



University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

## Child First: MOPAC Position Statement

Professor Neal Hazel  
Dr Sue Thomas  
Professor Stephen Case  
Dr Helen Gair

28<sup>th</sup> September 2023



Front Cover: *My perfect police officer* – by a young Londoner (aged 10)

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction to Child First.....	7
Child First – the summary of what works with children and justice .....	7
The guiding principle for youth justice .....	8
Why a MOPAC policy position on Child First .....	8
How this position statement has been formed .....	9
Child First and Child Centred Policing.....	10
Child First’s key system messages for MOPAC .....	12
<b>A</b> s children .....	12
<b>B</b> uilding pro-social identity for positive child outcomes .....	13
<b>C</b> ollaborating with children .....	14
<b>D</b> iverting from stigma .....	15
Reflective tool for Child First decision-making .....	16
Challenges to implementing Child First.....	17
Cultural concerns and resistance.....	17
Sufficient partnership working .....	17
Retrofitting Child First into existing structures .....	18
Resourcing .....	18
Applying Child First to MOPAC working, commissioning and partnerships.....	19
Culture and Language .....	19
Meaningful collaboration .....	19
Guiding compliance .....	20
Convening partnership working .....	20
Applying Child First to oversight of policing practice with children .....	22
Policing strategy and oversight.....	22
Police training and development.....	23
Police-child relationship .....	25
Children as victims and witnesses .....	26
Police powers.....	27
Stop and search .....	30
Strip searching /More Thorough Searches Intimate Parts Exposed (MTIPS) .....	33
Encounters and arrest .....	34
Police custody .....	37
Charging and disposals .....	41
Definitions.....	42



## Executive Summary

Child First is a four-part summary of contemporary evidence for what is important for achieving positive child outcomes, leading to preventing offending, fewer victims, and safer communities. It has been adopted as the guiding principle for the youth justice system. The Police and Crime Plan for London states that MOPAC will look to take a Child First approach in all work with children, and will encourage partner agencies to do the same. Similarly, the A New Met for London plan has committed the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to adopting a Child First approach. The London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is also committed to a Child First approach in everything it does.

To ensure that that this commitment translates into tangible and lasting change both within MOPAC and in wider partnership work, MOPAC commissioned the University of Salford to develop a Child First policy position. This policy position has been informed by (a) focus groups with existing representative forums of young Londoners; (b) interviews with a range of stakeholder organisations, including the VRU and various sections and ranks in the MPS; (c) workshops with stakeholders; (d) an advisory panel of experts with high-level delivery experience in London criminal justice; and (e) wide-reaching analysis of existing policies.

Child First and the 2015 Child Centred Policing Framework (CCPF) are aligned and compatible, but have different backgrounds and purposes. The Child First principle can provide the evidence-based understanding and guidance to ensure that considerations and decisions are 'child centred'. It also allows alignment of the intentions of CCPF with the 'common language' of the youth justice system.

The four tenets (or parts) of the Child First principle are presented, with an unpacking of the key system messages for MOPAC and its partners:

Child First tenets – what contemporary evidence shows is important	Key system messages for MOPAC
<b>As children:</b> Prioritise best interests, recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights & potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers & meets responsibilities towards children.	Prioritise adult duties of child safeguarding and wellbeing in any situation, using child-specific processes, and presuming against use of any powers risking trauma (with appropriate scrutiny if used).
<b>Building pro-social identity for positive child outcomes:</b> Promote children's individual strengths & capacities as a means of developing their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities & fewer victims. All work constructive & future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil potential & make positive contributions to society	Prioritise positive child and community outcomes over offence, incident or contact related targets for any encounter in which a child is involved.
<b>Collaborating with children:</b> Encourage children's active participation, engagement & wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children & carers.	Engage children appropriately, and involve them fully in finding positive solutions in both policy and each encounter.
<b>Diverting from stigma:</b> Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion & minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.	Presume constructive diversion and minimal criminal justice intervention at each stage, and view all situations through a stigma/'identity lens'.

Introducing a Child First approach will involve a change in culture that enables evidence-based decision making on the ground. It is important that changes to operational specifics are not imposed without the context of this broader cultural shift. Priority will need to be given to ensuring clear



Child First strategic commitment from agencies, then changes in guidance and training and other mechanisms affecting culture, and then changes in local policy that informs practice.

A checklist tool of twelve key questions is provided to help decision makers navigate key points in the four tenets of Child First.

Challenges to implementing Child First include cultural concerns and resistance (requiring reassurance, support, and guidance), ensuring sufficient partnership working and commitment, accommodating into existing structures and policies (or creatively working within them), and resourcing.

The policy position presents a series of position points – or recommendations – for how MOPAC could implement Child First across its working, commissioning, and partnerships within a broader commitment and culture change. Considerations include culture and language (e.g. policies referring to ‘children’ and not stigmatising terms), meaningful collaboration with children (e.g. involvement in all commissioning processes), guiding compliance (e.g. a Child First assessment for each new policy), and convening partnership working (e.g. needs analysis of diversion support focused on pro-social identity outcomes rather than managing negative symptoms).

