

WHAT'S *the* **MATTER?**

Activities exploring violence reduction for young people

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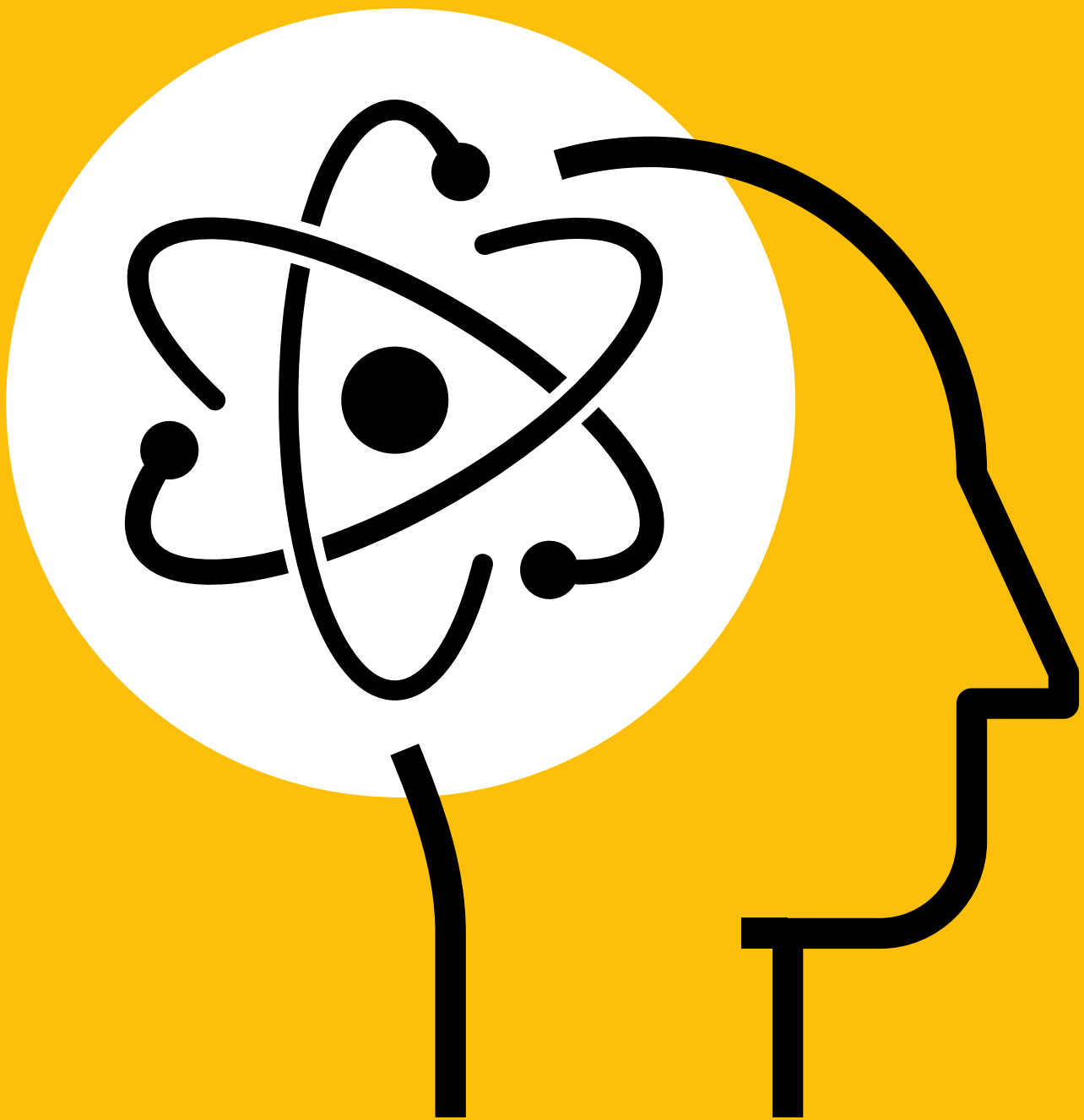
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1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This project was created by Abdoulaziz Lelo Ndambi, Clare Douglas, Demetri Addison, Jhemar Jonas, Joshua Eyekware and Wayne James.

It is dedicated to the young people whose lives have been lost or changed forever by the violence in our communities.

It was put together over many months of discussions and practical activities at Marcus Lipton Community Enterprise (MLCE) in Brixton.

The activities developed in the project have their roots in the research and experience of the contributors and the young people at MLCE.

Causes of violence

No literature review is conclusive, but there is significantly more literature that provides a broad outline and review of programmes than there is literature detailing the actual content of work with young people in areas afflicted by high levels of violence.

Literature that explores the roots of violence in individuals emphasises the impact of poverty in a context of inequalities; lack of opportunity; ideas about masculinity and the negative portrayal in the media of black and brown boys, white working-class boys, Asian boys, and so on; and the labelling as 'failures' of young people who are not able to achieve academically in their secondary education. These factors can accumulate into a sense of worthlessness, especially for young people whose talents have not been nurtured, who are not academic or who have not been taught that they are special and important as they approach adulthood. Alongside this is a critical combination of confrontations fuelled by social media algorithms and a background of sectarian or territorial tensions in addition to perceived historic and recent injustice relating to deaths and other losses.

Broadly, the literature recommends that projects work in partnership with other organisations, particularly the police but also health and education and other services that provide support to young people. There may also be people with lived experience who are willing to share their stories.

MLCE has a long history of working in partnership with the police, and establishing strong relationships with the police has supported its approach to young people's development.

An example of how this can work was reported back to us. The Metropolitan Police uses a mnemonic – Go wisely – when it is training officers to carry out stop and search, which outlines the information the police should communicate (grounds for the search; object being looked for; warrant card of the officer, etc.).

Many of the young people we work with experience stop and search as traumatising. A young person who had been involved in some partnership work with the police was approached in another area by uniformed police officers who said that they were going to search him. His response was, 'Go wisely,' and he believes that the search was conducted with more care and respect as a result.

All of the following activities have been informed by the direct experiences of young people and by our reading of research papers on the subject.

Values underpinning the programme

We expect practitioners working with young people to consult them and be guided by their views on what they want to learn about. Sometimes this might mean abandoning planned session content and improvising to respond to their expressed interest. There is research that confirms that young people are more likely to absorb information if it relates to something they are currently thinking about:

- Speak to young people with respect. Don't treat them as if they have no power.
- Create partnerships with other agencies, especially the police.
- Listen to young people with care, and take their words seriously.
- Show young people they matter by demonstrating that they matter to you.
- Wherever possible, avoid correcting them or telling what to do. Instead, encourage them to look at things from different perspectives or ask whether any of their peers have suggestions.

