

# **Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Gang Involvement**

## **Guidance and Risk Assessment**

**June 2018**

## 1. Introduction

This document provides guidance for agencies in Northamptonshire on working with children and young people at risk of becoming, or already involved, in gang activity. It aims to ensure a collaborative and consistent approach to children and young people at risk in this way. The guidance should be followed where the primary risk to a child or young person is the risk that they will become involved with a gang's criminal or anti-social activity.

This guidance is included within the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Board Procedures and should be read in conjunction with the following chapter [Children Affected by Gang Activity or Serious Youth Violence](#).

### Other documents which may be helpful include:

- HM Government Guidance 2010 – Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/288804/Safeguarding\\_children\\_Gang\\_activity.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/288804/Safeguarding_children_Gang_activity.pdf)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/419595/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard\\_Children.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419595/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children.pdf)
- Advice to parent and carers on gangs helping young people make the right choices 2014  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/345337/AdviceParentsCarersGangs14.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/345337/AdviceParentsCarersGangs14.pdf)
- Home Office 2015 - Addressing Youth Violence and Gangs practical advice for schools and colleges  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/418131/Preventing\\_youth\\_violence\\_and\\_gang\\_involvement\\_v3\\_March2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418131/Preventing_youth_violence_and_gang_involvement_v3_March2015.pdf)
- Early Intervention Foundation 2015 - What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime. A Rapid Review of Interventions Delivered in UK and Abroad  
<http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Final-R2-WW-Prevent-Gang-Youth-Violence-final.pdf>
- Ending gang violence and exploitation – 2016  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-gang-violence-and-exploitation>
- County Lines Gang Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply – 2016  
<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file>

## 2. Definition

There are many definitions of what constitutes a gang, none of which perfectly describes the situation in Northamptonshire. It is nevertheless necessary to have an agreed definition for practical purposes and those given below are widely used and are the definitions agreed locally.

- **Organised Criminal Group (OCG)** or Criminal Gangs: Individuals, normally working with others, with the intent and capability to commit serious crime on a continuous basis, which includes elements of: planning / control / coordination / structure / group decision-making.

Note – this definition does not require the OCG to have committed serious crime. If the OCG has the intent and capability to commit serious crime, it should be recorded.

- **Serious Crime:** Serious crime is defined by section 93(4) Police Act 1997 as crime that involves the use of violence, results in substantial financial gain or is conducted by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose, or crime for which a person aged 21 or over on first conviction could reasonably expect to be imprisoned for three or more years.
- **Street Gangs:** A relatively durable predominantly street-based groups of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, and engage in a range of criminal activity and violence. They may also have any or all of the following features:
  - Identify with or lay claim over territory
  - Have some form of identifying structural feature
  - Are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.
- **Peer Group:** A relatively small, unorganised and transient group composed of peers who share the same space and a common history. Involvement in crime will be mostly non-serious in nature and not integral to the identity of the group: Schoolchildren will usually be part of a peer group.

**NB** Peer groups are not in scope.

*Adapted from; Safeguarding Young People at Risk from Gang Activity, HM Government. Adapted from Hallsworth S and Young T (2004) Getting Real About Gangs. Criminal Justice Matters (55) 1213*

Gangs are often hierarchical in nature and individuals will be involved in different ways at different times. In the case of more established street gangs and organised crime groups, there will be a hierarchical structure with children and young people being at the bottom of this.

Some definitions of levels of gang involvement are described below: please note however, that there is no one set of definitions that applies in all areas and contexts and descriptors may change over time.

- **Gang Associated** – Interacting socially with gang members, through shared location, hobbies or pastimes, friendships or family links.
- **Gang Involved 1** – Not a constituent member of a gang or necessarily subscribing to its norms and values but intermittently co-opted to participate in some of its illegal activities.
- **Gang Involved 2** – Not a constituent member of a gang but coerced rather than co-opted into illegal activity.
- **Wannabees** – Aspirants who, whilst subscribing to gang norms, values, dress code, signs and signals, have not been accepted into the gang and are not involved in its illegal activities.
- **Gang Affiliated** – A constituent, lower status member of a gang, subscribing to its norms and values and participating as a “foot soldier” in its illegal activities.
- **Gang Member** – Core members with high status, subscribing to gang norms and values and orchestrating though not necessarily participating, in its illegal activities.

*Adapted from Factor, Pitts and Bateman 2015*

### 3. Northamptonshire: The Local Picture

The picture in Northamptonshire, as elsewhere, is rapidly moving and evolving. Practitioners should be alert to the fact that this is the case as tactics will change to avoid specific law enforcement and disruption approaches.

In the county there are a number of clearly identified street gangs which have children and young people at various levels of their hierarchy. At present these are predominantly in Wellingborough, Northampton and Rushden, but this can change quickly. There is also clear evidence of violence between these rival gangs, involving weapons which include knives, guns and, on one occasion, corrosive liquids.

