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[Public Health](#)
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Guidance

Collaborative approaches to preventing offending and re-offending by children (CAPRICORN): summary

Published 14 August 2019

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1. Introduction

1.1 Why this resource is needed

Children and young people who are in contact with the justice system have worse health outcomes than children in the general population. The youth justice system has very little influence on almost all the causes of childhood offending, so it's very important that a range of organisations in local areas work together to help prevent children offending and re-offending.

1.2 Who this resource is for

There are a lot of organisations and bodies in each local area which should work together to stop young people offending. These include:

- the police
- police and crime commissioners
- local authorities
- clinical commissioning groups
- NHS England health and justice teams
- community safety partnerships
- youth offending teams
- other local multi-agency partnerships
- Public Health England centres
- Jobcentre Plus
- Department for Work and Pensions employment support providers
- local charities
- schools
- the children and young people's secure estate

2. The CAPRICORN framework

Collaborative approaches to preventing offending and re-offending by children (CAPRICORN) sets out a framework to help local authorities prevent young people offending and re-offending, by looking at primary (or 'upstream') causes of offending, as well as secondary (or 'downstream') causes.

CAPRICORN's main focus is to describe some actions that local partnerships can take to prevent young people offending and re-offending.

Actions at an individual and family level to prevent offending include:

- support responsive relationships

- strengthen core life skills

Actions at a community level to prevent offending include:

- make sure school exclusion is a last resort
- prevent violence and exploitation
- address substance misuse and mental health needs
- strengthen communities
- prioritise looked after children
- reduce poverty and deprivation

Actions at an individual and family level to prevent re-offending include:

- encourage peer mentoring
- promote family-based interventions
- build life skills

Actions at a community level to prevent re-offending include:

- provide trauma informed services
- promote nurturing environments
- identify children at risk of re-offending
- support access to mental health services
- work with substance misuse services
- link with education, employment and housing

The CAPRICORN framework in the diagram below shows the different upstream and downstream actions that local partnerships can take to prevent youth offending and re-offending. There are actions to help individuals and families and for communities and society.

The framework uses a public health approach and will help you to integrate your action at individual and family level and community and societal level.