Overall strategy

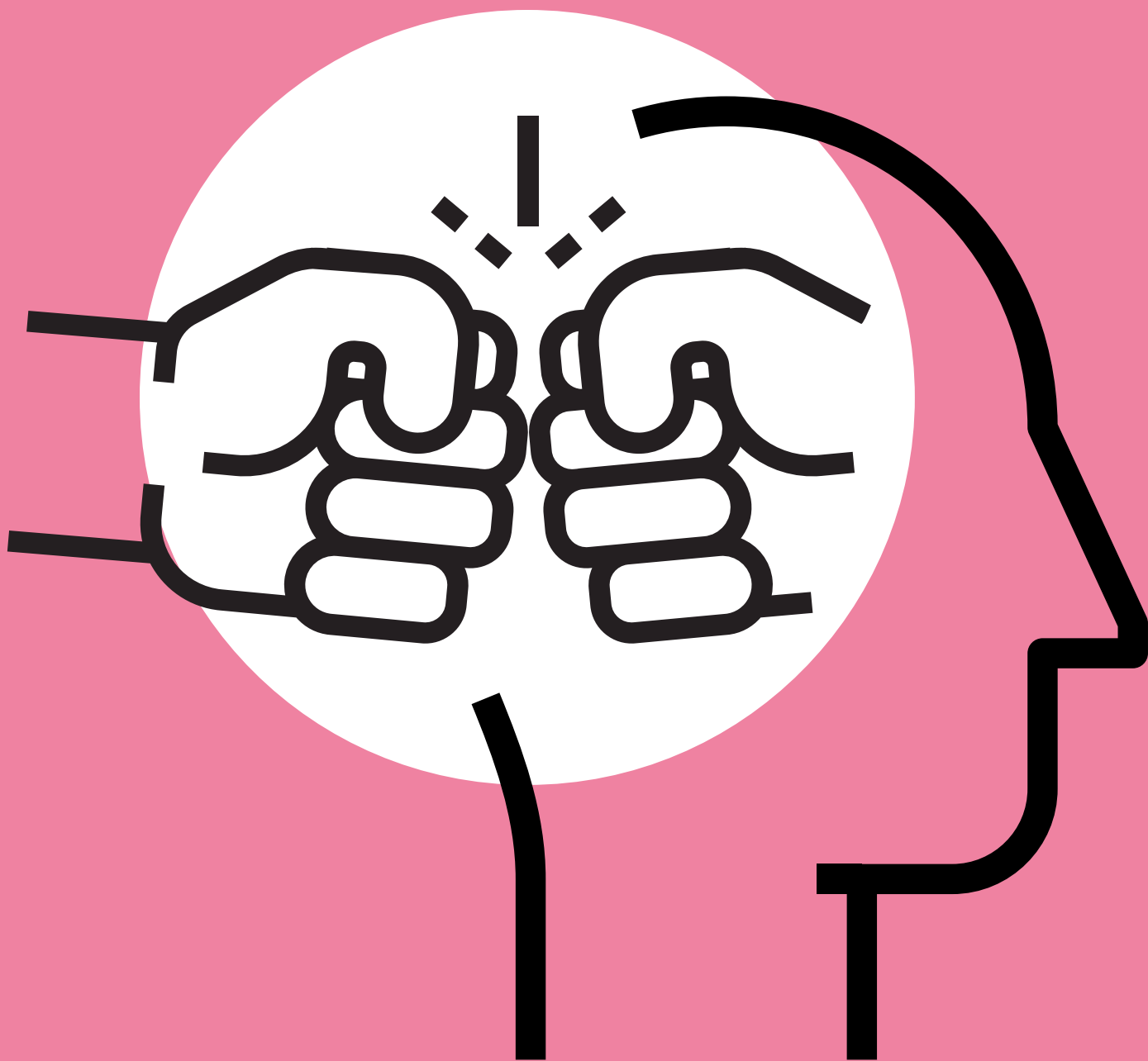
We can't end violence in our communities, no matter how many interventions we do with young people. That will take a fundamental change of attitude across society and a willingness to invest in a range of dimensions of support for young people and their families.

The activities we have designed address three areas of violence prevention:

- Activities to maximise young people's sense of their self-worth and significance
- Activities to help young people understand how the causes of violence are understood in psychology and social policy
- Activities that help young people manage their emotions, especially in situations where they feel provoked, threatened or triggered.

Each of the activities is laid out on the following template:

- Key learning
- Link to violence reduction
- Number of participants
- Resources
- Time it will take to deliver
- Prompts/instructions.



2

BEHAVIOUR

BEHAVIOUR

What are the words that you can't come back from?

(a.k.a. Do we have to die today? Over this?)



Key learning

This activity focuses on flashpoints for violence. The learning point is that even in a chaotic and pressurised situation, we can still make choices, and we will live with the consequences of the choices we make.



Link to violence reduction

There is a lot of evidence that rehearsing responses and practising decision-making is transferrable into situations where responses and decisions happen very quickly. By giving young people the opportunity to imagine how they would respond in threatening situations, we increase the choices they have when those situations occur in real life.



Number of participants

1 to 30



Resources

People, flipchart



Time it will take to deliver

15 to 45 minutes, depending on the size of the group



Prompts/instructions

Ask the group to 'Think about the last time you felt so angry that you wanted to hurt someone.'

What happened? What was the issue/event that led to that?

We don't have to share specific information, but it is helpful if the participants can think of a specific example.

Examples from practice

- Someone is deliberately provoking you and won't stop.
- Someone damages your possessions/ clothes/shoes.
- You lose at a game or in sport.
- Someone calls you something offensive.
- Someone tries to humiliate you in person or on social media.

Depending on how you work, you can keep a written record on the flipchart of their suggestions, and get them to act out a sample of their suggestions, but be mindful of their sensitivities, and don't let the exercise become an excuse for abuse.

Ask the young people, 'What do you say back to them? Would you threaten them?' (e.g., 'If you don't stop, I'm going to...').

Write their examples up on the board/flipchart.

Compare the outcomes.

Then ask, 'What if they don't stop? You have said that you are going to ... They don't stop; what happens next?'

We now have two paths to explore:

- What if you carry out your threat?
- What are the consequences of that?

Get the young people to respond to this and write up / act out their responses, following their suggestions through to their logical conclusion. This could include the possibilities of serious injury to self or others, permanent exclusion from school and/or police involvement.

There is a real problem to solve here about how we rescue ourselves when we are in an escalating situation.

- How do you manage the threat you have made? Can you style it out? Do you have to make sure you never make a threat?
- What about if your friends rub your nose in it and encourage you to retaliate?
- What happens inside you if you don't retaliate? What are the emotions you will experience?

Write these on the board/flipchart. They can include humiliation, loss of face, loss of status, loss of treasured possession/s, anger, sadness, fear.

Keep asking the question: 'How can you row back and walk away from this situation?'

It is likely that some of the young people may say, 'No, you can't back down. People will think you are weak.' Ask them what the possible consequences are if people think they are weak, and compare that with the possible consequences of them carrying out their threats.

Hopefully there will be a young person who will say, 'You just say, "This has gone too far. I'm walking away now."'

Who is stronger, the person who can tolerate their emotions, or the person who has to act them out?

Who wins?

As facilitators it is not our responsibility to ensure that young people always make the decisions we want them to. Our role is to give them choices and the opportunity to think through different scenarios and rehearse them in their minds. To do this we need to offer them realistic scenarios and options.

The Drill: Focus on triggers



Key learning

This activity is intended to improve young people's capacity to make constructive choices when they are under pressure by training them in possible conflict scenarios and rehearsing their responses. That is The Drill.



Link to violence reduction

If young people are prepared for the situations that will challenge them, they will be in a better position to make the right choices. Many of the conflicts that lead to serious injury and death begin with a minor insult or event that escalates over time. For example, we know of a conflict that started with water pistols in a playground and over five years resulted in the deaths of three young people.



Number of participants

You can do this activity with any number of people (including just one), but about 12 is probably ideal. If you have larger numbers it will affect the number of people who are willing to participate in role-play activities



Resources

Flipchart or paper to take notes



Time it will take to deliver

30 to 90 minutes depending on the size of the group



Prompts/instructions

This is a role-play activity that ideally follows on from "What are the words you can't come back from?" If you have created a list of provocations during that activity, you can use that list for this activity.

Alternatively, you can create a new list using the same instructions.

Ask the group to 'Think about the last time you felt so angry that you wanted to hurt someone.'

What happened? What was the issue/event that led to that?

We don't have to have all the information, but if the participants can think of a specific example that is safe to share, use it in the role-play.

Examples from practice

- Someone is deliberately provoking you and won't stop.
- Someone damages your possessions/ clothes/shoes.
- You lose at a game or in sport.
- Someone calls you something offensive.
- Someone tries to humiliate you in person or on social media.

There are three dimensions of thinking to violence and violence reduction: one-dimensional thinking (react), two-dimensional thinking (know there will be consequences) and three-dimensional thinking (360° thinking: there are other ways to handle this).