The policy position then presents a series of position points that MOPAC could adopt to encourage and support partners to implement Child First in various policing contexts. Although the document has been designed specifically to guide MOPAC, there might be learning that could be shared with partner organisations at an early stage to help guide their Child First journeys. The contexts considered cover policing strategy and oversight, police human relations, police-child relationships, police powers (including use of force, handcuffs, and tasers), stop and search (including engagement, safeguarding, and scrutiny), strip/intimate searching, encounters and arrest (including presumption against arrest and reducing stigma), police custody (including presumptions, treatment in custody, support, and interviews), charting and disposals, and children as victims and witnesses.

The position points in this document are intended as a useful starting point. MOPAC and partners should not see these position points as a comprehensive manual of what is needed to be aligned to Child First nor, conversely, become focused on the immediate operational feasibility of individual practice specifics suggested by the evidence base. It is for MOPAC and partners to use these Child First tenets as a guiding principle to work through each policy and practice on the ground *in context*, so ensuring that it reflects the evidence base of what achieves positive child outcomes and safer communities in London.

# Introduction to Child First

## Child First – the summary of what works with children and justice

‘Child First’ is an evidence-informed summary of what’s important in helping children (all under 18s) towards positive outcomes and preventing offending. It synthesises the range of relevant contemporary research understandings, particularly emphasising where there is consensus among academics, and provides a framework for understanding wider evidence (existing or new). Developed by the Youth Justice Board in 2018, in an initiative led by Board member Professor Neal Hazel, Child First is designed to guide decision making for both policymakers and practitioners.<sup>1</sup> ‘Child First’ is not a philosophy or an ideological approach, political, or soft/hard on offending – instead, it aims to ensure that work that involves children across the justice system is evidence-informed.

Child First consists of the four ‘tenets’ (or parts), below. Each tenet can be summarised in headlines with an [ABCD mnemonic](#), but each actually contains several important messages from the evidence-base<sup>2</sup>:

**As children:** Prioritise best interests, recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights & potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers & meets responsibilities towards children.

The first tenet focuses on the consensus from both international agreements, law, and the research base that children need to be treated distinctly from adults. In particular, the tenet highlights that children have particular vulnerabilities and capacities, and it is essential that work is age and developmentally appropriate. Similarly, the research shows that outcomes are better when work focuses on the child’s needs and development as a child rather than as an offender, suspect or victim. The last section of the tenet warns against responsabilising children solely in the process, recognising the central role that adults play both in the problems (e.g. exploitation, trauma, discrimination) and facilitating solutions.

**Building pro-social identity for positive child outcomes:** Promote children’s individual strengths & capacities as a means of developing their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities & fewer victims. All work is constructive & future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil potential & make positive contributions to society.

The second tenet highlights how ‘what works’ with children (in trouble or otherwise) in achieving positive child outcomes, with preventing offending and safer communities as consequences of this. We understand that the key to sustainable positive outcomes is ensuring children develop pro-social roles and identities (seeing themselves in the world in ways that inform positive behaviour)<sup>3</sup>. This is a major development in understanding from the old deficit-focus on managing a child’s ‘risk factors’,

---

<sup>1</sup> The structure of Child First was drawn largely from a merging of the [Positive Youth Justice](#) framework for categorising contemporary academic research with the understanding of why children stop offending from the [Beyond Youth Custody](#) research. The development of Child First is described in [Case & Hazel \(2023\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> The evidence base for the four tenets is explored in detail in [Case & Browning \(2021\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> More information on developing pro-social identities of children in trouble is found in [Hazel et al \(2020\)](#).

which misinterpreted children's vulnerabilities (so criminalising disadvantaged groups). Progress is best achieved through supportive relationships.

**Collaborating with children:** Encourage children's active participation, engagement & wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children & carers.

The third tenet recognises that achieving positive child outcomes and constructive social inclusion requires not just their participation, but active engagement. For children to feel engaged, research shows that solutions need to be relevant to them, and this is best ensured through their meaningful collaboration. This applies equally at policy and practice levels.

**Diverting from stigma:** Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion & minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

The fourth tenet reminds us of the need to minimise what research has consistently shown as a key driver for ongoing offending – stigma from contact with criminal justice system (which would impede developing a pro-social identity). Where possible, it is best to divert children to support away from the criminal justice system; where contact is necessary, it is important to try to minimise stigma from the process.

## The guiding principle for youth justice

Child First has been adopted as the 'guiding principle' for the youth justice system. It is treated literally as a four-part principle that can guide decision making in policy and practice. As such, it provides a 'common language' between agencies.

The principle underpins the [national standards for youth justice](#) (2019). Subsequently, the [case management guidance](#) for Youth Offending Services has been revised to be aligned with Child First messages (2022). The Youth Custody Service has also adopted Child First to guide its activities from commissioning to release policies.

Recently, the Crown Prosecution Service guidance for '[Children as suspects and defendants](#)' commits to a 'Child First' approach.

## Why a MOPAC policy position on Child First

The [Police and Crime Plan](#) states that MOPAC will look to take a Child First approach in all work with children and young people and encourage partner agencies to do the same. This is because MOPAC is committed to its work being aligned with the evidence of what works to ensure better outcomes for children and safer communities in London. Child First presents a useable summary of the evidence base that is designed for policy and practice decision making.

[A New Met for London](#) states that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) will "radically reset our approach to protecting and policing London's children and young people, adopting a 'child-first' approach" (p27).



The London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is also fully committed to a Child First approach in everything it does, particularly emphasising meaningful collaboration with children (reflecting Child First Tenet 3) and young adults in its work with the Youth People's Action Group (YPAG).