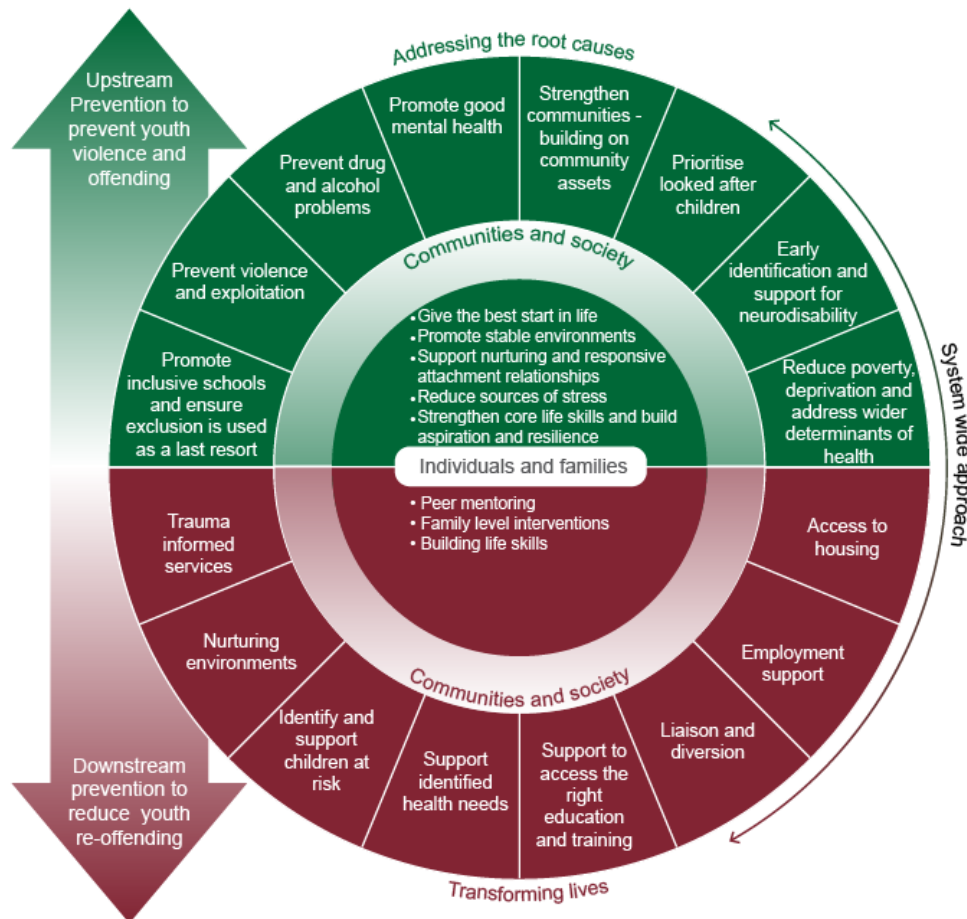


Figure 1: CAPRICORN framework

3. Children and young people in contact with the criminal justice system

Children and young people in contact with the criminal justice system includes those on probation or in contact with police services, as well as those in custody. But custody should be a last resort in dealing with offending behaviour in young people.

The rates of young people (10 to 17 years old) entering the youth justice system for the first time have decreased significantly in the last decade. In England and Wales there were around 14,400 first time entrants to the youth justice system between April 2017 and March 2018, which was a fall of 86% since the year ending March 2008.

However, despite a small decrease in March 2018, the re-offending rate is still higher than 10 years ago.

The vast majority of young offenders in England are male (83% in 2016 to 2017). Young people from black and mixed black-white backgrounds are over-represented in the criminal justice system and those from white and Asian backgrounds are under-represented.

Over half the children held in young offender institutions are or have previously been looked after children. In 2017 to 2018, 4% of looked after children were convicted or were subject to youth cautions or youth conditional cautions.

4. Risk factors and protective factors

A public health approach to preventing young people offending and re-offending should focus on risk and protective factors. A risk factor is anything that increases the probability that a person will suffer harm. A protective factor is something that decreases the potential harmful effect of a risk factor.

4.1 Risk factors

There are risk factors at an individual and family level and a community level and these can change over time, depending on other factors like age.

Risk factors usually occur in clusters and interact with each other.

Individual risk factors include:

- early malnutrition
- behavioural risk factors
- alcohol or drug misuse
- traumatic brain injury
- language difficulties

Family risk factors include:

- abuse
- emotional or physical neglect
- household alcohol or drug misuse
- household mental illness
- family violence
- family breakdown
- household offending

School and peer group risk factors include:

- poor educational attainment
- truancy
- exclusion from school
- gang membership
- low expectations from teachers

Community risk factors include:

- deprivation

- poor housing
- unsafe areas
- poor social mobility
- high crime rate
- high unemployment
- racism

4.2 Protective factors

Protective factors act against risk factors. They are conditions, characteristics and influences that can reduce the chances of children coming in contact with the criminal justice system and encourage positive, healthy living.

Protective factors can explain why children who face the same level of risk are affected differently. A combination of protective factors can even prevent the harmful influence of risk factors that have accumulated over a child's development.

Protective factors can also be categorised in a similar way to risk factors and grouped into individual, family, school and peer group, and community categories.

Individual protective factors include:

- health problem solving
- being ready for school
- healthy social relationships
- learning language

Family protective factors include:

- stable home environment
- nurturing and responsive relationships
- shared activities with parents
- good, consistent parenting skills
- parents being there consistently

School and peer group protective factors include:

- commitment to school
- positive teacher relationships
- positive social interactions and friendship groups

Community protective factors include:

- opportunities for sport and hobbies
- community cohesion
- safe environment
- inclusion

- opportunity for volunteering

5. How to develop a framework for action

If you want to prevent offending and re-offending you will need to take actions to prevent offending ('upstream') and action to reduce the impact of offending and prevent re-offending ('downstream').

These 3 important principles should support any actions you take.

5.1 Partnership and shared vision

You need to make sure that you co-ordinate work to reduce youth offending and re-offending across your partnership and you and your partners have a shared vision of what you are trying to achieve.