In addition to local gangs there is evidence of the presence of criminal gangs, sometimes London-based, seeking to extend their illegal drug dealing activities into Northamptonshire (running "county lines") and making use of children and young people locally in the process. There is evidence of local criminal gangs competing with out-of-county criminal gangs over drug dealing territory.

A 'county line' is where an individual, or a group, establishes and operates a telephone number in an area outside of their normal locality in order to sell drugs directly to drug users. Children and young people may be recruited either in the area in which the line originated or from the local area and can be used to run the operations on the ground. This can include delivering drugs and money between locations (often via trains), staying in safe houses to look after the drugs and money or in some cases selling drugs to local users.

Boys and young men aged 14-17 are the most often targeted, however girls and young women may also be recruited. Girls can be used to courier illicit drugs due to them being less likely to be searched by police. This tactic is frequently used by gangs nationally. There is information from the police regarding the involvement of children as young as 8, known in the gang structures as the 'Tinies'. These children are under the age of criminal responsibility and thus less susceptible to stop/search.

The use of debt is a feature in the exploitation of children and young people by gangs. They may be groomed by a member of the group who will give them money and/or gifts. They will then be told that they owe money, before being threatened and forced to take part in drug dealing. In addition, whilst in possession of drugs, children and young people may become victims of a staged robbery, and are then told they must work for free to replace the cost of the stolen drugs. Alternately, some children and young people may be willing to take part in county lines or drug dealing in their own locality and do not consider themselves victims of exploitation, particularly when they believe they will be rewarded with large sums of money or higher status in the group.

Vulnerable groups of children are more likely to be involved in county lines exploitation. There have been cases where young people with independent accommodation are targeted in order to use their home as a secure base. This can include Looked After Children (LAC) or young people released from custody that are relocated. However, children who are not known to services and who have no previous convictions are also used in an effort to evade police detection.

In addition, some Looked after Children from other areas who are considered at risk of gang involvement or who are at risk from gangs are placed in Northamptonshire's Children's Homes. Families and individuals with gang involvement have also been re-located into the area and may resume their links with gangs in their home area once they have moved. Criminal gangs and street gangs also target vulnerable local drug users/adults and take over their homes to deal illegal drugs from these properties (cuckooing).

Young people from Northamptonshire serving a custodial sentence will do so at some distance from home and may encounter gangs, and may be recruited whilst in custody. As gangs are largely determined by geography, a young person may join a gang from another area in prison for protection but return to Northamptonshire afterwards. This could lead to having less allegiance with the gang in the community but could also lead to the gang moving into the county across 'county lines' using the allegiance created in prison as a base. A bigger problem for young people from Northamptonshire in custody could be joining a gang in prison where a rival gang also exists and becoming involved in this conflict.

The picture is dynamic and constantly changing as the gangs adapt to new police tactics. A serious and organised crime local profile is produced on a quarterly basis to enable agencies to understand current levels of crime within the county.

## 4. What Are the Risks of Gang Involvement?

Young people often offend in groups and their victims are often other young people. It is important not to exaggerate or glamorize the involvement of children and young people in gangs or organised criminal groups. This can be counter-productive by making the lifestyle seem attractive in a way that is very far from the truth.

The risks of being associated or involved with a gang will vary according to the local area and those most relevant to Northamptonshire are included in the local context section.

The risks of gang involvement in a broader context are outlined below.

### 1. Crime and Violence

Gang involvement is a risk factor for becoming involved in youth violence.

Violence is a feature of gang life and is used for achieving dominance; establishing status; avenging perceived disrespect; maintaining group cohesion; accessing resources and regulating drug markets. Young people involved in gangs may be under pressure to commit violent acts and refusal to do so can result in them becoming victims in turn. Violence and fear can be a feature of life both within and between gangs.

Involvement in gangs facilitates a shift to more serious and more lucrative crime. Involvement in gang activity increases the risk of serious violence. Carrying a knife is a feature of gang involvement particularly for self-protection but it is important to remember that young people not involved in gangs may also carry knives 'for protection', particularly but not exclusively in areas where gangs operate.

It is important to recognise that young people who are a risk to others through gang related activity are also at considerable risk themselves. Violence is part of the culture of gangs and those associated with them are at increased risk of exposure through being a perpetrator, victim or witness. There have been several young persons subjected to serious violence in Northamptonshire due to their gang affiliations.

Children and young people are often reluctant to report gang related crime committed against them including sexual violence. They may fear retaliation against them or their families and have a lack of confidence in the authorities' ability to protect them. Violence, especially sexual violence, may also be perceived as a normal part of life. Families of those involved, in particular, siblings, may also be at risk of violence. Children and young people involved in gangs may experience and witness serious levels of violence and intimidation including torture and sexual abuse. Children and young people often feel they will be perceived by their peers negatively if they engage with police.