This position statement outlines how the four-tenet principle can be interpreted within the context of MOPAC's work, including oversight of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and its commissioning of services. The position statement is also intended to be helpful in MOPAC's convening role in considering how partnership work can be aligned to Child First.

The position statement contains the overall key system messages when interpreting Child First for the context of MOPAC's work.

The document also presents a series of 'position points' (or recommendations) for how MOPAC could implement Child First across its work with children, as well as how it can support and encourage partners to do the same. It is for MOPAC to decide which of these position points it expects itself and partners to achieve imminently (or already), and which it would adopt as longer-term expectations (towards which it would measure progress). However, to indicate where our understanding of the current context would suggest the latter, we have used phrasing such as "Consider how..." the position can be achieved.

The position statement is intended as an important initial step for MOPAC and partners to develop and implement Child First aligned policies and practices.

## How this position statement has been formed

In February 2023, the University of Salford were awarded a contract by MOPAC to develop a Child First policy position. This position statement has been benefitted from the views and experiences of children. Focus groups were held with three existing representative forums of young Londoners from across the capital, including some children who have been involved in the criminal justice system. In total, 25 children were involved, with ages ranging from 7 to 17-years-old. In addition, five young adults were included in one forum. The forum sessions lasted an average of 50 minutes. In particular, the children detailed their views on:

- Relationships between the police and children, including perceptions of the police
- The difference between good and bad policing, and elements of good practice
- Contexts and experiences of contact with the police
- Experiences of, and assessments of, police-managed street contact, arrests, transfer to the station, police detention
- Experiences of, and assessments of, policing as a victim or witness
- The extent to which current practice is in line with the tenets and messages of Child First.

Children were fed back the messages from the position statement, including the impact of their involvement, with the opportunity (through agreed work with forum leaders) to provide further views to influence ongoing work.

In addition, the team interviewed a range of stakeholders from organisations across the sector, including various sections and ranks in the MPS, representatives of local authorities, the London

VRU, and non-statutory agencies. We also held stakeholder workshops during the development of the position paper that brought feedback and helpful observations about the practical context for and feasibility of applying Child First informed recommendations. An advisory panel of experts with high-level experience of delivery in London criminal justice worked with us throughout the development of the project, commenting on draft position points.

The position statement was also informed by a wide-reaching analysis of existing policy, guidance and evidence relating to the context for Child First in policing and the criminal justice system in London.

In this policy position document, quotations and case study examples from both children and stakeholders are presented (in the text boxes). These are used to illustrate the contexts, considerations, and challenges for Child First implementation that were highlighted. In order to allow the voices of those involved to be heard, and encourage the reader's own reflection, quotations and examples are presented with limited analytical commentary.

## Child First and Child Centred Policing

The NPCC's 2015 Child Centred Policing Framework (CCPF) and Child First are aligned and compatible. However, it is important to note differences in their background and purpose.

The NPCC's Child Centred Policing Framework (CCPF) is a call to police forces to pay particular consideration to how they police children, including producing an action plan. It then suggests positive practices in specific situations. Child First could be seen as providing the understanding in between – the principles that should be borne in mind when considering situations involving children. Child First provides a principle (in four parts) that can inform the decision-making in any situation in policing and wider criminal justice work with children. This can be applied to both policy and practice decision-making.

Indeed, following the Child First principle will help guide police and policing oversight when considering how any particular issue or practice, beyond those listed in the CCPF, can be 'child centred'. Consequently, when this position statement considers what Child First means for the situations considered in the CCPF, there is general alignment with its recommendations.

CCPF has a primary concern to ensure procedural justice with children in order to increase trust and confidence. Child First is focused specifically and explicitly on operationalising what will improve child outcomes, reduce offending, and keep communities (including children) safer. It is built specifically from the contemporary evidence base on 'what works' to prevent offending.

The CCPF does not call on Forces to primarily see children as children first as a general principle, bearing in mind their particular vulnerabilities, rights and capacities (although some forces have used this language in their own strategies). Nor does it emphasise the adult responsibilities that are often the solution when a child is in trouble. However, the directions are aligned, and it might be possible to draw out similar concepts and principles by reading into the specific practice recommendations. For instance, CCPF notes in its section specifically on police custody that children are "*a protected group with specific vulnerabilities and need to be treated like children*". Child First (Tenet 1) recognises this a principle for all contexts.

Importantly, the NPCC's 2015 Child Centred Policing Strategy that informed development of the CCPF contains principles (on page 7) that are compatible with Child First:

- *"It is crucial that in all encounters with the police, those below the age of 18 should be treated as children first", "the vulnerability of C&YP should be identified and responded to", and "full understanding of their circumstances should be sought"* all align closely with Child First Tenet 1.
- *"Every interaction is both an intervention and an opportunity. Engagement should be positive..."* implies the importance of a strengths-based approach and positive child outcomes in Child First Tenet 2.
- *"Opportunities sought to enhance our relationship with them"* and *"the voices of C&YP must be heard and their opinions respected"* aligns with the collaborative approach of Child First Tenet 3.
- *"Keeping C&YP out of the criminal justice process unless necessary"* aligns with the importance of diversion in Child First Tenet 4.

Applying Child First to decision making in the policing and crime context also allows us to align the intention of CCPF with the 'common language' of the youth justice system. Child First is the stated guiding principle that underpins national standards and case management guidance for YOTs, youth custody etc.