5.2 A range of interventions

You will need to bring together and implement a range of interventions which can improve health outcomes in children in contact with the criminal justice system.

5.3 Identifying vulnerable children in all policies

You and your partners need to make sure to identify vulnerable children and include them in all policies and consider them in all decision making.

6. Reducing offending

6.1 Family level

The foundations for almost every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years has lifelong effects on people's health and wellbeing. So, it's really important to give children the best start in life.

Research has shown several things that improve outcomes for children in early life, including:

- home health visiting programmes
- teaching parenting skills
- [the Healthy Child Programme \(http://www.healthychildprogramme.com/\)](http://www.healthychildprogramme.com/)
- good health, wellbeing and resilience
- stable housing
- secure relationships with parents and carers
- high quality learning opportunities and home and school

You and your partners can help prevent children and young people offending at a family level, by basing your work on 3 important principles.

1. Support responsive relationships

Children's ability to thrive is affected by how healthy and supportive their relationships are. Research has shown that intervening early to address any attachment and parenting issues will help with resilience and physical and mental health in later life.

2. Reduce sources of stress in the lives of children and families

Poverty, violence, substance misuse and mental illness can cause severe stress to children and their families. Reducing the things that cause stress will help protect children.

3. Strengthen core life skills and build resilience

This means not just trying to improve young people's personal coping skills, but also making sure that they have the right conditions to support their relationships in their family and local community. It also means ensuring that services are available when they need them.

6.2 Community level

You and your partners can help prevent young people offending at a community level by taking the following actions.

Make sure school exclusion is a last resort

School exclusion does not directly make young people criminals, but it does increase the risk that they end up in contact with the criminal justice system.

School can act as a protective factor to vulnerable children by encouraging educational achievement, creating strong mentoring relationships, developing social skills and self-esteem.

Prevent violence and exploitation

Preventing violence is an essential part of improving outcomes for vulnerable children. There are a range of different interventions which can reduce people's tendency for violence, lower the chances of getting repeatedly involved in violence and make sure that young people affected by violence get the support they need.

Evidence suggests programmes that support parents and families, develop life skills in children, work with high-risk youth and reduce the availability and misuse of alcohol are effective at reducing violence.

Prevent domestic violence

Research shows there is a strong link between children who suffer from domestic violence and those who offend when they are older. So, if local partnerships need to include domestic violence prevention into their health and wellbeing plans.

Prevent child exploitation

Child exploitation is when a person or a group takes advantage of their power to control, manipulate or deceive a child. Tackling child criminal exploitation is an important part of any partnership's approach to preventing youth offending.

Prevent alcohol and drug problems

Alcohol and drug prevention aims to build young people's resilience to developing alcohol and drug problems. It can also help people avoid problems by giving them opportunities for alternative, healthier life choices and developing better skills and decision making.

Promote good mental health

Around half of all mental health problems start before the age of 14. Schools and colleges can promote mental wellbeing, develop policies to promote good mental health and provide supportive and inclusive school environments.

Prioritise looked after children

Children in care are over-represented in the youth justice system. Children's services need to support these young people, so they are not inappropriately criminalised. Young people in custody need to have extra help when they are released to make sure they have support from community services.

Identify and support young people with neuro-disability

Neuro-disability is a term for nervous system conditions, including cerebral palsy, autism and epilepsy. Research has shown that there is a high level of neuro-disability among young people who are in contact with the criminal justice system.

Staff in education services, family projects, social services and primary health care and the youth justice system, need to be able to recognise neuro-disability in young people and know what to do to help them.

7. Reducing re-offending

7.1 Family level actions

You and your partners can help prevent young people re-offending by taking the following actions at a family level.

Use peer mentoring

Mentoring programmes provide trained mentors to work with young people at home, school, or in the community. Mentoring is an important part of several programmes working with vulnerable young people. Some of these programmes are delivered by youth justice services.

Promote family-based interventions

Family-based interventions include programmes that focus on improving parenting skills and relationships within the family.

Build life skills

There is evidence that participating in sport can improve people's health and behaviour and help reduce reoffending, by providing a route into education and employment.

7.2 Actions at community level

Use trauma informed services

Trauma informed care recognises the signs, symptoms and effects of trauma and includes paths for recovery. It also requires a family-centred approach and needs different organisations to work together to recognise and treat trauma.