It should be noted that much of the above relates to boys and the ways in which they interact within the gang. Girls, as seen in the 2017 Children's Commissioner report '[A review of evidence on the subjective wellbeing of children involved in gangs in England](#)' will mostly but not exclusively be viewed as disposable commodities useful for sex or holding / hiding weapons. This feeds into the highly macho culture within gang hierarchies which can be a dangerously exaggerated extension of the male's sense of power and entitlement that exists within a gang culture.

### 2. Child Criminal Exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) often involves children who are trafficked, exploited or coerced into committing crimes and should also be seen as victims in need of safeguarding and support. Perceptions are changing but these young people are often still criminalised and perceived as having 'made a choice' to take part in illegal activity. CCE often involves children and young people being recruited to travel to areas away from home to sell drugs (see guidance on county lines). In other circumstances children under the age of consent may also be used to carry, hold or deal drugs themselves on behalf of an organised crime gang.

Research has found that patterns of grooming of children for criminal exploitation are very similar to those of sexual exploitation. In the past, child sexual exploitation was often perceived amongst professionals as the victim's fault, or due to their risky behaviour. It is important that these perceptions do not exist around criminal exploitation by gangs. Perpetrators of CCE may themselves be children who are criminally exploited and victims of CCE. There is currently no official definition from the DfE of what CCE is, although the problem is being recognised more; effective multi agency and partnership work is needed to understand the scale of the problem.

### **3. Joint Enterprise**

Young people at risk of gang involvement need to understand the concept of joint enterprise and professionals working with them need to ensure they are made aware of the risks they run. The concept of joint enterprise means that a young person who does not directly commit an offence can still be charged with it under certain circumstances if they are considered to have aided or abetted its commission. A useful reference document which covers the details of Joint Enterprise including examples, is CPS Guidance on Joint Enterprise Charging Decisions, which can be found at [www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk)

### **4. Health and Mental Health**

Children and young people involved in gangs face a high burden of mental illness. This can be as a result of experiences within gangs, or can be a contributory factor to wanting to join a gang in the first place. They are at increased risk of conduct disorder, anti-social personality disorder, anxiety, psychosis and substance misuse compared to other young people in the criminal justice system. It should also be noted that the health and mental health experiences will be different between boys and girls involved with gangs due to the different experiences they will be faced with, causing a distinctively different long term impact on their health and mental health.

Some risk factors for gang involvement and mental health are shared and pre-existing mental health issues may attract children and young people into gang activity as well as being a result of it.

Long-term exposure to violence is also a risk factor for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In November 2017 the Children's Commissioner published the report '[A review of evidence on the subjective wellbeing of children involved in gangs in England](#)', this gives the views of children involved in gangs on matters related to their subjective wellbeing.

Research from the USA also indicates that former gang members are also more likely to suffer from poor physical health. The negative effects on health and mental health may also endure beyond the period of gang involvement and into adulthood.

*"The finding that adolescent gang membership has significant consequences in adulthood beyond criminal behaviour indicates the public health importance of the development of effective gang prevention programs". Gilman et al (2014)*

Health staff, particularly those in Accident and Emergency settings, should be alert to the possibility that children and young people attending with unexplained injuries - especially stab wounds - may be gang involved or the victims of gang violence. This is particularly the case where they are unwilling to report to the police and/or are accompanied by others who are not parents, carers or relatives. In the event of suspicions being aroused, health staff should follow their agency safeguarding procedures.

### **5. Sexual Violence**

The Children's Commissioner report '[A review of evidence on the subjective wellbeing of children involved in gangs in England](#)' builds on previous research from the University of Bedfordshire and Children's Commissioner report in 2013 which exposes the use of sexual violence within the context of gangs.

*'For some of these children and young people, sexual violence – rape – is seen as a simple fact of everyday life, an inevitability from which there is no route out.'*

The report identified that the attitudes expressed reflected broader societal attitudes of young people who may not understand the meaning of 'consent' and may expect relationships to be violent. The inquiry uncovered evidence showing appalling sexual bullying and sexist attitudes across all areas of the country and all social groupings.

In gangs, sexual violence may be used as an initiation. It is often peer on peer and boys or young men may be pressured into acts of sexual aggression by others in the gang (e.g. boy in a gang forced to rape a girl as a punishment to her).

Exposure to sexual violence can cause multi-layered long-lasting effects including: depression, low self-esteem, helplessness, panic and anxiety disorders; self-harm and suicide risk.

The same principles apply to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) within a gang as in any other context. If there is any concern that a child is being sexually exploited it is not appropriate to discuss consent. A child cannot consent to exploitation. A point of learning following the Oxfordshire serious case review was that there was a professional mind-set which could not grasp that the victims' ability to say 'no' had been totally eroded.

Where a professional suspects that a child or young person is at risk of CSE within a gang context they should refer to the NSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Toolkit which can be found [here](#).

