

Practical guidance for professionals

Supporting bereaved young people and families affected by serious youth violence

This guidance is based on the recommendations of the [Overlooked and Forgotten report](#) published in September 2024 by Safer London and in collaboration with Child Bereavement UK, University College London and bereaved parent Karen Green Stewart.

Overlooked & Forgotten highlighted the profound and far-reaching impact youth violence related deaths has on families, friends and communities, emphasising that the trauma and grief extend well beyond the immediate family. It underscored the critical need for comprehensive bereavement support that encompasses all people affected by such a tragedy.

The report captured the views and experiences of this broad range of people, exploring its impact and how bereavement support should be shaped to best meet their needs. The recommendations from the research have directly shaped the guidance provided here.

Who this guidance is for



This guidance is designed for professionals supporting bereaved young people and their families who have been affected by serious youth violence.



Professionals include, but are not limited to, youth workers, social workers, educators, mental health practitioners, criminal justice sector professionals and community leaders.



The steps you can take to better support young people and families impacted by youth-violence-related homicide.

Tailor your support

It's crucial to tailor the intervention you offer to suit the unique needs of the people you are supporting.

For example, you might be working with someone who prefers a weekly telephone call with occasional text "check-ins", or someone who prefers face-to-face meetings every few days, or someone who prefers a mixture of video and phone calls every fortnight.

Ask people how best they would like to be supported and be consistent, proactive, transparent and as flexible as possible with your support. Working in this way will help to build comprehensive trust-based support with the individuals you are working with.

Be realistic about what you can and can't do, and make sure you communicate this clearly at the beginning and throughout your involvement.

Be mindful and respectful of people's religious or cultural needs and factor this into the way you provide support.

Be sensitive to and aware of different cultural practices of the people you're supporting.

This could be in relation to, for example, mourning and grieving processes, how and when funerals may be conducted as well as differing family structures that need to be taken into account.

There will also be a need to recognise the intricacies of intersecting identities, therefore it's important to be led by the individuals or families you are supporting and listen to what they have communicated about the different ways they have been impacted by their bereavement.

Questions to think about:

1. Have you explored the different ways in which people would like to be supported and are you able to realistically to offer support in said ways?
 2. How can you make sure you are providing consistent and proactive support?
 3. Are you aware of people's cultural backgrounds and have you tailored your support to be mindful/respectful of this?
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Map out the relationship network

With the input of bereaved family members (that are willing and emotionally able to do so) mapping out and identifying all the people that had significant relationships with the victim is a helpful exercise to pinpoint as many members of the relationship network as possible.

Oftentimes, bereaved people outside of the immediate family – such as aunts, uncles, peers, cousins, family friends, neighbours – can be forgotten when it comes to being signposted to bereavement support.

This is particularly important for young people who have lost a friend or peer to serious youth violence, whose lives are likely to be significantly impacted by grief in different ways.

These young people may not fit the criteria for support from many specialist bereavement services due to not being an immediate or closely linked family member. It could also be possible that these young people may not be considered as needing support, as immediate family members may not be aware of all the peer relationships and friendships that the young person who died had.



Doing this exercise may ultimately help reduce the amount of pressure on immediate family members, who may be unexpectedly made to carry the burden of providing emotional support to, for example, young people in the community who used to be friends with the victim, in the absence of being signposted to professional or peer support groups.

We have produced an example of a relationship or "[eco-map](#)" for reference.

Questions to think about:

1. Who might be missed in a relationship network to receive bereavement support?
 2. How best can individuals be reached and who might be the best person to reach them?
 3. How can we help signpost bereaved young peers to the age-appropriate available services?
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Map out the professional network

Similar to the above, working with the bereaved individual or family to map out all the professionals in their lives may help them access a wider range of support. This can include their gp, teachers, a youth worker, counsellor, family liaison officer, victim liaison officer, support worker and so on.

Helping the family to combine all contact details of professional in their networks into one succinct and easily accessible location, may help to alleviate the pressure of administrative burdens at such a difficult time.

Once you've been given consent to access the professional network, you can act as the key person linking the professional network together to co-formulate a plan of support for the bereaved family. If there is already a key professional in place, you can advocate for the people you're supporting to make sure this is being done.

This may also be a key opportunity to signpost individuals to services you think they would benefit from that may not have reached out for independently. For example, you can signpost a bereaved young londoner to a local youth-based emotional support service, pastoral care at their school or their gp, depending on their level of need.