## Child First's key system messages for MOPAC

Child First tenets – what contemporary evidence shows is important	Key system messages for MOPAC
<b>As children:</b> Prioritise best interests, recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights & potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers & meets responsibilities towards children.	Prioritise adult duties of child safeguarding and wellbeing in any situation, using child-specific processes, and presuming against use of any powers risking trauma (with appropriate scrutiny if used).
<b>Building pro-social identity for positive child outcomes:</b> Promote children's individual strengths & capacities as a means of developing their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities & fewer victims. All work constructive & future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil potential & make positive contributions to society	Prioritise positive child and community outcomes over offence, incident or contact related targets for any encounter in which a child is involved.
<b>Collaborating with children:</b> Encourage children's active participation, engagement & wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children & carers.	Engage children appropriately, and involve them fully in finding positive solutions in both policy and each encounter.
<b>Diverting from stigma:</b> Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion & minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.	Presume constructive diversion and minimal criminal justice intervention at each stage, and view all situations through a stigma/'identity lens'.

Introducing a Child First approach will involve a change in culture that enables evidence-based decision making on the ground. It is important that changes to operational specifics are not imposed without the context of this broader cultural shift. Priority will need to be given to ensuring clear Child First strategic commitment from agencies, then changes in guidance and training and other mechanisms affecting culture, and then changes in local policy that informs practice.

In the context of MOPAC's work, the key system messages contained in the above table are unpacked below.

### As children

#### Prioritise adult duties of child safeguarding and wellbeing in any situation,...

'Prioritising the best interests' of children and 'recognising their particular needs' and vulnerabilities tells us that the work of MOPAC and partners should be focused on adult duties of safeguarding and wellbeing. This is the primary concern and framework for decision making, and the key message from which others here stem. It includes safeguarding them against discrimination and unconscious bias.

It also means ensuring that partners, including police officers, are enabled and expected to be 'professionally curious' about a child's situation and wellbeing, rather than allowing this to be limited by status as an offender. It means that everyone recognises this as part of their role.

Recognising children as children in any situation, and adult duties towards them as such, also reminds us that everyone under 18 years-old is a child. It is a warning against adultification, even if the child presents as 'streetwise', or imposing, or lacking vulnerability.

'Adult duties' also recalls specifically the statutory duties of "corporate parent" that agencies have for children who are in local authority care, but recognises their appropriateness to any context

where they have charge of, or responsibility for, any child. The [Children Act 2004 \(s10\)](#) makes clear that corporate parenting duties would be held by the MPS, youth offending teams, councils and other service providers. In addition, although MOPAC itself does not have statutory duties as a corporate parent, it agreed in November 2022 to embed corporate parenting principles. The [Children and Social Work Act 2017 c16](#) states that corporate parenting responsibilities/principles include having regard to the need:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children
- to encourage those children to express their views, wishes and feelings and take those into account
- to seek to secure the best outcomes for those children
- for those children to be safe.

#### **...using child-specific processes,....**

Children's particular capacities mean that it would often be inappropriate or ineffective to apply the same policies, processes, facilities, or interactions as employed with adults. They need to be appropriate developmentally, and in line with contemporary understanding of children's neurodivergence, trauma, brain development, identity development etc. Seeing children as children implies a widespread reconsideration of expectations for criminal justice touchpoints from interpretations of children's behaviour to police custody environments.

#### **...and presuming against use of any powers risking trauma (with appropriate scrutiny if used).**

In the same way, children (even if they present as similar to adults) are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects from the use of powers against them (such as use of force and strip searching). Those risks range from surfacing underlying trauma, to criminogenic stigma, to physical paediatric vulnerabilities. Consequently, the use of those powers should be minimised. Legally, there is always a presumption against use of force, but where there may be a cultural normalisation of such powers (including handcuffing) there is a need to reaffirm an expectation against them, and to find ways to discourage and challenge inappropriate use. This includes ensuring appropriate scrutiny if used.

### **Building pro-social identity for positive child outcomes**

**Prioritise positive child and community outcomes over offence, incident or contact related targets for any encounter in which a child is involved.**

As achieving positive child outcomes is what prevents offending, leading to safer communities and fewer victims, it is important that these are prioritised. In terms of oversight, this can be reflected in targets. In practice, this means enabling officers on the ground to be child focused and think about overall wellbeing, whether the child is involved in offending or as a victim or witness.

Interim or end indicators of positive child and community outcomes may focus on areas including safeguarding, diversion, improved engagement, informal resolution, identity, or wider community

cohesion, trust, or safety. There is a history of changes to police targets having a significant effect on numbers in the criminal justice system and even custody.

## Collaborating with children

### Engage children appropriately,...

‘Encouraging children’s active participation and engagement’ specifically applied to a policing context in London primarily means considering the relationship between children and the police. Research on children’s perceptions of the police generally, and reflected by children here, is that they support *what* the police do but have concerns about *how* they engage with them.