## **5. Other Relevant Factors**

### **1. The Role of the Gang**

Young people described the gang in terms of family or friendship groups. For young men, the gang can be both a source of protection but also of fear. Breaking away from a gang is described by both sexes as an 'overwhelming challenge'. Young people affiliated to gangs may experience particular barriers to engaging with services. Being involved in a gang takes away the availability of choice for children and young people.

Children and young people are more likely to become associated with this lifestyle if their parents or siblings have been or are involved.

A gang is defined as a "relatively durable group who have a collective identity and meet frequently. They are predominantly street-based groups of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the groups' identity." Within Northamptonshire the identity is often related to a particular town, area or increasingly postcode. This can make it particularly difficult for young people wishing to pull away from a gang as they often continue to live in the same community and postcode.

### **2. Gender**

Both young women and men may be involved with gangs and be both victims and perpetrators of violence. There are some issues that are particularly relevant to young women and girls, although they may also affect young men and boys and these are outlined in this section.

For young women and girls their identity and role within the gang is fluid but other than a rare few, they will not achieve any status higher than being known as a 'link' unless they become the mother of a gang member's child for example. Almost all of a girl's status is determined on the basis of their relationship to (sister/mother) or with a male gang member, or their perceived willingness to provide sexual services leading to them being protected or mistrusted by other gang members. They may also be used to attract rival males into danger,

for hiding and carrying weapons and for sexual exploitation. Girls involved in gangs are at particular risk of mental health problems associated with sexual and intimate partner violence, this can also lead to physical health problems including contracting STI's and having terminations of pregnancies. Young women and girls linked to gang members may be at risk from males in other, rival gangs.

### **3. Ethnicity**

The ethnicity of gang members tends to reflect the local demographic. Recent immigrant populations may be at risk of involvement due to exposure to violence before immigration and deprivation and stigma afterwards.

### **4. Custody**

Young people in custody, including those involved in gangs, are now concentrated in a small number of penal establishments. This can lead to a potential reinforcement of gang identity whilst attempts to manage the problem and disperse gang members can export the problem to previously unaffected institutions. Young people in custody may be under pressure to join gangs for protection. Gang allegiances are dynamic in nature especially in a custodial setting and will be based on the current perceived threat and the need to feel safe. Some young people in custody maintain or develop a gang identity, whilst others use a custodial sentence or period on remand as a "breathing space". Professionals should be aware that young people who have been held in a custodial setting such as a Young Offenders Institution (YOI) are likely to have had contact with gang members and the possibility that they may have formed allegiances with them. This can increase the risk of gang involvement on release. Conversely young people may come into contact with rival gang members who present a risk to them due to their affiliations to a rival gang.

### **5. Children and Young People Who are Looked After.**

Children and young people who are looked after by a local authority are at increased risk of gang involvement.

Children and young people who are already gang involved may be placed in Northamptonshire by their home local authority because they are at risk in their home area from rival gangs.

In the case of a looked after young person who is also subject to a court order, the home Youth Offending Team will agree caretaking arrangements with the local Youth Offending Service in line with the National Youth Justice Board protocol who will see the young person on their behalf for the purposes of statutory appointments and intervention work. It is important that both home and host Youth Offending Team and social workers work in partnership with each other and share information in order to manage risk in these cases.

### **6. Substance Misuse**

Some young people will experiment with drugs and alcohol; it is in some measure an aspect of growing up – of testing boundaries and becoming an adult. For most young people, this experimentation is as far as it goes, for others their substance use becomes problematic. If a young person has been using substances as a coping strategy, as a way to fit in or to deal with emotional pain, this can add another risk factor to the lives of already vulnerable young people. It can also increase the risks of a child or young person becoming involved in gang related activity and/or drug dealing. Practitioners, especially substance misuse workers, need to be alert to the possibility that the children and young people they are working with may become involved in gangs and/or drug dealing and should follow their own agencies safeguarding procedures where they assess that this may be the case.

In Northamptonshire, there are young people who are substance misusers – using alcohol or cannabis which can impair thinking skills and introduce them to illegal activity. They see themselves as different from the people they sell to and may have strongly held negative views of heroin and crack users. This means that they are willing to use higher levels of violence and intimidation when selling to them. Practitioners should be aware of this possibility and intervene with individuals to address such attitudes.



## **7. Social Media**

Gang members generally use social networking sites individually to promote gang culture or individual reputations it is important that social media is not underestimated as a grooming tool for recruitment into a gang.

Social media can often play a key part in creating an online hysteria around a particular gang or feud they may be involved in often allowing trivial disputes to escalate in a relative short space of time as rival gangs goad each other online. This can often be through young people taunting each other via music videos.

Many gangs may have their own websites or social media channels used to promote their activities and this can lead to the gang creating a 'fan following' online which can lead to the grooming of young people, who could then be inadvertently drawn into violent activities after contact is made over social media.

## **8. Age**

It is becoming increasingly common for gangs to recruit younger children into gangs to deal drugs through county lines. It is suggested that children as young as 8 are being recruited into gangs where violence is often threatened as a means of grooming vulnerable children. It is important to remember that it may often be perceived that this is a lifestyle choice by the child however, they have more than likely been groomed and then exploited into carrying out this activity.

