

Serious Youth Violence: What Practitioners Need to Know

The prevalence of Serious Youth Violence has increased across England and Wales since 2014, London is no exception to this, with increasing numbers of young people affected. Serious Youth Violence can be devastating for the individual, their family, friends, and the wider community. The survivors of violent injury can suffer lasting physical and psychological effects. The aim of this briefing is to provide information about Serious Youth Violence and the support available to young people who may be being affected in Hillingdon.

What is Serious Youth Violence (SYV)?

Serious Youth Violence includes the threat, and intentional use, of violence towards children under 18 years old. SYV usually occurs in a public place, it may or may not involve the use of weapons and can result in serious physical injury or death. Perpetrators may act alone, or as part of a group, SYV does not always happen in the context of gang activity. The intention of SYV is to cause significant injury, deprivation, psychological harm, or death.

Statistics evidence that young black boys are overrepresented as victims of peer homicide, but it is important to remember that any child can be a victim or perpetrator. Children may also experience loss, or fear, due to incidents involving their peers, or the wider community. Experience of prior victimisation can increase the likelihood of becoming a perpetrator for some children. A victim may feel they have been embarrassed or disrespected in front of peers and perceive a need to reassert their 'status'. Perpetrators of SYV may also be victims of exploitation in their own right; they could be being pressured or threatened or in debt to drug dealers. SYV can also stem from disputes related to gang activity, drugs and territory. Exclusion from mainstream education is known to be a risk factor for involvement in Serious Youth Violence.

Signs and Indicators	Social, Emotional, and Psychological Risk Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Non-accidental or unexplained injuries including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bruising ○ Fractures ○ Fresh scars or minor cuts ○ Chronic pain (back, arms, upper legs) ○ Burns ○ Sprains ○ Dislocation ○ Internal injuries ➤ Attempting to hide the injury by wearing long clothing on a hot day ➤ Requesting medication or treatment (bandages or plasters) for unseen injuries ➤ Suspicious injuries (appear to be inflicted by a bladed article, or inconsistent with the explanation) ➤ Refusing to be referred to a hospital or GP for further examination ➤ Inconsistent explanation about how the injury was obtained ➤ Becoming defensive, angry, or hostile when exploring the injury and sequence of events ➤ Mood swings or abusive language that is unusual for the child ➤ Unwillingness to talk, or fearfulness, in the presence of another person. The child may be worried about repercussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Victim of a recent theft, mugging, bullying, assault, or weapon related offence ➤ Regular missing episodes ➤ Exclusion, low school attendance and education attainment ➤ Early exposure to violence in the family home ➤ Lack of supervision by primary care giver ➤ Displaying unexplained aggressive behaviour, or talking frequently about violence ➤ Aggressive towards parents, siblings, animals, peers, professionals ➤ Housing instability ➤ Diagnosed or suspected disability or learning difficulty ➤ Frequent but sporadic contact with a range of different agencies ➤ Mental or emotional health concerns ➤ Substance misuse ➤ Peer group involved in anti-social behaviour or criminality ➤ Isolated from friends ➤ Fear of certain people or places ➤ Developmental regression (bed wetting)

Everyone has a role to play in reducing the harm caused through Serious Youth Violence.

Be curious about the information you are being told by the child and/or their care giver. Do not always take what you are told as fact, be uncertain.

Protect children from SYV without fear of a breakdown in your relationship. View a referral to children's social care as the start of an exploration, not an accusation.

Be prepared to talk about your observations of injuries and worries. If the child is willing to talk, give them time and space.

'Walk in the child's shoes'
Consider the situation from their lived experience (have empathy).

Be patient, ask open questions in a non-judgemental way that is focused on the safety of the child.

It is okay to be unsure about what to do, if you are concerned seek advice

- Is there more than one person making you feel unsafe or afraid?
- Who is making you feel unsafe? How do you know them?
- Have they threatened to hurt you or anyone else you care about (including animals, property)?
- Is there someone else that knows about what is happening to you or you have talked to?
- Have they physically hurt you in any way? (Hitting, choked, kicked, strangled, poisoned)
- Do they have access to materials/weapons to carry out their threats?
- Do you feel safe to leave here today?
- Do they know where you live or what personal information do they know about you?

When a child experiences a crisis, perhaps witnessing or being a victim of violence, school exclusion, or being arrested there is an opportunity to intervene; known as a **'teachable' or 'critical' moment**. This is the time when a child will be more receptive to the idea of change. The [words used](#) and actions taken by professionals are more likely to reach the child and influence the child to change direction if they need to. The [language used](#) to describe children also affects how we understand risk e.g. 'boys' and 'girls' not 'males' and 'females'. **Think about the child** behind the behaviour.

What to do if you are concerned:

- Speak to your Agency Safeguarding Lead
- If you have concerns about a child's welfare complete a Stronger Families Assessment and submit through the [Stronger Families Hub](#) to access support
- If you are concerned a child has, or is likely to, suffer harm call: **01895 556 006** for advice
- If a child is in immediate danger, please call the **Police**.
- If a child has been a victim of crime or witnessed an incident of SYV [Victim Support](#) offer trauma informed, 1-2-1 emotional and practical support, in a safe and confidential setting. Please contact them on **0808 168 9111**
- **Axis** gather intelligence, provide resources and work with children and young people involved (victim or perpetrator) or at risk of involvement, in Serious Youth Violence, Child Sexual Exploitation and/or Child Criminal Exploitation (including concerns of supplying drugs, county lines, grooming and weapons related incidents). For further enquires please email: axis@hillingdon.gov.uk or call: **07823 501585**