After you have discussed and recorded the examples of provocations, ask the young people how they calm themselves down when they are angry.

Record their responses.

Even young people with really poor impulse control will have some ways to calm themselves down. Gather and record as many of these as you can.

Clarify that this exercise is about how situations can escalate quickly from banter to verbal insults, and we need to be able to stop before it becomes a violent episode. This is not about situations that are already violent and dangerous, which they should always avoid. If in doubt, run.

Examples from practice

- Count to 10.
- Think about consequences.
- Ask yourself, 'How important is it in the big picture?' Think about the future.
- Get up and leave the situation.
- Use calming breathing exercises.
- Think about the people who love you.
- Young people can often defuse situations with humour.

Think about yourself in a broader context.

Things that you can do to reduce the likelihood that you will respond to a situation with violence are:

- Exercise, improve your self-esteem.
- Make sure that you are not under too much pressure in your life.
- Notice what makes you angry. Use your anger as an energy to motivate you to do other things.

Role-play

Encourage the young people to role-play. Agree the provocations first, and make sure they are safe. It's important that no one leaves the activity with unresolved anger. Let the young people take turns to act out someone saying something provocative and find a way of responding that de-escalates the situation.

Give as many people as possible the opportunity to role-play managing the provocation. At some point you can increase the pressure by adding an additional character to the role-play, the toxic friend who says, 'Are you going to let him get away with that?' We all have that friend; they may even mean well. Unfortunately in the context that some young people currently live in, they have cost lives.

Allow the additional character to exacerbate the situation, and support the young person in the role-play to withstand the additional pressure.

The more you repeat the exercise, the more the pattern gets laid down that violence is something you need to avoid, and it does not bring any rewards, not even satisfaction. It makes life more difficult, not easier, for you, your future and the people who love you. The exercise will also expose social pressure to escalate to violence.

Consent

What is Consent? *quiz*



Key learning

What is rape and sexual assault? What is consent? What are the 'persistent myths' around rape and sexual assault?



Link to violence reduction

Violence against women and girls may include sexual violence. Young people are particularly vulnerable to manipulation and may lack enough experience to identify insincerity or to recognise when boundaries are crossed.

Each new generation seems to absorb the same myths about rape and sexual assault, which are explored in depth online in the two links provided from the Rape Crisis Centre and the Crown Prosecution Service.

<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/sexual-consent/>

https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/what_is_consent_v2.pdf

There are also myths around sex and relationship education, such as 'The more knowledge young people have, the more likely they are to experiment.' In research the opposite has been found to be true: in cultures where sex and sexuality are openly discussed with children and young people in an age-appropriate way from an early age, sexual experimentation is reduced and the age of first sexual experience is delayed.

Many young people don't experience a distinction between relationships they form online and those which are in person. For example, their relationship doesn't begin the



Number of participants

You can do this activity with a small group of about six or with a classroom of about 25. The larger the group, the longer the activity will take



Resources

'What is Consent?' quiz: three sets of questions about rape and sexual assault, consent and persistent myths

The law: a summary of the current UK law relating to rape and sexual assault



Time it will take to deliver

Depending on the size of the group and the number of questionnaires you use, 20 to 50 minutes

day they meet in person. It begins when they start communicating, in the same way that our predecessors didn't distinguish between relationships that were conducted via letters sent in the mail and those that were conducted in person.

Unfortunately, rape and sexual assault increasingly occur in the context of relationships that have been established online, and almost unavoidable exposure to porn has not helped us to develop a culture of respect in sexual relationships.

Practitioners develop their own style in delivering sex and relationship education. Young people need the information to be clear and specific if they are to be protected from harmful sexual experiences, either as victim or perpetrator.

It is important that young people understand that rape is a serious crime that may result in a custodial sentence, a criminal record and being added to the sex offenders register.

It is also important that young people understand that sending or forwarding nude photographs of themselves or other young people can be construed as distributing child pornography, and there have been cases where children have been charged and placed on the sex offenders register for sharing photos.



Prompts/instructions

Note: Occasionally, working with these issues can bring safeguarding issues to the surface. Before delivering this activity you should familiarise yourself with the safeguarding policy and, particularly if you are working in a school, any relevant sex and relationships education policy of the organisation you are working in.

Look at the sets of questions as well as the materials that are available via the link given.

Ask the young people if they know what rape and sexual assault is. After they have given some suggestions, you can share the legal definition if that is helpful. Make it clear that the law is complex, and there is a lot in the law about what is and isn't consent.

Ask them the questions from the question sets. They are arranged so that the answers in each section are either all yes or all no.

Asking and providing answers to these questions usually gives rise to some interesting discussions and draws out attitudes to sex, gender and sexuality.

Although this is an activity that has significant sex and relationship education content, it is primarily about what is and isn't violence, and using the law as the boundary marker enables us as facilitators to be clear. Some behaviour may be right or may be wrong, but this activity makes it clear which behaviours are illegal.

Three sets of questions about rape, sexual assault and consent

Can you be charged with rape if:

- You are making out with your partner and you get a bit carried away and overpower them and have penetrative sex?
- You are a teacher or a youth worker and you have sex with a 17-year-old?
- You buy someone a lot of alcoholic drinks and then tell them that they 'owe' you sex, and they agree to have sex with you?
- You put your penis in the mouth of someone who is an adult (over 18) but really drunk at the time?
- If you are having sex with another adult and they stop in the middle and say no, but you continue having penetrative sex with them?
- A friend asks you to trick someone into going somewhere at a particular time and they are raped when they are there?
- You are in a group of people, for example, sleeping on a floor after a party, and someone there forces someone else to have sex with them?

The answer to all of the above questions is yes.

Which of the following are examples of sex without consent and are therefore rape or sexual assault:

- Feeling like you have to agree to sex or other sexual activity because you're worried about the other person's reaction if you say 'no'?
- Someone having sex with you or touching you in a sexual manner when you're asleep or unconscious?
- Someone continuing with sexual activity despite your non-verbal cues that you don't want it to continue or you're not sure – for example, if you pull away, freeze or seem uncomfortable?
- Someone assuming that you want to have sex or take part in other sexual activity because of your actions or what you're wearing – for example, flirting, accepting a drink, wearing a short skirt?
- Someone assuming that you want to have sex or take part in other sexual activity with them because you've had sex or taken part in other sexual activity with them before?
- Someone assuming that you want to take part in one type of sexual activity because you wanted to take part in another?
- Someone removing a condom during sex after you only agreed to have sex if they wore one (known as 'stealthing')?

The above are all examples of sex without consent and are therefore rape or sexual assault.

From Rape Crisis England and Wales

<https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/sexual-consent/>

Addressing myths and stereotypes:

- If someone is wearing revealing clothing, does that mean they should expect to be raped?
- In the majority of rape cases, is the rapist a stranger?
- If the victim's memory is inconsistent, does that mean they are lying about being raped?
- If someone is drunk, does that mean they were 'asking for it'?
- If the victim did not fight, does that mean they are lying about being raped?
- If the victim does not come forward until some time later, even years, does that mean they are lying about being raped?

From the Crown Prosecution Service: Information on Consent

https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/what_is_consent_v2.pdf

Addressing myths and stereotypes:

- The form of dress a person wears does not mean they should expect to be raped.
- In the majority of rape cases, the offender and complainant know each other.
- Trauma can affect memory and create inconsistency.
- Being drunk makes the complainant vulnerable. It does not mean they were 'asking for it'.
- Most victims do not fight; resistance and self-protection/defence can be through dissociation, freezing or trying to befriend the defendant – in fact any effort to prevent, stop or limit the event. It does not have to succeed to be an 'effort'.