It’s not what they do but the way that they do it – importance of not acting aggressively:

*"I've had officers who have come up and said, "We'll need you to leave this place now because we've had neighbours complaining about a certain amount of noise". My friends were respectful cos they don't want no problem. But sometimes [the police] come with some unnecessary force and try to act like they want to show you by flexing their power and move more aggressively than they need to. They could even just give you a warning. If they did it in respectful way, you would definitely listen the first time. Rather than them trying to come with force – force with force don't really get you anywhere.*

16-year-old boy

‘Engaging children appropriately’ in the context of policing means being age and development appropriate in communication, and again recognising and prioritising children’s vulnerability. It means being careful not to adultify children when considering their approach or expectations for engagement. It means managing the power differentials and dynamics to build trust. It acknowledges the importance of positive relationships to positive outcomes, and how interactions can underline or undermine a child’s pro-social identity development (e.g. supporting seeing themselves as a constructive and valued community member or a potential criminal). This would apply to contexts from arrest to interviews with children in trouble, as well as investigation work with (and support to) children who are victims, witnesses and in other vulnerable situations.

It also means that adults are responsible for managing an incident in a way that deescalates rather than escalates it or leads to negative outcomes. They need to be aware of how children have triggers and reactions to policing actions that are different from adults, particularly if they are neurodivergent. As with other key system messages here, this points to the importance of appropriate professional understanding of children.

### ... involve them fully in finding positive solutions in both policy and each encounter.

The need for meaningful collaboration with children is valid across policy and practice in MOPAC and partners in all areas that affect the child. At the policy level, this could mean involvement in commenting, sense-checking, or commissioning processes. At the practice level, it recognises that positive outcomes are more likely to be achieved if children feel engaged in development of the solution. For example, the VRU has developed the Young People’s Action Group (YPAG), a team of children and young adults aged 16-24 with a diverse range of lived experience. The YPAG are paid members of staff who co-design, co-develop and co-deliver on policies and programmes throughout the VRU, as well as scrutinising the VRU’s investments to ensure maximum impact for children and young adults.



## Diverting from stigma

### **Presume constructive diversion and minimal criminal justice intervention at each stage...**

Recognising the criminogenic effect of involvement in the criminal justice system means that there should be a presumption at every possible point that children should be diverted to outside support. This includes decisions of arrest, detention, whether a child is kept overnight, and whether there is a charging application.

### **... and view all situations through a stigma/‘identity lens’.**

Similarly, the need to minimise stigma from any contact with the system requires an expectation that all actions, processes and environments are considered through an ‘identity lens’ – exploring the possible messages being sent to the child about how they should see themselves. Essentially, it is important to consider how every interaction that the child has with the system can minimise the chances that the child develops a criminal label that “I am an offender”. That also means that MOPAC and partners review how interventions may inadvertently underline a pro-offending identity (such as offence focused programmes).

The need to treat children as children to avoid criminalisation and stigmatisation:

*"There needs to be a complete change of mindset of how to treat children (...). They don't get treated as children anymore, they're treated as the crime that they may or may not have committed. I feel that when they're treated like that, they become your self-fulfilling prophesies [labelling], and that thought starts to play out."*

17-year-old girl

## Reflective tool for Child First decision-making

Child First is intended to ensure that decision-making at the levels of policy and practice is informed by the contemporary evidence-base of what works to ensure positive child outcomes, prevent offending, and ensure fewer victims and safer communities. Ultimately, the four tenets and their key system messages contain lots of important understandings, and each should be followed in policy and practice considerations. The list of questions below is designed as a reflective tool to help to ensure that we are considering everything that is needed to align decision-making with the evidence base.

### ***As children:***

1. Is it in the best interests of the child, prioritising their safeguarding and wellbeing (including focusing 'professional curiosity' on welfare concerns)?
2. Does it recognise particular needs and capacities as a child (appropriate to development)?
3. Does it recognise structural barriers and other adult responsibilities (avoiding adultifying and unreasonably responsabilising the child)?
4. Does it protect the child against the risk of increased trauma and retraumatisation (including from use of agency powers)?

### ***Building pro-social identity for positive child outcomes:***

5. Does it prioritise positive child and community outcomes over offence/incident outcomes?
6. Is it focused on finding constructive and strengthening solutions to move forward (not backward- or deficit-focused)?
7. Does it develop rather than disrupt individual pro-social identity (including around diversity), and not reinforce pro-offending identity?
8. Does it strengthen positive, empowering, and supportive relationships (not threaten or undermine those relationships)?

### ***Collaborating with children***

9. Does it promote positive child response and engagement (including deescalating problems)?
10. Does it meaningfully involve and engage the child in solving problems, and promote their broader social inclusion?

### ***Diverting from stigma***

11. Does it promote diversion away from the criminal justice system and towards constructive support (not draw in)?
12. Does it minimise stigma from contact with the system?

## Challenges to implementing Child First

### Cultural concerns and resistance

Implementing evidence-informed change often challenges existing cultures and professional assumptions. This can be met with genuine concerns about implications for individual roles, ability to adapt and increased workload. Consequently, it can be met by resistance to implementation, or to the need for that implementation, and will require reassurance and constructive adoption.

The experience of adopting Child First understandings elsewhere in the system is that they are generally met positively, but with some reassurance needed that it does not undermine other priorities or groups. For instance, 'Child First' should not be misinterpreted as meaning that victims (or any other group) are second; the phrase is about how children need to be treated 'as children' primarily, and adopting the approach will lead to fewer victims and safer communities.

Similarly, there can be the concern that 'meaningful collaboration' in Tenet 3 undermines professional power or means that the child is the decision maker. The adult is still responsible in the situation and a child's views as part of 'active participation' do not trump blindly the child's best interests.