## **6. Safeguarding Context**

The following principles should underpin the multi-agency response to the exploitation of children and young people by gangs:

- Exploitation of children and young people by gangs is primarily a safeguarding issue and the response of agencies should reflect this;
- Children and young people who become affiliated or involved with gang activity are at risk of physical violence, emotional harm and reduced life chances;
- Children and young people do not make informed choices to enter or remain in a gang but do so because of coercion, enticement, manipulation and/or violence;
- Children and young people who are harmed and who harm others should both have their safeguarding needs assessed;
- Children who have injuries or present injuries late to health professionals that they are reluctant to explain may be involved in gang culture. This possibility should be explored by professionals;
- Professionals should bear in mind that a child or young person may be a perpetrator and also a victim of violence;
- The safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount; and
- All decisions or plans for the young person or child should be based on good quality assessments and be sensitive to the issues of gender, nationality, culture and sexuality.

## **7. Information Sharing**

- Professionals in all agencies need to be confident and competent in sharing information appropriately to safeguard children at risk of harm through gang activity and/or serious youth violence.

- All agencies are empowered to share information without permission for the purpose of crime prevention under section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, although obtaining consent is good practice.
- To aid professionals in effective Information Sharing both the NSCB and the Serious and Organised Crime Partnership have information sharing agreements in place to support this.
- See also: Sharing personal and sensitive personal information on children and young people at risk of offending – a practical guide (Youth Justice Board & ACPO, 2005) at [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk).

## **8. Who is at Risk of Gang Involvement?**

Professionals who have contact with children and young people should be able to recognise when a child or young person is vulnerable to, or at risk of harm from gang involvement or activity. There are risk factors that may lead to children and young people being vulnerable in this way; in the main, these factors are similar to those that make them vulnerable to other types of harmful activity including becoming involved in offending or extremism.

The triangle model (Figure 1) is based on the assessment triangle set out in the *Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* and groups risk factors for gang involvement under headings of child development, parenting capacity and family/environment. The factors are divided, based on whether they are associated with a strong, medium or low risk. Children and young people may experience a number of these factors and professionals should be aware of the possible cumulative effect.

**Figure 1**

**HIGH RISK FACTORS**

- Early problems with anti-social and criminal behaviour
- Persistent offending
- Unable to regulate own emotions and behaviour
- Physical violence and aggression
- Permanent exclusion from school
- Friends condoning or involved in anti-social and aggressive behaviour
- Alcohol and drug misuse

**MEDIUM RISK FACTORS**

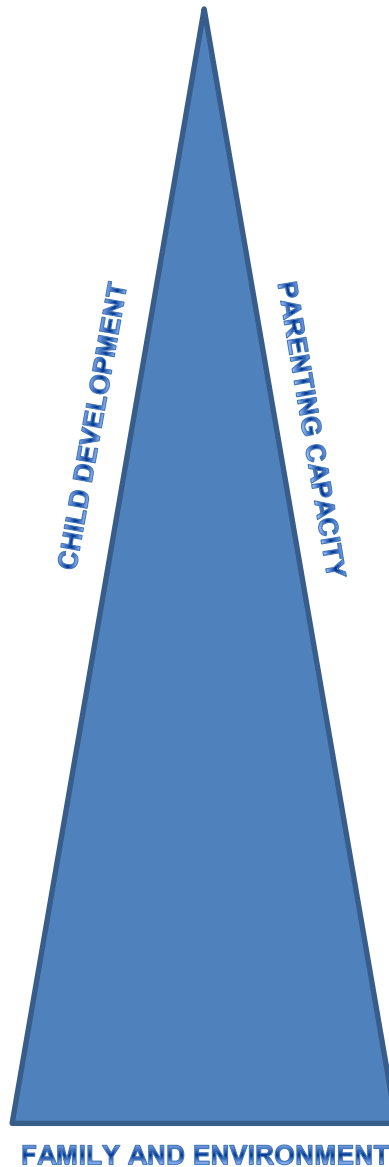
- Mental health problems
- Aggression, behavioural problems
- Depression
- Truancy and unauthorised absence from school
- Bullied or bullying others
- Medical history of repeated injuries or accidents
- Child in local authority care or leaving care

**LOW RISK FACTORS**

- Aggressive bullying by siblings
- Lack of ethnic identity
- Peer rejection
- Not involved in positive activities
- Few social ties
- Exposure to violent media

**HIGH RISK FACTORS**

- Family members involved with or associated with gangs
- Wider family involved with gangs
- Community norms that tolerate crime
- Local tensions between ethnic/cultural/religious gangs
- Known gang recruitment at school
- Presence of gangs in community
- High level of local crime, including drugs market



**MEDIUM RISK FACTORS**

- Availability and use of drugs
- Criminal conviction of parents or siblings
- Witness or victim of domestic abuse

