incidents
- creating an environment where early signs of harm (including aggression and peer-on-peer abuse) are easier to spot

Creating a school behaviour culture: audit and action planning tools can help schools:

- identify times, locations and patterns that highlight where risks of violence or exploitation are higher (such as corridors, local streets, or transitions between lessons)
- reduce opportunities for violence and strengthening supervision, where needed

Searching, screening and confiscation in schools

Searching, screening and confiscation in schools can help you manage situations involving weapons, drugs and other prohibited or dangerous items.

It explains:

- how and when staff can search pupils
- what can be confiscated

- how to record actions safely and legally

If you are addressing concerns about grooming, gang association or weapon-carrying, this resource supports proportionate intervention.

Using reasonable force in schools

Using reasonable force in schools explains your lawful powers to prevent injury, serious disorder, or criminal behaviour, and how to do so safely and proportionately. It emphasises prevention and de-escalation to help reduce the likelihood of violent incidents.

It covers:

- statutory recording and reporting duties for significant incidents
- when reasonable force can be used to prevent harm
- how to spot patterns of escalating aggression or violent conduct over time

Using pupil premium to address issues

Using pupil premium: guidance for school leaders states that you may use pupil premium funding to address issues such as:

- poor behaviour
- low attendance
- risks linked to safety and serious violence, where these are identified as barriers affecting your disadvantaged pupils

Monitoring school attendance

Regular school attendance is the essential foundation for positive outcomes for all pupils, including their safeguarding.

Not being in school is recognised as a safeguarding concern and can increase children's vulnerability to harm outside the home.

The Working together to improve school attendance guidance:

- sets out the roles, responsibilities and strategies that support early, coordinated action
- helps you recognise when absence could be an indicator of exploitation or involvement in serious violence
- supports multi-agency coordination around attendance, helping you intervene earlier when patterns appear, including spotting children being coerced into drug-running or missing school for grooming or criminal activity

Children missing education are at significant risk of exploitation and serious violence. Children missing education guidance helps you act quickly when pupils disappear from education and are no longer registered at a school or receiving suitable education elsewhere.

It explains that you should:

- notify the local authority
- track children
- escalate safeguarding concerns quickly so that pupils are located and supported rapidly

Using exclusion and suspension

The statutory guidance on suspensions and permanent exclusions can help you make lawful, reasoned decisions when responding to seriously violent incidents or repeated aggressive behaviour. Decisions must be lawful, proportionate and based on the circumstances of the individual child or young person.

The School suspensions and permanent exclusions guidance outlines:

- when exclusion may be an appropriate response to weapons, physical attacks, gang-related behaviour or threats
- helps you document decisions in a way that supports safeguarding partners
- sets out your responsibilities to ensure that pupils who are suspended continue to

receive appropriate education and safeguarding support during the period of suspension

Headteachers are trusted to exercise their professional judgement in applying sanctions, where necessary, having regard to school suspensions and permanent exclusions statutory guidance. The circumstances of individual pupils should be evaluated when considering exclusion.

Recognising the signs of grooming, coercion and criminal exploitation

County lines exploitation guidance helps you:

- recognise the signs of grooming, coercion and criminal exploitation linked to county lines operations
- use practical indicators, such as:
  - multiple phones
  - unexplained travel
  - fearfulness
  - older influencers
- make timely referrals to safeguarding partners when you suspect exploitation

Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines guidance explains how children are pulled into violent criminal networks, including drug-running, territorial disputes and threats. It can help you identify early signs of exploitation.

Understanding emotions and healthy relationships

High-quality relationships sex and health educations (RSHE) is essential in helping pupils:

- understand healthy relationships
- manage conflict safely
- recognise harmful or exploitative behaviour
- gain the language, confidence and knowledge they need to seek help early and avoid situations that may lead to serious violence

From September 2026, updated statutory RSHE guidance clarifies and strengthens expectations around violence prevention, social and emotional skills, and trusted adults, building on previous requirements.

Relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education guidance will help you meet statutory requirements and support pupils' understanding of safe relationships and behaviour.

Using RSHE to help prevent violent behaviour

This section draws on statutory RSHE guidance for schools. In colleges, sixth forms and other post-16 settings, similar content may be delivered through tutorial programmes, enrichment activities, pastoral support, safeguarding education or other equivalent provision.

In relation to violence prevention, RSHE guidance includes content on:

- developing key social and emotional skills that increase pupils' safety and reduce involvement in conflict and violence, including:
  - self-awareness
  - self-management
  - social awareness
  - relationship skills
  - responsible decision-making
  - recognising and managing peer pressure
- recognising unsafe or abusive behaviour and knowing how to seek help or advice, including in relation to sexual harassment and sexual violence
- understanding domestic abuse, including controlling or coercive behaviour and other forms of abuse, and understanding the links between sexism, misogyny and

violence against women and girls

- understanding risks and identifying signs of grooming or exploitation, and knowing how to seek help where there is a concern
- understanding which trusted adults to talk to if they are worried about violence or knife crime
- age-appropriate teaching on the law as it relates to knives and violence, using examples from local context but without using fear as an educational tool (pupils should be taught that carrying weapons is uncommon and should not be scared into the idea that many young people are carrying knives, which can lead to the misconception that they need to carry a knife too)
- understanding the law in relation to grooming or exploiting children into criminal activity, which can include gang involvement and county lines drug running

Approach to teaching RSHE

You should follow the principles set out in the RSHE statutory guidance, including:

- engagement with pupils: an inclusive and well-sequenced RSHE curriculum should be informed by meaningful engagement with pupils to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and engaging
- careful sequencing: schools should:
  - cover all statutory topics, recognising that young people can start developing healthy behaviour and relationship skills as soon as they start school
  - sequence teaching so that pupils are supported and equipped with the knowledge to navigate different experiences in a positive way before they occur, and to prevent harms
- relevant and responsive: schools should:
  - develop their curriculum to be relevant, age and stage appropriate and accessible to pupils
  - where appropriate, work with local partners and other bodies in their area to help pupils understand specific local issues and ensure their needs are met

Schools should ensure that RSHE :

- is inclusive and accessible, and sensitive to the needs of all pupils, including

those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (in line with the SEND code of practice)

- is aligned with your safeguarding and pastoral systems, so staff can respond appropriately to disclosures or emerging concerns
- avoids fear-based approaches, which can be emotionally harmful, and in the context of violence such as knife crime, may inadvertently lead children to think they need to carry a knife for their own protection

Importance of RSHE

High-quality RSHE plays a central role in violence prevention by helping pupils:

- build strong social and emotional skills
- recognise risk early
- seek support confidently
- develop healthy, respectful relationships

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