Its adoption in the wider youth justice system also tells us that staff may be concerned with the compatibility of Child First with public protection, partly because of its warning against the negative effect of focusing on 'risks of offending'. Public protection is always critical and fully compatible with Child First. However, insights into criminogenic stigma would suggest that 'risks of harm' are framed more positively in terms of public protection, safeguarding, and ensuring wellbeing of all (including any child).

Faced with cultural challenge, there may also be a tendency to restrict implementation to the elements that are easiest to implement. In particular, there can be a temptation to focus on Tenet 3, collaborating with children (e.g. increasing focus groups), without the context of the other tenets.

There needs to be recognition that, if it is to be done properly, the cultural change of implementing the evidence-based approach of Child First is a journey for both individuals and agencies. It requires a change in thinking about language, roles, and priorities. Experience has shown that it challenges professional and cultural assumptions, requiring reassurance, support, and guidance.

### Sufficient partnership working

Introducing Child First aligned policy and practice is not the responsibility of one agency alone, and cannot be achieved without effective partnership working. This partnership needs to extend beyond MOPAC, the VRU, and the criminal justice system to all agencies that support safeguarding, wellbeing and positive outcomes for children and their families. For instance, effective diversion away from the criminal justice system requires a partnership of agencies to which the police can refer children.

However, experience shows that interagency working is incredibly complicated and challenging. The common language of Child First should help shared understanding in partnership working, but it

requires a commitment at all levels of relevant agencies within and outside of the criminal justice system.

## Retrofitting Child First into existing structures

To a large extent, aligning the policy and practice with the Child First evidence base means developing *how* things are done within existing wider structures and operating models (e.g. including children's involvement within an existing commissioning model; reaffirming existing presumptions against the use of force). However, it may also require changes that are difficult to do within wider existing structures, and may require changes to those systems or creative workarounds. For instance, a barrier to implementing the system message to "prioritise child and community outcomes over offence, incident or contact related outcomes" may be that the existing deficit-focused model has limited measures or data collection for positive outcomes (e.g. safeguarding, diversion, informal resolution, trust, community cohesion). As an example in the broader youth justice system, which relied on measuring risks and deficits, it has been necessary to develop a verified scale for assessing pro-social identity. It will be necessary to consider creatively how those positive intermediate outcomes critical to preventing offending and keeping Londoners safe can be measured.

It will be even more challenging to align practice expectations to the evidence base where it suggests the necessity of changes that are beyond the authority of MOPAC and its partners. Where those changes are not possible, creative consideration will need to be given to how a Child First solution can be accommodated. For instance, where the evidence base may suggest a change to Authorised Professional Practice, PACE codes or wider legislation to be appropriately child-specific, MOPAC may need to consider how much flexibility there is for chief police officers and partner bodies to adapt practice under the statutory duty to promote the welfare of all persons under the age of 18 (Children Act 2004, section 11). In consideration, MOPAC and partners should be careful not to confuse established practice or cultural norm with legislative restriction.

## Resourcing

Policy and practice expectations aligned to Child First would not, generally, require more resources than currently; they require more of a shift in culture, considerations, or *how* existing practice is done. Nevertheless, it is accepted that even the consideration of changes requires a resource commitment. It takes some resources to consider, for instance, what questions would be necessary to ensure a Child First compliance checklist for policies.

Other recommended position points would require a larger human resource commitment. For instance, in agencies that have begun their journey to align with the evidence base, it has proved no small task to review and revise or caveat as necessary existing policies. At the very least, Child First alignment will require the resources to produce new guidance and training. It is recognised that there is a prioritisation required when working within limited resources, particularly where implications affect partner agencies (the production of MERLIN reports for stop and search cases has resource implications for Children's Services).

Further recommended position points may require more expensive human or capital resources (e.g. introducing body scanners, child-only investigators, child-only custody suites). Again, these resource implications will require a commitment from both MOPAC and its partners inside and outside the criminal justice system.

## Applying Child First to MOPAC working, commissioning and partnerships

This section presents a series of recommendations – or position points - for how MOPAC could implement Child First across its working, commissioning, and partnerships. Each context has been considered using the four tenets and their corresponding key system messages for MOPAC. The brackets after each position point note the Child First tenet(s) from which the consideration is drawn (Tenet 1 to Tenet 4).

MOPAC and partners should not see the position points in the remaining sections of this document as a comprehensive manual of what is needed to be aligned to Child First. Nor, conversely, should the focus be on the immediate operational feasibility of individual practice specifics here suggested by the evidence base. However, they are intended as a useful starting point. MOPAC and partners will need to use these Child First tenets as a guiding principle to review each policy and practice on the ground *in context*, so ensuring that it reflects the evidence base of what achieves positive child outcomes and safer communities in London.