Questions to think about:

1. Which other professionals are working with the family or individual you are supporting?
 2. Are these professionals offering the right level of support or can this be improved?
 3. How can you best work with other professionals to make sure people are getting all the help and support they can access?
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Upskill

It's important to increase your education and engage in specialist training about:

1. The impact of bereavement and the different ways it can affect people. This is something that the bereaved family members and peers we worked with highlighted was important; they desired skilled workers that know about the complexities of bereavement and the various ways it can impact people differently.
2. Youth-related grief; recognising that it involves different emotions, thoughts, and feelings compared to other forms of bereavement. There was a clear need for practitioners to receive specialised training in this area. It was identified that specialist support must be tailored to different age groups, with age-appropriate approaches that consider how grief affects people at various stages of life.
3. The mental health issues that can arise because of bereavement, particularly traumatic bereavement, such as ptsd and nightmares.



6. Organisations such as [Child Bereavement UK](#), [Support After Murder and Manslaughter \(SAMB\)](#) and [UK Trauma Council](#) have a wealth of resources and training opportunities to increase your knowledge and skill set when it comes to supporting individuals who have experienced bereavement.

Questions to think about:

3. Do you know enough about the impact of bereavement and how it can impact people differently?
 3. Do you know where you can access information to fill any knowledge gaps you may have?
 3. Can your employer support you to access specialist training you require?
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Carry out a risk assessment

When it comes to serious youth violence there may be ongoing risks posed to the family

Members (immediate and extended) and peers of the person who has died. This could be with regards to any ongoing rival group or 'gang' related violence or threats of violence.

Be sure to sensitively gather information and risk assess any locations you plan to meet any young people or their family members in; this is so you do your best to ensure the safety of those in attendance at your meetings and take any necessary precautions.

If it's not possible to ascertain whether it or not it's safe to meet in a physical place, it may be best to provide telephone or video-call based support.

Questions to think about:

1. Have you properly risk assessed the places and spaces you hope to provide in-person support in, to make sure those present will remain safe?
 2. How can you work with other professionals in the bereaved family's network to ensure safety is maintained?
 3. How can you tailor your support to account for any identified risks?
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Link in with local and community-based support

Work to coordinate your intervention with key members of the local community and other professionals within the bereaved family's network.

With consent, multiagency working is often a crucial way to provide holistic support to the individuals and families you're working with. This can include, for example, linking in with GPs, health visitors, teachers or pastoral care workers within schools, youth workers, social care and faith groups.

You could explore whether providing in-person support within certain community settings, such as community centres or schools, would be preferable to those you are supporting; it's often the case that these settings are familiar spaces that people feel more comfortable in.

For bereaved young people impacted by serious youth violence, youth centre, school or

College-based support within the affected community may be something you could offer or work alongside other relevant education-based professionals, to create.

Oftentimes, some local community peer-based bereavement support groups, such as bereavement cafes, are not widely advertised beyond flyers posted in local supermarkets, coffee shops or GP surgeries. This may mean you need to physically search for and identify local groups and share this information with the individuals and families you're supporting.



Questions to think about:

1. Have you explored places and spaces within the community where you can provide in-person support in that are familiar to those you are supporting?
 2. How can you help spread information about local bereavement services as widely as possible to those who need it?
 3. How can you work to create connections with key community groups and spaces for the benefit of bereaved community members?
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Ensure independence and neutrality

Although it's important to work alongside other professionals, it's important to emphasise that your role and involvement are unique and separate from other organisations. This is especially important when working with young people and their families impacted by serious youth violence whereby there may be a lack of trust in professionals.

Be clear about your intentions to provide tailored, non-judgemental, trust-based support at a pace that is comfortable for those you are supporting.

This could help reduce any anxieties people may have about associations with, for example, other institutions they have had poor or harmful interactions with.

Individuals or families should be made to feel comfortable seeking and receiving help from your service or organisation and you should continue to build a trusting and positive relationship throughout your intervention.

Questions to think about:

1. Have you made the nature of your role clear and distinct from others that may be present in the bereaved family's network?
2. How can you effectively work alongside other professionals in a bereaved family's network without losing the trust and confidence of those you are supporting?

Guidance in practice

Examples of how and when the guidance can be applied.