**HIGH RISK FACTORS**

- Historically involved with or known to social services
- Lax parental supervision
- Lack of parental attachment to child
- Conflict and violence in the home
- Parental abuse
- Parents aggressive towards or unwilling to engage with statutory agencies
- Child is not protected from significant harm or danger, including contact with unsafe adults

**MEDIUM RISK FACTORS**

- Lack of emotional care
- Allowing child to associate with known troublemakers
- Violent discipline
- Lack of parental discipline
- Inconsistent or minimal boundaries

**LOW RISK FACTORS**

- Parents don't model positive and responsible behaviour
- Absent parent
- Unstable family environment
- Child left with multiple or unsuitable carers
- Parents unable to communicate effectively with children
- Parent-child separation

**LOW RISK FACTORS**

- Lack of positive role models in the community
- Transient families
- Lack of age-appropriate, safe play facilities or diversionary activities for young people in the area
- Financial difficulties affecting child; little interaction with neighbours and community
- High unemployment
- Sustained poverty
- Lack of reliable support from wider family
- Limited access to conventional careers

Taken from HM Government Safeguarding children and young people who may be affected by gang activity 2010  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/288804/Safeguarding\\_children\\_Gang\\_activity.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/288804/Safeguarding_children_Gang_activity.pdf)

## 9. Early Intervention Foundation Risk Factors for Youth Violence and Gang Membership

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) (2015) has also looked at risk factors for youth violence and gang membership. More information can be found in Early Intervention Foundation (Stephanie Waddell) 2015 - *Preventing Gang and Youth Violence: Spotting Signals of Risk and Supporting Children and Young People an Overview* <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/preventing-gang-and-youth-violence/>

Many of the same risk factors appear in both lists.

The EIF report identified that the following were associated with gang involvement specifically as opposed to a more general involvement in youth violence.

### 1. Risk Factors for Gang Involvement

Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marijuana use (aged 10 – 12)</li> <li>• Displaced aggression traits (aged 13 -15)</li> <li>• Anger traits (aged 13 -15)</li> <li>• Aggression traits (aged 13-15)</li> </ul>
Family and Peer Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None identified</li> </ul>
School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low academic achievement in primary school (aged 10 -12)</li> <li>• Learning disabilities (aged 10- 12)</li> </ul>
Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marijuana (aged 10 -12)</li> <li>• Neighbourhood youth in trouble (aged 10 -12)</li> </ul>

### Overlapping Risk factors between Youth Violence and Gang Involvement

The EIF report also identified some overlapping risk factors between youth violence and gang involvement as follows:

Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyperactivity</li> <li>• Lack of guilt and empathy</li> <li>• Physical violence/aggression</li> <li>• Positive attitude towards delinquency</li> <li>• Previous criminal activity</li> </ul>
Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family poverty</li> <li>• Family violence and aggression</li> <li>• Broken home change of primary carer</li> </ul>

<b>School</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic underperformance</li> <li>• Low commitment to school</li> <li>• Frequent truancy</li> <li>• Peer group</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delinquent peers</li> <li>• Commitment to delinquent peers</li> <li>• Peer rejection</li> <li>• Neighbourhood disorganisation</li> <li>• Availability of drugs</li> </ul>

### Protective factors for Youth Violence

The EIF report also identified protective factors for youth violence (none have been specifically identified for gang involvement).

<b>Individual</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief in the moral order</li> <li>• Prosocial/positive attitudes</li> <li>• Low impulsivity</li> </ul>
<b>Family</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good family management</li> <li>• Stable family structure</li> <li>• Infrequent parent –child conflict</li> </ul>
<b>School</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic achievement</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low economic deprivation</li> </ul>

## 2. Gang Involvement Indicators

In addition to the risk factors identified above increasing a child or young person’s vulnerability to gang involvement, there are also some indicators that can be used to assist professionals in deciding whether the risk to a child or young person of being involved in a gang warrants a referral to Children’s Social Care.

The screening tool on the next page can assist in highlighting signs to look for and can support decision making, but does not replace professional judgement or a careful consideration of the risk factors described previously. In most situations, there will be a combination of the signs/indicators below and the risk factors above which together will give a more reliable picture of what is happening for the child or young person and how agencies should respond.