Promote nurturing environments

Children in contact with the youth justice system should experience a nurturing environment which is caring and aims to build their confidence, life skills and resilience.

Identify and support children at risk

Local partners that work with vulnerable young people need to identify children at risk early and refer them to services that they need, such as substance misuse and mental health services. There has been an increase in referrals to children and young people's mental health services in recent years, and local partnerships should make sure that young people continue to have access to these services.

Meet young people's health needs

NHS England's [Framework for Integrated Care project](https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/children-and-young-people/) (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/children-and-young-people/>) (or SECURE STAIRS) aims to identify and meet the needs of children and young people in the criminal justice system.

Support young people's access to education, training employment and housing

Local partners need to support children and young people to access appropriate education and training opportunities. Constructive resettlement is an evidence-based approach to work with children within a secure setting and following release. It has 2 stages – individualised personal support and individualised structural support.

Make the most of liaison and diversion services

[Liaison and diversion \(L&D\) services \(https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/liaison-and-diversion/about/\)](https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/liaison-and-diversion/about/) identify adult and children with mental health problems, learning disabilities and substance misuse problems at the earliest point after initial contact with the police and criminal justice system. Local partnerships should make the most of opportunities provided by L&D services.

8. Working together: a whole system approach

There are a few important actions which you and your local partners should do, if you are going to work effectively together as part of a whole system approach.

8.1 Understand how the whole system approach works

A whole systems approach to preventing offending and re-offending means organisations moving away from working individually on short-term interventions, to working closely with a range of partners across the local system. You and your partners need to be able to have the flexibility to change and adapt plans as the partnership develops and things change.

Your local partnership will need to work out how individual organisations contribute, but also how the whole system works together and can be more than the sum of its parts. You should take ownership of the system and identify the actions you need to take together to tackle offending in the short, medium and long term.

You should meet regularly with your partners to discuss their progress towards your agreed goals and adjust activities where necessary.

8.2 Be clear about your vision

You will need to have clear vision for what you're trying to achieve, which is clear and communicated to all your local stakeholders.

It should be clear that preventing offending and re-offending is not just a priority for public health but for all local partners.

8.3 Try distributed leadership

Distributed leadership means that leading the local partnership is not about sticking to existing organisational roles, but it means that anyone can act and influence people to prevent offending at all levels of the organisation.

8.4 Use a place-based approach

The definition of 'place' for your area is best defined by local leaders, taking into account your target populations, local geographies and the boundaries of your services and partner agencies.

The most promising examples of place-based approaches have tended to involve the partnership being led by one (or more) of the partner organisations. Where the system leadership sits – whether the health system, the criminal justice system or elsewhere – is less important than having good leadership and ownership by everyone.

8.5 Understand the system

The starting point to a whole systems approach is to have a good understanding of your local system, so you can map all the stakeholders and identify potential leaders at all levels in the system.

Stakeholders include the organisations and bodies listed in the [introduction](#).

8.6 Use data from across the system to build a picture

You can support local crime prevention activity by setting up data sharing processes for anonymised data between local health services and other organisations in your partnership.

When health data is combined with youth justice data it can help to:

- measure the levels and nature of violence in a local area
- identify the population groups and geographical areas most affected
- inform the development, targeting and evaluation of prevention activity

8.7 Use an asset-based approach

An asset-based approach means using your community's assets to help you achieve better outcomes for vulnerable young people and reduce offending and re-offending. These assets include:

- the skills, knowledge, and commitment of individual community members
- friendships, community cohesion and neighbourliness
- local groups and community and voluntary associations
- physical, environmental and economic resources

It also involves getting children to help design services and asking them what the gaps in provision are.

8.8 Bring it all together

Partnerships in different parts of the country have implemented a whole system approach in different ways. The systems set up to prevent offending and re-offending have usually been led by police and crime commissioners, chief superintendents of police, health and wellbeing boards and community safety partnerships.

But there is no one right way to structure the whole system approach. You need to start the process and work collaboratively across organisations to develop your own approach to preventing youth offending, violence and re-offending. And in doing this, you need to put children and young people at the heart of all your actions.

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