The law at the time of writing in the UK on rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault

Rape

1. A person (A) commits an offence if
 - a. he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis,
 - b. B does not consent to the penetration, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
2. Whether a belief is reasonable is to be determined having regard to all the circumstances, including any steps A has taken to ascertain whether B consents.
3. Sections 75 and 76 apply to an offence under this section.
4. A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for life.

Assault by penetration

1. A person (A) commits an offence if
 - a. he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of his body or anything else,
 - b. the penetration is sexual,
 - c. B does not consent to the penetration, and
 - d. A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
2. Whether a belief is reasonable is to be determined having regard to all the circumstances, including any steps A has taken to ascertain whether B consents.
3. Sections 75 and 76 apply to an offence under this section.
4. A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for life.

Sexual assault

1. A person (A) commits an offence if
 - a. he intentionally touches another person (B),
 - b. the touching is sexual,
 - c. B does not consent to the touching, and
 - d. A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
2. Whether a belief is reasonable is to be determined having regard to all the circumstances, including any steps A has taken to ascertain whether B consents.
3. Sections 75 and 76 apply to an offence under this section.
4. A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable
 - a. on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;
 - b. on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.

Manipulation



Key learning

What manipulation is and understanding some key forms of manipulation and how they work:

- Grooming using charm, praise and flattery
- Emotional blackmail
- Blame
- Gaslighting
- Deflection and diversion.



Link to violence reduction

Manipulation is a bit like lying: everybody thinks it's wrong. However, when we investigate its use, it seems that a lot of manipulation is used to smooth the wheels of our society, and it is not always harmful. Sometimes our parents use emotional blackmail to encourage us to study or do activities that they want us to do, to make them proud. Young people need to develop the capacity to make their own judgements about other people's motivation. Using role-play can help them to develop insight and intuition.



Number of participants

This is a role-play-based activity so although you can have a large, class room sized group, only a smaller number will be able to participate in the role-plays



Resources

Manipulation help sheet



Time it will take to deliver

This activity can take as long as you need it to as the discussions can be brief or in depth

Sadly, one of the underlying causes of violence is young people being groomed into gang membership. Grooming is a form of manipulation, and the following activities are designed to help young people recognise grooming when they experience it.



Prompts/instructions

Give the participants the opportunity to define 'manipulation'. The definition we prefer is 'using covert social pressure to create a response in someone so they do something they would not otherwise agree to'. Definitions are also available via Wikipedia and online dictionaries. It is worth

having different definitions available so the issue can be simple or complex to suit the participants' preferences.

Ask the young people if they know what grooming is and if they can define it for others. One definition is that grooming is a form of manipulation in which someone pretends to be your friend or to care about you because they want something from you.

Fluid role-play

Ask for two volunteers, one to be the 'groomer' and one to be the 'victim'. Ask the groomer to act out trying to persuade the victim that they want to spend time with them because they really like them, using charm, praise and flattery. If the groomer becomes stuck, ask the other young people to help out by suggesting lines they can use. If another young person thinks they can play the role better, let them get up and show this. Always thank the young people who have acted in any role for their contribution.

After you have explored the roles for a little while, ask the participants to come out of character and ask them how they felt in the roles. Were there any 'lines' that affected them, either making them feel good about the attention they were getting or making them suspicious?

Ask the young people to describe the qualities of a 'real' friendship. Write these up on the board. Look for evidence of genuineness such as 'I can be myself with this person' and 'They accept me for who I am.'

You can use fluid role-play for scenarios demonstrating the other forms of manipulation. It will usually work better if the young people come up with the scenarios themselves after you give them an outline, because these will be more relevant to their lives. You can instigate scenarios with conflict prompts. For example, a confrontation could be about money: 'You said you were going to pay the money you owe me, but it isn't in my account,' or it could be about broken arrangements: 'You said you were coming over after work on Wednesday. Instead I got a text at 6pm and you're going out with your mates?'

An example of emotional blackmail is 'If you loved me you would understand that I need to spend time with my friends.'

Gaslighting is when someone denies something ever happened and implies that you're crazy to think that. For example: 'I didn't say I was coming over. You're imagining things again.'

Blame, deflection and diversion locate responsibility elsewhere: 'I couldn't come over because it was someone's birthday and they were expecting me to be there.' 'I couldn't phone because there wasn't any reception where I was.'

In these examples manipulation is used to make people believe in an inaccurate reality. Often, young people may struggle to assert their version of events, so it is important to demonstrate how we can handle conflict and difficulties without using manipulation. This invariably involves accepting other people's autonomy and taking responsibility for our own failings.

For example:

- 'I'm sorry I'm late. I was trying to do too many things, and I just didn't give myself enough time. I should've called to let you know.'
- 'I'm sorry I let you down, I feel bad about what's happened; you deserve better than that.'
- 'This is something I would really like you to do, but not if you don't want to.'

Ultimately, we must judge people by their actions, not their words, and if you have a friend who always makes you feel bad about yourself, maybe they aren't a good friend.



3

CREATIVITY

CREATIVITY

Superheroes



Key learning

Everyone has unique characteristics, talents and abilities. This activity will support young people to imagine who they would like to be. There will come a point in the future when they can make some of their dreams and aspirations real, but it's OK if some things are impossible. That's the nature of dreaming.



Link to violence reduction

A lot of connections are made in psychology and social science literature between violence and a lack of a sense of identity, the value as a person or insight into the unique talents and special characteristics that each individual has. This activity will highlight individuality, skills, talents and aspirations. If young people can appreciate themselves and their potential to realise their dreams in legitimate ways, they will value their lives and therefore their safety more.



Number of participants

This exercise can be done as a conversation with an individual or a group. The larger the group, the more limited the scope for open discussion



Resources

You will need one sheet of "Superhero questions" and a pen for each young person. There is a series of questions about what kind of superhero each person wants to be. You can either read the questions out and have a discussion or hand out a printed list



Time it will take to deliver

20 minutes to an hour depending on how many young people there are and how much discussion you want to have



Prompts/instructions

Ask the young people: 'If you were a superhero, what kind of superhero you would like to be?' Say that this activity will give them the opportunity to think about that.