Youth Worker

your Youth Club, has recently lost a close friend, Marcus, 15, to serious youth violence. Marcus also attended your Youth Club on occasion.

Stefan visits your Youth Club a number of weeks after his friend's death. You take him aside to speak with him and ask him how he is doing, if he needs any support, or if he is getting any support. He says he has some professionals that he sees and hears from once in a while but is not sure who they are or what their roles are.

You offer to map out his professional network in order to provide clarity on what services are supporting him and how he can benefit from them. He consents to this and to your speaking with his mother, who he says knows more about them than he does.

Additionally, with Stefan and his mother's permission, you speak to the lead worker in his professional network, a Family Support Worker based at the local authority, and share the work you've done and are doing to support Stefan. You make it clear to Stefan and his mother that yours is a separate organisation and you seek to get in touch with other professionals in order to find out how to advocate on his behalf.



You speak with Stefan about what things he does that help him to cope. He says he enjoys playing basketball and that this helps him clear his head. You offer to provide weekly 1:1 sessions during which you can play basketball and talk. You also invite him to your Club's weekly young men's emotional wellbeing group.

Community Nurse

You are a Community Nurse based at a local GP. A patient, Sarah, has informed you that she recently lost her 20-year-old nephew due to serious youth violence. She shares that she is struggling to cope with this loss and that the service supporting her nephew's immediate family cannot provide her with bereavement support – the service only has the capacity to provide support for immediate family members.

You share the details of your Health Practice's bereavement café that runs once a fortnight in the community centre next door. You also remember seeing a flyer pinned to the 'Community Notice Board' in your local supermarket that advertised an online and in-person bereavement support group and provide this information to Sarah as well.

You also map out the family network with Sarah and discuss who else she thinks could benefit from bereavement support. Sarah feels able to search for local groups for four other extended family members and arranges a family support group that she will host online every few weeks.

Family Liaison Officer

You are a Family Liaison Officer supporting a family who recently lost their 18-year-old son, Jacob, due to serious youth violence. You are aware that the young person lost his life due to gang-affiliated retaliation.

You wish to improve your knowledge about the issues surrounding serious youth violence and the different ways it can impact young people. You take a few workdays to gather as much information as possible, accessing different organisations' websites that specialise in the field, relevant statistics, and research studies.

You also want to improve your skills with regard to supporting bereaved family members of different ages. You can go to [Child Bereavement UK](#)'s website and speak to your manager about enrolling in their training courses. You also apply for professional training delivered by [Support After Murder and Manslaughter \(SAMM\)](#).

As part of your work, you carry out risk assessments to ascertain any possible ongoing risks to the safety of the bereaved family and yourself as a worker who may visit the family home. You work alongside the professional network to ensure each family member is fully informed about all the bereavement, emotional and mental health support they may need and help them access it when they feel ready to.

Teacher

You are a Maths teacher at a secondary school. You have just been made aware that a local teenage girl (Taya, 16) has recently become a victim of serious youth violence having been stabbed to death by her boyfriend of the same age.

You notice that one of your students, Michelle (16) is tearful and withdrawn in your lesson. You speak to her after class and ask her how she is doing. She shared that her friend recently died and establish that said friend is Taya, her long-time neighbour and friend. You offer her your condolences and emotional support.

You ask Michelle if she would like to be referred to access support from the school counsellor, who comes in a few days during the week, for emotional support to help cope with her bereavement. You share that you will need to get permission from a parent too. She said she will think about it.



You say to Michelle that, in the meantime, she could speak to the school's Pastoral Care Lead, and you offer to support Michelle in attending the Pastoral Care Lead's office at break time to explain the situation on her behalf, which she agrees to.

Later, you reach out to SLT to ask if Taya's death can be acknowledged at the next school assembly; to not only pay respects but to also encourage students to reach out and ask for support if they have been impacted in any way.

You also speak with SLT about the possibility of arranging for a youth charity that focuses of youth safety, wellbeing and relationships, to come and speak to students. You also discuss whether the SRE curriculum is up to date and accurately reflecting current issues facing young people. You offer your help to work on this.



Overlooked & Forgotten Research Participant

I didn't really feel there was anyone who could understand the vacuum that I felt inside. I didn't really feel anyone was gonna understand the effect the death of my younger brother had on my mental health.



Read the Overlooked & Forgotten report to discover the full set of recommendations shared by the real voices who took part in the research.

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HERE**