

# Reducing first time entrants into the criminal justice system

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## 1. What do we know about youth offending and who is at risk?

Young offenders are a group of young people who are subject to disproportionate levels of health need, adversity (including parental substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse, bereavement) and trauma. There is a high prevalence of mental health issues, physical health conditions and health harming behaviours. Young offenders have particularly high levels of conduct disorders and depression, attention deficit disorders and speech, language and communication difficulties. Rates of substance misuse are also high. This complexity means that young offenders are hard to engage in services and have often not had access to early intervention, treatment and support.

Young men are consistently over represented in the youth justice system, with approximately 3 young men for every young woman in the system. Children in care are also at risk of becoming young offender. Younger children who enter the criminal justice system are more likely to go on to be persistent offenders.

There is a strong association between rates of young offenders in the population and deprivation. Family risk factors include worklessness, substance misuse, mental health, criminality, domestic violence, financial stress, teenage parenting and overcrowding in the home. The more risk factors a child has the greater the risk that they will come into contact with the police and criminal justice system. When a child is already engaged in the criminal justice system, their siblings should also be considered at risk.

## 2. What works to reduce youth offending?

- Work to reduce social and health inequalities:
- Ensure the wider children's workforce have the skills to identify children at risk, support children and young people exposed to adversity and trauma and work positively to build relationships with young people and their families
- Ensure that the wider children's workforce have the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage parents and carers around their mental health, substance misuse, domestic violence and can refer to specialist services and support parents and carers ongoing engagement in them.
- Support at risk children and young people to reduce the risk factors and promote protective factors including resilience. This includes making sure there is always a trusted adult in their lives, that they have an opportunity to develop their talents and interests and that they engage positively in education.
- Support children and young people at risk to access and benefit from the specialist health services they need.

- Ensure the wider children's workforce have the skills, knowledge and confidence to engage parents and carers around their parenting style and the monitoring of children and young people's movements and social contacts.
- Engage families where children are at risk in evidence based parenting programmes.

### **3. Questions you might need to ask**

- Which children and young people are at risk? What schools and communities do they come from?
- Who in their community or school has the best relationship with them and their families?
- Are these young people engaged in education? How can they be effectively reengaged?
- What opportunities are there to engage these young people in youth work, sports or activity clubs? How can you overcome barriers to these young people's engagement?
- Why might these children and young people not be getting access to health services they need? How can you overcome barriers to these young people's engagement?
- Does the workforce who is coming into contact with these young people and their families have the skills knowledge and confidence to build relationships, reduce risks and build protective factors?
- What evidence based parenting programmes are operating in the district? How can you overcome barriers to these parents' and carers' engagement in them?

### **4. Who to involve?**

- Children and Young People at risk of offending and young offenders
- Early Help and Prevention
- Youth workers
- Schools
- The Police
- Community and voluntary sector
- Community Safety Partnerships
- Mental Health Workers
- Substance Misuse Workers

## **Resources/Further Information**

<http://www.chimat.org.uk/youthjustice>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/youth-justice-board-for-england-and-wales>

[http://www.kpho.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/56310/Young-Offenders-JSNA-Chapter-Summary-Update-2015.pdf](http://www.kpho.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/56310/Young-Offenders-JSNA-Chapter-Summary-Update-2015.pdf)