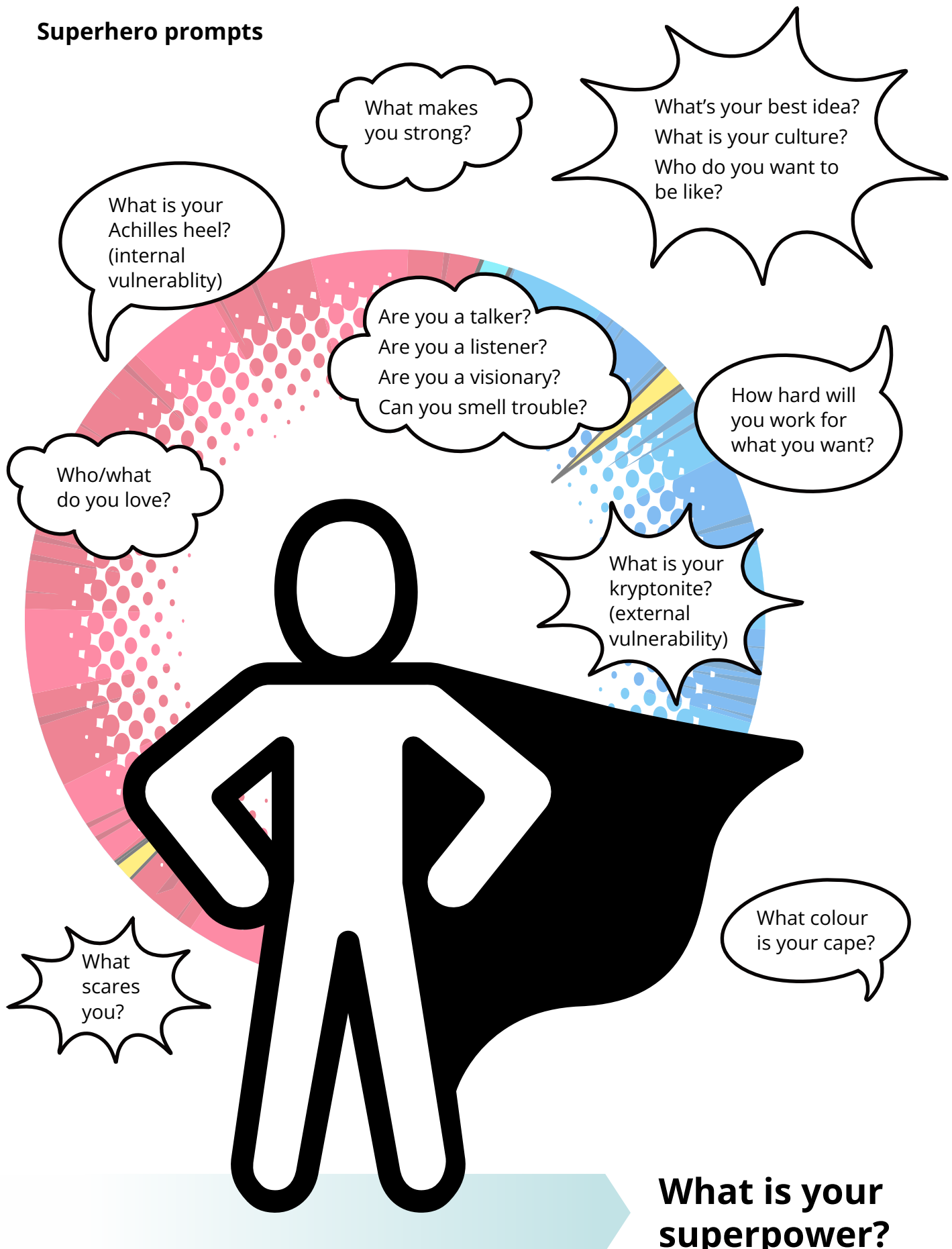
Hand out the silhouette and make sure each person has a pen. Start by asking; 'If you were a superhero, what would your superpower be?' As with most of these activities, it helps if you can have a discussion. Older young people can enjoy this activity if they have a sense of humour about it.

Carry on asking them the questions from the list and discussing their answers.

Tell them they don't have to share if they don't want to, and if they suggest something that can only exist outside of the universal laws of physics, let them. This is an exercise in imagination as much as it is about aspirations.

You can discuss their answers either as you go along or at the end. The more you are able to affirm the young people's suggestions, the better.

Superhero prompts



Superhero questions

- What's your superpower?
- What's your best idea?
- Who do you want to be like?
- What is good about you?
- What is your culture?
- What is your purpose in the world?
- What makes you strong?
- Who/what do you love?
- How hard will you work for what you want?
- What scares you?
- What is your Achilles heel (internal vulnerability)?
- What is your kryptonite? (external vulnerability)?
- Are you a talker?
- Are you a listener?
- Are you a visionary?
- Can you smell trouble?
- Can you feel your way?
- What colour is your cape?



Rhyming games



Key learning

By using different words and phrases to look for rhymes, we are collaborating on a creative process that supports young people to develop their rhyming capabilities, skills and talents as well as their ability to express themselves. This provides a window into some of the issues affecting them. You can use any words at all, but if you choose phrases that contain words such as loyalty, pride, sacrifice and safety, they are likely to share more from their own experiences. Opportunities for young people to learn by participating in discussions with adults and peers in a safe environment are rare and potentially hugely influential as young people develop their thinking.



Link to violence reduction

Rhyming and rapping provide opportunities for young people to express themselves using a medium that they are familiar with. They may take a lot of pride in their performance and be willing to share quite deeply through the use of rhyming in a way that would be difficult for them to achieve



Number of participants

Up to 12



Resources

People; method to record material, either sound recording or by writing (if you choose writing, you will need to write quickly)



Time it will take to deliver

Anything from 10 minutes to an hour, depending on the size of the group

in conversation. It is an opportunity to acknowledge their talent and to encourage them to take pride in themselves. A lot of the culture around rap is about self-reflection and honesty as well as pride, so it can be therapeutic and increase self-awareness. It may also open up avenues of discussion if you ask them to explain something in more detail, for example.



Prompts/instructions

Explain that this is a rhyming game that will give them the opportunity to practice their lyrical skills. It will make them better at rapping.

Sit in a circle and offer them phrase or a short sentence. Ask them to respond with something that rhymes.

Write down all the words they say.

Suggest phrases like 'In a place of safety' or 'That's what is meant by loyalty', and ask them for lines that rhyme.

Write down or record all the phrases they say. Ideally, type them up and make copies available to each of the participants.

CREATIVITY

When they create lists of rhyming words and phrases, they may share the context or the experiences behind the words they offer. This creates opportunities to discuss the dangers they encounter in their lives and how different lyrics can be used to provoke or reduce violence, depending on the context. Many environments where young people record themselves will have 'no hate speech' policies, and unpacking them can also be an opportunity to look more deeply at how violence can be glorified or represented in a more balanced way, with the consequences arising from violence honestly represented.

It is likely that young people playing this game will come out with lines that celebrate violence, probably copied from someone else. This is a dimension of young people's exposure to violence that we need to address. Don't shut them down.

Instead, encourage them to speak from their own experience. Check in with them: 'Is this true about you?' In this way you can negotiate a lyric that is more authentic to the young person in front of you. This is a good exercise to use techniques such as amplification. If a young person says something controversial, repeat it back to them or paraphrase in a neutral voice and ask if that is what they really meant. If what they are saying is antisocial, then share why that might be problematic – for them or for others. Remain neutral and non-judgemental even if you share your own opinion.

You can use the rhymes they have created in a number of different ways: you can curate them to make poetry which you can share with the young people with their permission, or you can just have lists of rhymes on the wall or for future reference.

Using creativity

This is not an activity on its own but an encouragement to practitioners to think about how you can use creativity to support whatever other activities you are delivering.

A lot of the activities involve role-play, which allows young people to experiment creatively with ways of being themselves – one of the developmental challenges of the teenage years.

It also provides them with opportunities to rehearse responses to social situations that they may find confusing or overwhelming and which may be genuinely dangerous.

Another technique that I use a lot with groups in the community is painting. If it is possible to find a space where it's OK to use paints, I use acrylic paints because they are washable until they dry and they are cheap. The instruction for the group is to paint colour and texture but not to think about trying to paint something like a bird, a face or a tree.

I have found this technique very useful for young people who struggle to concentrate for any length of time. They may or may not follow the instruction, but they are occupied and absorb and participate in the discussion. Adults also seem to get a lot out of it, but I run this activity alongside information and conversation on whatever subject we are discussing at the time.

Music and poetry are both important outlets for young people who need to express themselves and may have limited opportunities to do so. Rhyming gives many opportunities for the development of languages skills and provides us with insight into the way young people are experiencing the world.

If you have knowledge or skill in an art form, consider whether it's possible to bring that into these activities somehow. Photography, dance and textiles are a few of the many creative activities that can be shared with young people to help them explore themselves and their physical and emotional environments.



4

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

How do you know (what you know is true)?



Key learning

The fact that something can be described as a conspiracy theory doesn't mean that it is definitely untrue. It usually means that it is contested and that there is a lack of conclusive evidence that it is true.

The key learning from this activity is a better understanding of how critical thinking can help us to tolerate lack of certainty and to assess the likelihood of something being true before we react to it.

The Meriam-Webster Dictionary definition is as follows:

- A theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful conspirators
- Also: a theory asserting that a secret of great importance is being kept from the public

[https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conspiracy theory](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conspiracy%20theory)



Link to violence reduction

There is now a significant body of research linking conspiracy theories to violence and violent extremism. The logic is that conspiracy theories reinforce a sense of powerlessness: believers consider that there is no point in participating in democratic processes because there is a secret powerful group who are in control of everything. The alternative then, if you want change or if you believe that you or people that you care about are in danger, is to take matters into your own hands.