*[Adapted from Met Police Gangs Matrix May 2015]*

<b>Signs of Gang Involvement Screening Tool</b>	
<b>Strong signs/indicators of possible gang involvement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Possession with intent to supply Class A drugs	
2. Possession with intent to supply Cannabis	
3. Unexplained physical injuries and/or refusal to seek/receive medical treatment.	
4. Associating with pro-criminal peers who are involved in gang activity	
5. Started adopting certain codes of group behaviour (e.g. ways of talking and hand signs)	
6. Refuses/scared to enter certain geographical areas	
7. Expressing aggressive or intimidating views towards other groups of young people, some of whom may have been friends in the past	
8. Multiple mobiles/changing phones frequently	
<b>Moderate signs / indicators of possible gang involvement</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Sudden change in appearance	
2. New nickname	
3. Using new/unknown slang words	
4. Increase in aggressive behaviour / use of intimidation or threats	
5. Unexplained money or possessions	
6. Seems withdrawn / emotionally 'switched off' – from family	
7. Interest in music which glorifies weapons/gang culture	
8. Changed friendship groups and no contact with old friends	
9. Stays out unusually late without reason or consistently breaking parental rules	
10. Robbery offences – used as test of loyalty/initiation	
11. Concerned by the presence of unknown youths in their neighbourhoods	
12. Loss of interest in school, decline in attendance or achievement	
13. Possession of knife or other weapon – to protect/threaten	
14. Constantly talking about someone who seems to have a lot of influence over them	

15. Dropped out of positive activities	
16. Increased episodes of going missing and / or absconding	
17. Drug misuse – to encourage selling to users	
18. Increased use of social networking sites	
19. Starting to adopt codes of group behaviour e.g. ways of talking and hand signs	

	<b>Risk levels – Please use the below as a guide exercising your professional judgement as necessary.</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	<p><b>Low risk</b></p> <p>A child or young person who is at low risk of being involved in a gang / gang activity (None of the strong signs are present less than 5 of the moderate signs are present. There are few risk factors present).</p>	
	<p><b>Medium risk</b></p> <p>A child or young person who is likely to be linked to others known to be involved in gang activity and is at risk of being drawn into the behaviours. (1-3 of the strong signs and some moderate signs are present. There are a number of risk factors present).</p>	
	<p><b>High risk</b></p> <p>A child or young person who is likely to be involved with a gang and the behaviour could already be entrenched. A level of control / coercion will be present and a change of lifestyle could be difficult (More than 3 of the strong signs and more than 5 of the moderate signs are present. A high number of risk factors are also present.)</p>	

<b>Additional comments</b>

## 10. What Works in Addressing Gang Involvement?

A multi-faceted approach, which targets the problem of gang involvement at a number of levels, is most likely to be effective. Any attempt to tackle the issue of gangs at a local level will need to employ a number of different approaches and not rely solely on police enforcement measures if it is to be successful. There is a strong argument that the most effective and well-evidenced approaches to preventing youth crime and violence tend to aim at creating positive change in the lives of young people and families as well as preventing negative outcomes.

What is known about what works on an individual basis to prevent gang involvement and to help those already involved to leave is an area of practice that is relatively under-researched. There are many local initiatives working with children and young people at risk of gang involvement or involved with gangs which have yet to be rigorously evaluated and therefore do not currently have a robust evidence base. There is very limited evidence for what works in a gang specific context. There is more, though still limited evidence for what works to prevent youth violence and it is reasonable to assume that this may also be effective in the context of gangs.

### 1. Effective Interventions for Involvement in Youth Violence

Interventions that have been demonstrated to have a positive effect in the area of youth violence are summarised below:

- a) **Skills Based Programmes** that include demonstrations, practice and activities aimed at developing a young person's ability to control their own behaviour and/or participate in pro-social activities.
- b) **Programmes** aimed at children and adolescents, focussing on problem solving, self-control, anger management, conflict resolution and socio-emotional skills.
- c) **Healthy Lifestyle Programmes (some)** which focus on healthy lifestyle choices and preventing relationship violence show increased awareness and attitude change in participants although their impact on behaviour is less clear.
- d) **Family Focused Programmes** that include home visiting, parental training and family therapy.

### 2. Promising Approaches

The following approaches have been identified as potentially promising, although there is limited or mixed evidence on the types of intervention summarised below:

- a) **Mentoring** - there is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring. Mentoring has been found to have a positive effect on at risk youths but this effect did not endure beyond the end of the programme. For young people in general, community-based mentoring was found to have a beneficial effect on behavioural, socio-emotional and academic outcomes but where the relationship ended within 3 months this was found to have a possibly adverse effect on young people who are identified as being at higher risk. School based mentoring had a very small effect if any.
- b) **Community Engagement Data Sharing and Partnerships** - Have a role to play but more robust evaluation of these approaches is required.
- c) **Sports Based Approaches** - Aimed at engaging young people in pro-social activities and improving self-esteem may have potential but again, more robust evidence is required.
- d) **Hospital Based Interventions** - there is little robust evidence although there is some initial evidence of positive results.



### 3. Gang Injunctions

There are a number of civil and criminal measures that can be used to disrupt gang activity. A specific measure aimed directly at gangs is the gang injunction. A gang injunction is a civil tool to prevent a person from engaging in, encouraging or assisting gang-related violence, and gang-related drug dealing, and serves to protect them and their community from gang-related violence and gang-related drug dealing. Gang injunctions are applied for at the County Court, High Courts or for 14-17-year olds at Youth Court.

