

Adolescents

Respond to the behaviour, but are you seeing the child?

London Context

Over 15 teenagers died from knife crime in London in 2015. They were all male, most were from black and ethnic minorities and many were 17 and 18 years old. The victims also included a boy of 15 years old and one of 16 years old.

Local Context

The CHSCB recognises that as professionals we can sometimes normalise young people's behaviour and not see certain actions as unusual for their age or gender. If they exhibit challenging/criminal behaviours this becomes the main focus and wider vulnerabilities can be ignored.

Understanding how to keep adolescents safe is a key priority for the CHSCB.

Following a recent death of a young person who had been reported missing, the CHSCB undertook a multi-agency case review to identify relevant learning.

- *Child L was a 17 year old male who was **fatally stabbed**. The assailants were of a **similar age and were known to Child L**.*
- *The assailants were found **guilty of murder**.*
- *Child L came to the attention of the statutory services in the months before he died.*
- *On 2 occasions he was reported **missing** to the police and had been arrested or had contact with the police on at least 7 separate times for **drug offences** in a number of **cities** across the UK - including in the period when he had been reported missing.*

To help identify learning and cross cutting themes/challenges, the findings from this review were considered by the CHSCB alongside other local and national reviews involving young people in similar circumstances.

All the reviews identified key themes for professionals to consider, with particular relevance for those staff who come into contact with young people involved in criminal activities.

Further action will be taken forward as part of the new Vulnerable Adolescents group being set up by the CHSCB in both the City and Hackney.

Cross-cutting challenges

- Ensuring professionals are able to **see beyond the criminal behaviour** and consider if a young person, in particular young men, are either **vulnerable or at risk** of harm/exploitation.
- **The effectiveness of criminal justice responses** to those adults that seek to exploit children. (The CHSCB is actively exploring ways in which the “stigmatising” of offenders could dis-incentivise adults that seek to use children and young people as instruments of crime)
- Ensuring professionals are aware of how young people can be **criminally exploited** to traffic drugs across the UK
- Ensuring professionals are mindful that when young people move **across geographical areas** there is a greater risk of them falling through **statutory service gaps**
- How professionals can overcome the **challenges of engaging** a young person who does not want to live at home
- Challenging agencies to be ready for **a cultural shift** when responding to young people with risky behaviour in a similar way the approach to CSE has shifted
- Recognising **systems needs to be safer by design** for young people and more attractive for them to engage.
- Understanding **one size does not fit all**. Agencies need to develop a menu of support which could be more proactively offered to young people
- In all the cases, the challenges for agencies working with young people **displaying violent or risky behaviour** was identified.