Number of participants

You can do this as a desktop activity with a group of up to 30, or you can make it a discussion-based activity with a smaller group. You can also do this in a one to one



Resources

Fact-checking help sheet



Time it will take to deliver

Ideally, if you are going to do research, you can spread this activity over several weeks

Psychologically, a belief in conspiracy theories can convey a special status on the believer, that they are one of the few people who have the true inside knowledge.

Combine this with the risk factors we have already identified, of young people who may be traumatised and believe that they don't matter, who can't see a future for themselves, and they provide an amplification point for theories that may confirm some of their fears about society and their place in it.

Generally, research demonstrates that it can be difficult and potentially counterproductive to try to dissuade someone who has a firm belief in a conspiracy theory. It does seem to be possible to inoculate people against accepting such beliefs by giving them the skills to critically assess information they may be exposed to in the future.

It is not our job to tell young people what to believe. Our job is to give them the skills and space to work that out for themselves.



Prompts/instructions

This is an interactive activity. You will be asking young people for information and then sharing an investigative process with them to learn more background information and establish what is verifiable and what is not.

Ask the young people if they are aware of any conspiracy theories going around on the internet at the moment. Make a list of what they suggest. You will need to choose one of these theories to explore. Choose a theory where it is possible to verify facts around the issue. The theory that the Royal Family are really alien flesh-eating lizards is not one that can easily be researched.

There are always new conspiracy theories emerging; some are more plausible than others. By going on the investigative journey with the young people and continuing to question whether they think something is true and why, you can help them develop critical-thinking tools and scepticism.

Example from practice

The first time I tried this activity was after the Grenfell fire and prior to the Grenfell Inquiry. Many of the young men I was working with were aware of a conspiracy theory that the Grenfell fire was deliberately started by powerful white people who wanted to kill black people, so we used this as a model to explore critical thinking.

Using a combination of fact-checking and logic, we unpicked the process that led to the Grenfell fire by working backwards.

Explain to the young people that a theory is just a theory; it is not a fact, just something you can gather evidence for. So we started to talk about the causes of the Grenfell fire, starting with the fact that the cladding should not have been flammable. We then traced that back to the decision that was taken to put cladding on the building because it was nicer to look at. It was public

knowledge that this decision had been taken by the local council.

We then had an interactive discussion about safety standards and how to test that an item is safe. They had very creative ideas about how you could test whether materials were flammable. They all began by saying, 'Go to a safe space away from buildings,' and then, basically, expose the material to fire and see if it catches.

We then looked into organisations whose job it is to decide whether something is safe, gathering information from relevant professionals such as architects and engineers about who is responsible for ensuring the safety of materials used in buildings.

The outcome of this process was not entirely reassuring. In this case, for example, a number of the decisions that led to the Grenfell fire were taken in public, and lives were lost in the pursuit of profit. However, understanding the process does create the possibility that people can protest about injustice, and sometimes change things.

It also means that young people are able to challenge their own assumptions about why they believe and what is true.

Abdul Basit (2021).

Conspiracy Theories and Violent Extremism: Similarities, Differences and the Implications. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*. Vol. 13, No. 3 (June 2021), pp 1–9. Published by: International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research

Jolley, D.

Marques, M.D., Cookson, D. (2022). Shining a spotlight on the dangerous consequences of conspiracy theories. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 2022, 47:101363

Fact-checking helpsheet

There are numerous websites that have been set up to help us fact-check dubious claims on the internet such as viral news posts, fake news and scams. They have a search function so you can cut and paste some lines from the article and see what comes up, but they also have helpful advice.

Full Fact is based in the UK (in Lambeth, in fact). The others are based in the US.

Full Fact

<https://fullfact.org/>

Some notes from the fact-checking toolkit from the Full Fact website:

Simple practical tools anyone can use to identify bad information

To spot bad and misleading information, ask yourself these three simple questions:

1. Where's it from?
2. What is missing?
3. How do you feel?

Where's it from?

A trusted source is your safest option.

If you don't know the source, check out the about page or ask yourself why they're sharing the story.

If there's no source, search for one.

You can search for images to find out where they've been seen before or search for the story to see where it started.

If it doesn't look right, be careful.

False news can be hidden on websites made to look like the real thing. Look for the little clues: phony URLs, bad spelling or awkward layouts. On social media, check their handle to verify the name matches.

What's missing?

Get the whole story, not just a headline.

One click can help you spot false news. Read the whole story and watch out for images, numbers and quotes that don't have sources or that might have been taken out of context.

Images and videos can be faked.

False news stories often contain images or videos that have been changed. Even real images can be made to look like things they're not with a false date or caption. Videos can be edited or the voices can be changed: check for the original.

Check what other people say.

Check out the sources they give. See what trusted news sites or fact checkers are saying: breaking news is quickly picked up by different news sources. In an emergency, look for the official emergency services.

How do you feel?

People who make false news try to manipulate your feelings.

They know that making you angry or worried means they're more likely to get clicks. If it's winding you up, stop and think about how you could check it before you share.

If it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Hope can be used to manipulate us too. Most of the time, the miracle cure doesn't exist.

Don't be the one who doesn't spot the joke.

Sometimes jokes and satire online aren't obvious. Funny or outrageous details, the way it's written or the site it's on might give it away.

The site also has detailed information about how you can fact-check online.

From checking out images to understanding polling, these guides will help you spot misinformation and find the most reputable information online.

Fact Check

<https://www.factcheck.org/>

How to spot a fake: This is a summary of advice from: <https://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>.

Consider the source. Many viral headlines have originated in spoof or satirical websites.

Read past the first few lines. If the headline is a joke, the fourth line might make that clear.

Check the author. Check they exist. If there are claims they have won awards, check the claims.

Check the context. Check the source of the quote and see if it contains the quote.

Check the date. Some fake news is real news with the date changed so a politician can take credit for it.

Check whether it's a joke. As above, many viral headlines have originated in spoof or satirical websites.

Check your biases. You need to be a bit self-aware for this, but do you like this piece of news because it confirms your opinions? There is a lot of evidence that this will make you more likely to believe it.

Snopes

<https://www.snopes.com/>

Snopes is included because it has been going since 1995 and has a long-standing reputation for fact-checking internet rumours and scams.

Finally

We all have people and sources we consider to be reliable and trustworthy. This is necessary because we can't check everything all the time. The legacy media rely on journalistic integrity and fact-checking processes, but even these have led to errors in the past. There is no 100% guarantee of truth, which may be subject to interpretation anyway, and we are all guided by our own instincts, biases and judgements. Terms such as 'widely accepted to be true', 'credible sources' and 'eyewitness accounts' are used to validate the likelihood of something being true, but in the end it is up to the individual to decide what they believe.

What's the matter: The public health approach

Activities in this section look at the underlying causes of violence



Key learning

In this activity we look at the public health approach to violence and some of the key concepts underpinning it – for example, that violence can be seen as a contagious condition because it requires exposure to be infected – but environmental factors also play a part in making individuals susceptible.

This activity will also support young people to develop critical-thinking skills and insight into how their background may influence risk of violence (as a perpetrator or as a victim) for them personally as well as how they can reduce their level of risk.



Link to violence reduction

The London Mayor and a number of London boroughs have adopted the public health approach to violence as a strategy for reducing violence in the community, especially violence that is experienced by young people as victims and as perpetrators.