The burden of proof is civil, which means that the court must be satisfied on the balance of probabilities that it is required. A gang injunction can last for a maximum of two years. Gang injunctions have the benefit of allowing the gang to be targeted as an entity.

The gang injunction order can impose prohibitions i.e. things not to do, for example, associating with other gang members, or positive requirements i.e. things to do, for example, attending an apprenticeship programme. Gang injunctions prevent an individual from being involved in gang-related violence and gang-related drug dealing, and/or protect individuals from such activities.

In summary, gang injunctions allow a police force or local authority to target the activities of every gang member at the same time, maximising disruption and deterrence.

**More information is available at:** Home Office (May 2016) Injunctions to Prevent Gang-Related Violence and Gang-Related Drug Dealing A Practitioners' Guide

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/526380/Gang-Related\\_Violence\\_and\\_Gang-Related\\_Drug\\_Dealing\\_-\\_A\\_Practitioners\\_G....pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526380/Gang-Related_Violence_and_Gang-Related_Drug_Dealing_-_A_Practitioners_G....pdf)

## 11. What Doesn't Work

The following are identified as ineffective or potentially harmful: scare tactics, prison visits, militaristic type programmes such as boot camps. These may make things worse, especially for young people at higher risk.

For more information on the evidence available on what works in this context see Early Intervention Foundation 2015 - What Works to Prevent Gang Involvement, Youth Violence and Crime, *A Rapid Review of Interventions Delivered in UK and Abroad*.

Interventions based mainly at individuals or groups can be supported through the use of other measures such as enforcement or community based measures. Specific information relating to gang injunctions is provided below.

## 12. What to do if you suspect a child or young person is at risk of gang involvement or is involved with a gang.

### 1. Making a Referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

The Signs of Gang Involvement Screening Tool will assist in enabling practitioners to reach a reasonable working conclusion as to levels of risk. Based on this assessment it may be necessary to make a referral to the MASH. Professionals with concerns about a child or young person or vulnerable adult should follow the safeguarding referral protocols and procedures which can be found [here](#).

## **2. Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service**

Consultancy and advice is available from the Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service. The Youth Offending Service seek to address the specific behaviour of the individual in the context of their current circumstance and history. A positive working relationship with the police ensures that a good understanding of the local picture ensures expertise in this area of work.

## **3. Adolescent Risk Management (ARM) Procedure**

The ARM procedure provides guidance and advice in respect of children and young people who have been identified as vulnerable and potentially at high risk of significant harm as a result of their behaviour or others. This includes gang membership amongst others. This process seeks to deliver a flexible and holistic, multi-agency response for young people who have identified multiple needs, whose planned outcomes are not being achieved despite the best efforts of the inter-agency core group and for whom risks are increasing to such an extent that they are likely to suffer significant harm or are likely to cause serious harm to others. The full procedure and related documents can be found [here](#).

## **Useful Contacts**

### **Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service**

- Offices in Kettering and Northampton
- Contactable on 01604 364118

### **Northamptonshire Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

- 0300 126 1000 option 1

## **Resources**

Children First Northamptonshire – [Children and families service finder](#)

Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board – [Tea Break Guides, Gangs / County Lines](#)

Youth Justice Board - [Effective Practice Library](#)

IMPACT Resources - [Mindset Programme – Tackling Offending](#)

IMPACT Resources - [Mindset - Gangs and Weapons](#)

Childline

<https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/ask-sam/bullying-abuse-and-safety-asksam/gangs/>

0800 1111

## References

- F Factor, J Pitts and T Bateman, 2015 [Beyond Youth Custody - Gang Involved Young People Custody and Beyond](#)
- ROTA 2011 [“This is it. This is my life...”. Impact of Serious Youth Violence and Criminal Gangs on Women and Girls](#)
- Public Health England 2015 -[The mental health needs of gang affiliated young people](#)
- Office of Children’s Commissioner 2013 – [“If only someone had listened”, CSE in gangs and groups](#)
- HM Government 2011 – [Ending Gangs and Youth Violence Final Report](#)
- Joint Thematic Review 2010. – [Management of gang issues amongst children and young people in prison custody and community](#)
- National Crime Agency Report August 2015 [County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding](#)
- Catch 22 Dawes Unit July 2015 [Running the Risks, the link between gang involvement and young people going missing](#)
- Centre for Social Justice 2009 Dying to Belong - [An in-depth review of street gangs in Britain](#)
- Pr John Pitts 2008 Reluctant Gangsters – *The Changing Face of Youth Crime*
- Youth Justice Board 2007 [Groups, Gangs and Weapons](#)
- Early Intervention Foundation (Stephanie Waddell) 2015 - [Preventing Gang and Youth Violence: Spotting Signals of Risk and Supporting Children and Young People An Overview](#)
- Children’s Commissioner for England 2017 – [A review of evidence on the subjective wellbeing of children involved in gangs in England](#)
- Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board – Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Gang Involvement Police, Guidance and Assessment