

Serious violence prevention for young people using a MACE team

Using a multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) team to support vulnerable young people in relation to serious violence prevention and identify children at risk of exploitation.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Child sexual exploitation and abuse Intelligence and investigation Violence (other) Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Norfolk Constabulary
Smarter practice	Multi-agency child exploitation team – Norfolk Constabulary
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Key details

Partners	Education Government department Health services Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Communities Families Offenders Victims

Aim

Norfolk Constabulary's Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) team helps put young people at the centre of serious violence prevention.

The MACE team was restructured in 2019 to better identify children at risk of exploitation. The team works alongside multi-agency partners to offer interventions and support for vulnerable young people, their families, and the wider community.

The main responsibilities of MACE are to:

- investigate the sexual and criminal exploitation of children
- identify children subject to exploitation and offer outreach and support
- participate and engage in multi-agency serious violence prevention
- offer a flow of information and intelligence relating to serious youth violence

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes from the work of the MACE team are:

- reductions in young people subject to serious violence
- improved multi-agency and partnership working
- improved relationships between vulnerable young people and the police

Description

MACE is a team in Norfolk Constabulary with a safeguarding and investigative function. The team is made up of:

- one detective inspector
- three detective sergeants
- eight police constables/detective constables
- four civilian staff members

Team role and responsibilities

Through the use of information, intelligence and referrals, the team seeks to identify those who exploit vulnerable children and young people.

MACE takes responsibility for some of the criminal investigations that relate to exploitation or trafficking (depending upon complexity), and also supports other case holding investigative units in Norfolk Constabulary. The team provides support for both exploitation related cases and offences that fall into another category – for example, if a young person is the victim of sexual offences.

A key component of the MACE team responsibilities involves working collaboratively with external partner agencies to establish:

- if a young person is being exploited
- by whom
- how the exploitation manifests

Risk assessment

MACE forms part of multi-agency efforts to safeguard and support these children.

Any agency referrals for children who are potentially at risk of exploitation come into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and are risk assessed by Children's Services and Norfolk Constabulary. A screening process is applied to arrive at a child exploitation risk rating of high, medium or standard.

Cases assessed as standard receive targeted family support from Children's Services. Cases assessed as medium or high risk fall under section 47 or section 17 of the Children Act 2004. These children receive intense safeguarding and support from an allocated social worker and are also allocated to a member of the MACE team.

The MACE team coordinates internal meetings (for example, with response colleagues) and external meetings (for example, with Children's Services and other forces) to coordinate intelligence regarding the exploitation. MACE additionally supports the child through conducting joint visits with the child's social worker.

In appropriate cases, the MACE team liaises with magistrates and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) regarding an exploitation case, providing a comprehensive insight into all actions taken by involved agencies to disrupt the exploitation.

Child planning meetings

As part of the support offered to medium- or high-risk children, the MACE team and Children's Services conduct joint child planning meetings.

The child and their parents are invited to child planning meetings, although their attendance is voluntary. Having the child and parents invited to these meetings forms part of the commitment of MACE to provide support to the vulnerable children, their families and also the wider community.

The key aims of the child planning meetings are to:

- build trust with the child
- establish whether the child faces an exploitation risk
- understand what the exploitation risk looks like
- understand who the exploitation risk comes from

These meetings occur every two weeks for high-risk cases and every six weeks for medium-risk cases. The meeting is chaired by a social worker, with education also present. The meetings cover topics such as:

- safety plans for the child
- risks to the child's residential, educational or training placements
- intelligence relating to future risk
- wider community impacts and risks

The child planning meetings offer one of the key opportunities for the MACE team to become fully embedded with the multi-agency approach to tackling serious youth violence. The role of MACE in these meetings is to:

- act as a conduit between different agencies involved
- help inform risk assessment
- provide updates on police related safeguarding and investigative activity

Additionally, out of all attendees at the meeting, the MACE team is the agency with the most authority to act on any intelligence regarding exploitation.

The child's risk rating is reviewed at the meeting, and the child is also invited to risk assess their own exposure to exploitation. The risk assessment ranges from a score of one (completely safe) to the highest score of ten.

The child planning meetings also explore ways that the child can be supported by participating agencies, ranging from diversionary activities such as gym sessions with a social worker through to help with CVs and employment. If the child cannot attend the meeting, they are visited separately to ensure they are aware of the professional support surrounding them.

Evaluation

There has been no formal evaluation of the work conducted by the MACE team. In relation to specific outputs concerning the vulnerable children supported by MACE, Norfolk Constabulary believes that the benefits on individuals will be evident in the longer term.

Overall impact

[An OFSTED inspection report published in early 2023 on Norfolk Children's Services](#) commended the relationship between MACE and Children's Services, stating 'strong relationships with police officers from the multi-agency safeguarding hub support joint working and lead to decisions which are focused on children and their protection'.

Learning

Norfolk Constabulary has identified the following learning and recommendations in relation to their MACE team.

- The importance of sharing information to understand risk and develop safeguarding aims. The MACE team has recognised the potential for there to be strained relationships between partner agencies, especially given potential tensions between safeguarding and investigative roles. Sharing clear aims, identifying a common purpose and being clear about protocols has helped develop relationships between MACE and partner agencies.
- Ensuring that relationships with partners are supported by strong systems and processes. While key agencies within Norfolk operate good partnership working practices, there is always the potential to strengthen these further given the large number of people involved in the serious youth violence space.
- The high number of people involved in cases of exploitation and serious youth violence can cause issues for ensuring everyone involved has up-to-date learning. Norfolk Constabulary has identified that while those who work in serious youth violence tend to be aware of key learnings and developments, front line responders may not always have this opportunity.
- Norfolk Constabulary has accepted the need to tweak and refine their serious youth violence and homicide prevention processes as they go along. The force has adopted a gradual approach to serious violence prevention, of which the MACE team forms one key part.

Best available evidence

Currently, the [crime reduction toolkit](#) does not include best-available evidence on the use of MACE teams to identify children at risk of exploitation and offer them interventions and support. It has been developed as a [smarter practice example](#).

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Tags

Vulnerable people Child sexual exploitation