This is an evidence-based approach that has been effective in Glasgow, Chicago, Columbia, New York and other places around the world. It is a part of the British government's violence prevention strategy:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-public-health-approach-to-violence-prevention-in-england>

It has been adopted and developed by the World Health Organization:

https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/documents/social-determinants-of-health/who_2022_plv_strategy_2022-2026_finalfile.pdf?sfvrsn=c819ff54_3&download=true



Number of participants

It would be possible to do this in a classroom situation with around 30 young people, but it would be better to have a group of 12 or fewer. It is also possible to do it with one young person



Resources

People, flipchart, the list (entitled Environmental risk factors, ACEs and impacts) of environmental factors that could count as exposure to violence or increase an individual's vulnerability



Time it will take to deliver

At least 30 minutes



Prompts/instructions

Explain to the participants that this exercise is designed to help us understand the causes of violence. In this approach, violence is understood as a disease, like COVID-19, but instead of spreading through the air, it spreads through exposure to violence. As with COVID-19, environmental factors are also relevant. Violence seems to flourish in communities with certain characteristics such as poor-quality housing, low incomes, lack of opportunity, health inequalities, educational inequalities, high rates of domestic violence and other types of crime. Another risk factor that is emerging in research at the moment is when young people don't believe that they matter or feel that their lives have little or no value.

Ask young people for examples of how they might be exposed to violence or of risk factors for violence in their everyday lives. All young people with smartphones are likely to have witnessed violence against young people on their phones, for example.

Write their answers up on a flipchart/whiteboard. Have a look at the possible answers on the sheet titled **Environmental risk factors, ACEs and impacts: Example table**. You may need to unpack the concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Be generous about including their responses. I have learned a lot about how young people experience the world through this activity. For example, young people have told me that being excluded from school is a form of violence to them, as is having to handle responsibilities beyond their age and more obvious things such as being the subject of stop and search and being taken into custody. You can create safety in your group by accepting what young people tell you about how they experience the world.

Pass around copies of the sheet **Violence as a contagion: Blank table**. This sheet lists protective measures that were put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ask them to think about what might be the equivalent action in the context of violence (**Violence as a contagion: Example table** has been included as a completed example to give the facilitator a sense of the activity).

They can write their ideas down or share them in the discussion. There aren't really right or wrong answers; the point is to help the young people understand that they can reduce their risk of harm from violence both as a victim or as a perpetrator by addressing the risky areas of their lives.

This activity should help them appreciate that violent and dangerous situations may cause harm to them that isn't immediately obvious.

As with all of these activities, especially if you are working with a group of mixed levels of maturity, you may get some answers that are intended to shock or provoke. As much as possible, avoid shutting young people down. You can ask them to repeat what they have said and then ask them to explain it. Sometimes young people throw out difficult and distressing subjects in an offhand way in an attempt to make the subject matter more manageable and to learn about how other people deal with the issues. Try to bring the discussion back to what is true for each young person rather than what they have heard other people say.

Violence as a contagion: Blank table of equivalence

Infection reduction measures

COVID-19 item	Means	Ideas that might work for violence	Examples of activities
<i>Mask</i>	To place something between your face and another person		
<i>Handwashing</i>	To decontaminate after exposure to infected material		
<i>Lockdown</i>	To use authority to restrict activity		
<i>Social distancing</i>	To keep a physical distance		
<i>Vaccine/ inoculation</i>	To prepare yourself before exposure to the contagion to reduce the likelihood of infection		

Violence as a contagion: Example table of equivalence

Violence reduction measures (although with contagion, we speak about disease control)

COVID-19 item	Means	Some ideas	Relevant activities
Mask	To place something between your face and another person	Conflict de-escalation and communication skills to identify and prevent violent situations	Identity activities: making a superhero Develop a persona who can be less impulsive
Handwashing	To decontaminate after exposure to infected material	Educations and awareness programmes to promote empathy, respect and non-violent communication	PTSD insight – support for victims and perpetrators
Lockdown	To use authority to restrict activity	Increased law enforcement presence in high-risk areas and targeted strategic interventions during times of heightened violence	Partnership with police to improve stop and search experiences
Social distancing	To keep a physical distance	Community-based conflict mediation and intervention strategies to create physical and emotional space in potentially violent situations	Take time to calm down
Vaccine/ inoculation	To prepare yourself before exposure to the contagion to reduce the likelihood of infection	Role-plays and practice of scenarios: conflict situations/triggers	Talk about ideas about masculinity Think about 'What are the words you can't come back from?'

Environmental risk factors, ACEs and impacts



Key learning

In this activity we look at key concepts underpinning the public health approach to violence, specifically the environmental factors that contribute to an increased likelihood of becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence.

This activity supports the development of critical-thinking skills, and helps young people to develop insight into how their circumstances might affect them.

The point of this activity is to demonstrate to young people that there are always choices, no matter how difficult our circumstances are. Our strengths and our weaknesses are often drawn from the same factors.

We should avoid making it worse for young people by telling them, 'You are disadvantaged; you have been made to feel worthless, therefore you are likely to be a victim or perpetrator of violence.' Any negative messages need to be balanced by positive ones, for example, 'The characteristics of our communities are not our fault, but we can use them to help us be better/stronger/wiser.'



Link to violence reduction

As with many risk factors, if people are able to heal and are supported to access opportunities and to progress in their lives, their risk factors can become strengths. This activity gives young people the opportunity to identify the strengths they can develop from bad experiences they may have had.

The London Mayor and a number of London boroughs have adopted the public health approach to violence as a strategy



Number of participants

It would be possible to do this in a classroom situation with up to 30, but it would be better to have a group of 12 or fewer. It would also be possible to do this activity with just one young person. Bear in mind that young people will be conscious of their relationships with each other and will naturally and understandably avoid stigmatising themselves



Resources

Use the document **Environmental risk factors, ACEs and impacts: Table**; the left-hand column contains a list. There is also a Plain English version



Time it will take to deliver

Between 40 and 60 minutes

for reducing violence in the community, especially violence that is experienced by young people as victims and as perpetrators.

This is an evidence-based approach that has been effective in Glasgow, Chicago, Columbia, New York and other places around the world. It is a part of the British government's violence prevention strategy:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-public-health-approach-to-violence-prevention-in-england>



Prompts/instructions

Using the list of risk factors, ask the young people if they can see how these events/conditions might give them any advantages. This is interesting work, because much inspiration can be drawn from our experience of overcoming difficulties.

It is important to give young people opportunities to identify and describe the strengths that could be drawn from difficulties, but if they are stuck or struggling, the table has two more columns. The second column describes the destructive impact of harmful environmental factors, and the third column describes the benefits or strengths that can be drawn from them.

This activity requires some skill in ensuring that none of the young people are left feeling they have exposed themselves as vulnerable and haven't identified any strengths to draw on in relation to that. Although it is possible for young people to discuss these situations in theory, facilitators need to be conscious that there may be real experience behind the discussion.

There are a number of key concepts in this activity that may need to be unpacked, although many young people I have worked with in the past few years are already aware of them. See **Key concepts** for a brief description of these concepts: dissociation; adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), disrupted attachments and contextual poverty.

Environmental risk factors, ACEs and impacts: Blank table

Using the risk factors we have identified, we started to discuss how it is possible to transform them into strengths.

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Witnessing domestic violence as a child (one of the ACEs)</i>		
<i>Attachment issues – absence of a safe consistent attachment figure(s) in childhood (one of the ACEs)</i>		

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Older peers/role models who use violence</i>		
<i>Bereavements (one of the ACEs)</i>		
<i>Household member with addictions and/or mental illness (one of the ACEs)</i>		
<i>Desensitisation due to normalisation of events involving violence</i>		
<i>Extreme behaviour at home (one of the ACEs)</i>		
<i>Suicide/self-harm</i>		
<i>Being detained/taken into custody, especially with a lack of dignity</i>		

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Professionals who are desensitised</i>		
<i>Inequalities/unfairness/ contextual poverty (one of the ACEs)</i>		
<i>Hypervigilance</i>		
<i>Dissociation (a.k.a. putting your feelings in the fridge)</i>		
<i>Attitude to social media news</i>		
<i>Attitude to legacy media news</i>		
<i>Trauma</i>		

Being affected by these characteristics in your community and/or at home will have an impact on you.

Environmental risk factors, ACEs and impacts: Example table

Using the risk factors we have identified, we started to discuss how it is possible to transform them into strengths.

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Witnessing domestic violence as a child (one of the ACEs)</i>	PTSD/CPTSD	Insight into trauma, empathy with others' relationship difficulties Insight into the impact of early experiences on personality development
<i>Attachment issues – absence of a safe consistent attachment figure(s) in childhood (one of the ACEs)</i>	Difficulty in maintaining stable relationships, trust issues, inexplicable rage/ mood swings	Empathy with others' relationship difficulties Insight into the impact of early experiences on personality development
<i>Older peers/role models who use violence</i>	Thinking that violence is inevitable, an unavoidable way of life	Realising that non-violence can be a choice Motivation to train in self-defence discipline, martial arts, etc.
<i>Bereavements (one of the ACEs)</i>	If you lose people close to you when you are young and before their time, it can give rise to powerful and possibly overwhelming feelings of rage, helplessness and despair Some illusions about the world are shattered	If you are supported to process these feelings so that you are able to heal to some degree, that can give you resilience and the ability to support others, as well as deep insight into the pain of bereavement
<i>Household member with addictions and/or mental illness (one of the ACEs)</i>	Difficult behaviours can be normalised; you may be less likely to notice when people are off-key	Difficult behaviours can be normalised; you may find it easier than other people to be around people with mental health problems

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Desensitisation due to normalisation of events involving violence</i>	Difficulty accessing feelings/ emotionally cold	Can handle difficult situations calmly
<i>Extreme behaviour at home (one of the ACEs)</i>	Difficult behaviours can be normalised; you may find it harder to notice when people are off-key	You may find it easier than other people to be calm and relaxed around people with challenging behaviour
<i>Suicide/self-harm</i>	You are hurt by your own actions and the actions of others	You are able to relate to survivors and others struggling with self-harm
<i>Being detained/taken into custody, especially with a lack of dignity</i>	Desensitisation/dissociation, distrust of the police	You know how to deal with yourself under pressure It motivates you to learn about the law and maybe challenge policy
<i>Professionals who are desensitised</i>	You are not validated/ comforted or given a way forward	You learn the importance of maintaining your sensitivity and validating your own and other people's experiences
<i>Inequalities/unfairness/ contextual poverty (one of the ACEs)</i>	You feel excluded and powerless and possibly feel rage, helplessness, disappointment, envy, etc. Maybe you create your own inclusion through gang membership	You are motivated to challenge inequalities You create your own inclusion through community and through insight, understanding and self-knowledge
<i>Hypervigilance</i>	Anxiety, paranoia, distrust, prejudice, exhaustion	You are more aware of potential danger; the sound of mopeds; threats in the landscape
<i>Dissociation (a.k.a. putting your feelings in the fridge)</i>	Insensitivity; difficulty in concentrating, difficulty processing emotions	Able to function in highly stressful and possibly dangerous situations and emergencies

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Attitude to social media news</i>	Believing false representations of life and relationships without questioning the evidence	Understanding how fake news and fake images are created, fact-checking dubious claims to be confident in your knowledge
<i>Attitude to legacy media news</i>	Believing false representations of life and relationships without questioning the evidence; accepting invasions of privacy and intrusive media coverage	Understanding that bias is everywhere, and gaining insight into how people who are different from you see things
<i>Trauma</i>	Many of the above are traumatic situations/events, e.g., experiences where there is a threat of death or serious harm to you or someone close to you	You may find it easier than other people to be calm in difficult or dangerous situations or emergencies

Plain English table: Environmental ACEs, strengths and weaknesses

Using the risk factors we have identified we started to talk about how it is possible to transform them into strengths.

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Becoming emotionally numb</i>		
<i>Seeing your parents hit each other when you were a child</i>		
<i>Not having a good relationship with an adult who made you feel safe when you were a child</i>		
<i>People you know and look up to who use violence</i>		
<i>Losing someone you love</i>		
<i>Someone who lived at home when you were growing up who had an addiction of serious mental health problems</i>		
<i>Hurting yourself or trying to kill yourself, or being close to people who are doing this</i>		
<i>Being stopped and searched by the police and/or being arrested without dignity</i>		

CRITICAL THINKING, PSYCHOLOGY and SOCIAL POLICY

Risk factors, ACEs and impacts	Possible negative impact	Possible strength after recovery
<i>Encountering professionals (police, doctors, nurses) who have worked too hard and don't care any more</i>		
<i>Growing up poor</i>		
<i>Always being alert and on the lookout for trouble</i>		
<i>Dissociation (a.k.a. putting your feelings in the fridge)</i>		
<i>Stories and reels that you see on your phone</i>		
<i>Stories that you see and read in newspapers and on TV</i>		

Being affected by these characteristics in your community and/or at home will have an impact on you.

Glossary of key concepts

Dissociation

From the MIND website:

Many people may experience dissociation (dissociate) during their life.

If you dissociate, you may feel disconnected from yourself and the world around you. For example, you may feel detached from your body or feel as though the world around you is unreal. Remember, everyone's experience of dissociation is different.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/dissociation-and-dissociative-disorders/about-dissociation/#HowMightIExperienceDissociation>.

Dissociation is one way the mind copes with too much stress, such as during a traumatic event.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/dissociation-and-dissociative-disorders/about-dissociation/>

From the Psychology Today website:

Dissociating is the experience of detaching from reality. Dissociation encompasses the feeling of daydreaming or being intensely focused, as well as the distressing experience of being disconnected from reality. In this state, consciousness, identity, memory, and perception are no longer naturally integrated. Dissociation often occurs as a result of stress or trauma, and it may be indicative of a dissociative disorder or other mental health condition.

More information can be found here:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/dissociation>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/identity>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/memory>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/stress>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/trauma>

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

ACEs were a popular concept in the early 2010s as a way of including and quantifying the longer-term traumatic impact of childhood circumstances alongside traumatic events. These were seen as indicators of potential problems including health conditions in later life.

They are less in fashion now because the evidence for them wasn't conclusive, and they failed to include items that weren't on the list but could give rise to serious trauma. For example, the loss of a parent during childhood is listed, but the loss of a sibling is not.

More information can be found here (Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust):

<https://mft.nhs.uk/rmch/services/camhs/young-people/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-and-attachment/>

Disrupted attachments

Attachment theory underpins many psychological and therapeutic theories. In summary, the theory proposes that the attachments we form as children to our carers and the degree to which they are able to provide us with a secure and loving environment is a predictor of our capacity to form healthy relationships in later life.

More information can be found here:

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment.html>

This gave rise to the concept of attachment styles: secure, avoidant, anxious and disorganised. There is a lot of literature available about attachment styles and how they can affect us and about ways to see them, for example, as something requiring healing or simply variations on how people are.

More information can be found here:

<https://www.attachmentproject.com/blog/four-attachment-styles/>

Contextual poverty

It's generally understood that our experience of ourselves as wealthy or poor can have an impact on our sense of our own worth. How we experience our status in society is usually determined by those around us. So if someone is better off than their neighbours, they will feel better about themselves than someone who is worse off than their neighbours, regardless of whether they live in a poor neighbourhood or a wealthy one. Poverty in countries where there is a welfare state will be less severe than poverty in a region where there is no social welfare provision, but individuals will experience their own circumstances in comparison with the people they see around them.

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Further resources including PDFs of this book and videos to support delivery are available on the following websites:

<https://mlcommunity.co.uk/>

<https://resiliencefoundry.com/>

<https://www.492kornaklub.com/>

Contact

Email: claredouglas01@gmail.com