### Culture and Language

1. MOPAC, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and partners use the language of ‘child’ for anyone under the age of 18 in all policymaker- and practitioner-facing documents and speeches. This includes the MPS statistical dashboard. This recognises and underlines the children’s legal status and their particular vulnerabilities etc. Be aware of using terms that have negative or stigmatising cultural connotations (such as ‘youth’, currently used in the [MPS dashboard](#)). Avoid ‘children and young people’ which implies a distinction that only some young people under 18 should be considered children. Descriptions that span ages including young adults could be referred to as ‘children and young adults’. It is recognised that children may prefer ‘young people’ in child-facing contexts. (Tenet 1, Tenet 4)
2. Review existing publicly available documentation to ensure that it aligns with Child First understanding and messages. Where documents are not aligned with Child First messages, they could either be revised or a caveat be attached explaining the context, where it is not aligned, and whether/how the document could be framed in a Child First way. (Tenet 1)

### Meaningful collaboration

3. MOPAC and partners ensure meaningful collaboration with children (and carers) on all policies involving children. Meaningful collaboration would value the contextual insights of children, avoiding tokenism, and include 360-degree feedback to the children of how their collaboration impacted the policy development. It is anticipated that more children's forums would be needed for such an expectation to be fulfilled. (Tenet 3)
4. Children are involved in all commissioning processes. This may be in developing specifications or assessing bids, as possible and appropriate, drawing on learning from the work of the London Young People's Action Group. (Tenet 3)

## Guiding compliance

5. There is a mandated Child First compliance/alignment check question for each new policy with relevance to children, similar to a 'community impact assessment'. Consideration is given and shown to how the policy aligns with each of the four tenets. (Tenet 1-4)
6. All existing MOPAC and MPS policies relating to children are identified and assessed against the Child First tenets to identify strengths and weaknesses. They are revised as appropriate. (Tenet 1-4)
7. All commissioning bids required to demonstrate compliance with four tenets, included in the scoring process. This includes the requirement for the bid to outline the organisation's position and commitment to Child First. (Tenet 1-4)
8. Existing commissioned projects assessed in relation to Child First tenets. Where they are not, consequences should be considered in light of the evidence base, and revised or withdrawn as appropriate. (Tenet 1-4)
9. Guidance, training, and reflective supervision to support the alignment to Child First is ensured for staff in MOPAC and partners. In particular, MOPAC would help guide commissioned providers and potential providers (e.g. voluntary sector organisations) on how to develop and implement compliance with Child First. (Tenet 1-4)

## Convening partnership working

10. MOPAC convenes partners to assess and address any areas where there is a barrier to Child First practice. In particular, MOPAC brings partners together to find solutions where information sharing across agencies is perceived as a barrier to either information needed for safeguarding or effective diversion. The Disrupting Exploitation Programme between the MPS and the Children's Society is an example of a 'safeguarding conversation' to share information between the police and Children's Services. (Tenet 1, Tenet 4)
11. MOPAC continues a needs analysis for children in London around effective constructive diversion support, considering the gaps and ensuring awareness of services for police and partners. Any analysis is focused on building pro-social identity and positive child outcomes rather than just focused on managing negative symptoms. (Tenet 2, Tenet 4)



12. Ensure there is awareness of the diversion options available in each criminal justice partner's local area, and a way for frontline practitioners to access any 'menu' of options in a timely manner. (Tenet 4)

## Applying Child First to oversight of policing practice with children

This section presents a series of recommendations – or position points - that MOPAC could adopt to encourage and support the MPS and other partners to implement Child First in various policing contexts. Each context has been considered using the four tenets and their corresponding key system messages for MOPAC. The brackets after each position point note the Child First tenet(s) from which the consideration is drawn. (Tenet 1 to Tenet 4)

### Policing strategy and oversight

#### Overall principles and role

13. The clear expectation is that the child's safeguarding and wellbeing is always the priority in any situation, especially concern for possible trauma and retraumatisation from that situation. This does not imply that policing aims should ever be compromised; but that attention is paid to the impact on children of *how* policing is carried out. (Tenet 1)

The need to be focused on the child rather than the offence:

*"I don't think they treat us like young people. The reason I don't think that is because every experience that I or someone that I know has had with the police, as soon as they see you as an offender or as someone doing something wrong, man, just switches. They don't look at you as a young kid who may be manipulated or groomed or anything of the sort (...) At such a young age, I think as soon as they see you as an offender, they just don't hear. Your age goes out the window."*

16-year-old boy

14. MOPAC / MPS issue a clear statement on the role of police in relation to children – that police do have a responsibility to safeguard and engage children appropriately. It is important that, culturally and individually, police see these as part of their role, in the same way as teachers see safeguarding as integral to their role. While the statement should be widely circulated internally to enable officers, it should also be issued publicly to increase confidence in the police for children and their communities. (Tenet 1)

#### Informing operations

15. The potential presence of children is always considered in pre-planned police operations. Additional justifications and adaptations of police tactics are made where children are likely to be present. (Tenet 1)
16. There are clear and known safeguarding procedures for each situation. Local policies, guidance and training enables officers to fully comply with [Working Together](#) guidance. (Tenet 1)
17. Consider deploying constructive MOPAC monitor (and possibly community member) out with police, to advise on Child First policing practice. They would feed back to police. Consider how

the Independent Custody Visitors scheme can be a partner in this, including assessing against the Child First tenets within a record review process. (Tenet 1-4)

### Enabling positive outcomes

18. Remove or deprioritise offence-focused targets for contact with children, replaced with positive child and community outcomes targets (e.g. safeguarding, constructive, Outcome 22 diversion, improved engagement, informal resolution, community cohesion, preventing wider community harm). (Tenet 2)

Children welcoming informed engagement that recognises vulnerability:

*"[It would be ok] if the police were targeting us for the right reason, which is that they know that young people are going to be influenced, are going to be addicted to things and going to get into things because they are easily manipulated. Yes, they should target us, but don't target us for the wrong reason. Don't target us so that you can come, stop and search us, find something on us, arrest us, send us somewhere, put us in the Young Offenders [Institution], and that's it. Target us in the sense of, "Cool, you know what, these young people and these youngsters are easily manipulated, teach us how to help." That's what the police should do. Come into the youth club and talk to us."*

16-year-old boy

19. Ensure that police officers and police partners are enabled to value positive child and community outcomes above offence/incident outcomes internally. It is important care is taken to ensure that officers, particularly new officers, are not concentrated on their crime targets in cases involving children. (Tenet 2)

The need to be focused on the child rather than the offence:

*"[Currently] we focus on the crime, the offence and the behaviour, not the child ."*

Police Officer

20. Reaffirm in local policies, training, and guidance that there is a clear and articulated presumption of minimal criminal justice intervention/ escalation. There is an understanding from all partners that processing children through different stages of criminal justice is damaging. There is a clear expectation on everybody to avoid this where possible, and concern at each stage wherever this has not been possible. (Tenet 4)

### Police training and development

21. Mandatory training (with evidenced level of understanding) sufficient to enable all officers to be equipped to work with children appropriately. This includes an understanding of Child First, how to work with children, neurodiversity, adultification, child development, identity,

informed engagement, and the relationship between crime and exploitation. This forms part of both police entry training, and regular refreshers. (Tenet 1)

Children want police officers who know how to engage with children

*" We need to be moving to a more solution-focused way of thinking. What needs to be looked at I believe is the vetting process to start off. If I ever treated somebody in my job role right now the way how police treat young people on a normal every day, I would be sacked. What they seem to get away with is because their badge gives them that permission. "*

17-year-old girl

22. Ongoing reflective supervision to ensure Child First aligned culture development and support to meet the needs of staff. See the trauma informed supervision model piloted recently in Camden and Islington for a successful example. (Tenet 1)

Officers not feeling enabled to deal with children's vulnerabilities:

*"You're not trained in this department. So I could get things completely wrong. But on the day, it all falls on me being the police officer called to scene. There's a lot of responsibility there that we're not trained in. It often gets escalated, and children end up being restrained."*

Police Officer

23. Consideration of children's needs built into antiracism training, taking into account intersectionality of diversity with childhood vulnerabilities. (Tenet 1)
24. Guidance is produced on how to engage with children, in different contexts (e.g. everyday relations, where children may have offended, as victims, as witnesses). This should include direction for interviewing skills, and age-appropriate (non-aggressive) approaches, and avoiding escalation. It should also outline established evidence of the adverse impact of poor engagement on the child, and on their future relations with the police. (Tenet 3)

Knowing how to approach children – the theme of reciprocal respect

*"It's the way they approach you. There are obviously going to be some people who are doing bad, but if you are giving that person respect, I'm sure that that person is going to give you respect back. Respect should run two ways, you can't expect to be respected if they aren't giving respect towards, especially little kids."*

16-year-old boy

25. Police 'youth ambassadors' are introduced across every unit and station – providing ongoing and accessible advice on how to work with children. However, this is seen as a priority and senior role, not a 'champion' type role or given to a junior officer. (Tenet 1-4)

26. Consider / develop towards child-specialist police units or officers to process children (both options have been adopted in other countries<sup>4</sup>). It is acknowledged that this would need to be properly resourced. (Tenet 1-4)

## Police-child relationship

27. Ensure that every opportunity is used to encourage police to engage positively with children. This is best achieved when police are able to patrol on foot, or step out of their police vehicle, and they can use the opportunity to explain why they are there framed in a reassuring way as appropriate (e.g. to keep people safe). (Tenet 3)

Good vs bad policing: the importance of rapport, care, and empathy:

*"Unfortunately, one bad egg ruins the bunch, so it's a bit sad that police officers do have a bad rep. but I've had experiences with good ones, but that was in school. You know, the ones that say, "Hello", but that was in secondary school and they're for [vs. against] the community. (...) She was amazing, she was. I remember this situation that happened with me, and it was really scary, and what not. And I went to her and she helped me out throughout the day, calming stuff right down. She was so supportive, and I think it's because of the rapport she established with the schoolgirls. So, wherever I seen good policing, I feel like there's a previous rapport that's been established. Unfortunately, I've never [positively] encountered police (in the community) unless I know the police officers beforehand. And that's really sad being a Londoner."*

16-year-old girl

28. Reflect on possible negative effect of police vehicle presence near children's areas, including vans near schools (e.g. increased suspicion). This can present a faceless vehicle as opposed to the face of a person. Recognise any presence as an opportunity to engage. (Tenet 3)
29. Involve PCSOs, youth engagement and diversion officers and safer schools officers to engage with children if particular police activities are taking place in their area (including response to serious incidents), to explain what is happening (within the boundaries of any surveillance/investigative activity which is taking place). (Tenet 3)

Interaction rather than a faceless police presence to avoid suspicion and stigma:

*"I believe that on the police are particularly invasive to a certain demographic of young people. Because there are particular areas that I know, and that I somewhat used to frequent, that contained high rates of young Black people and you would just there are just so much police officers just standing there for [children leaving school]. They'll be, literally like, police vans. And it's just there's no reason for that. It's a bus stop, people are trying to get home and like, you're just like, you know, coming into, like, these areas and you're standing around. (...) And, you know, they're not gonna feel safer. Would you? [Children] are just gonna assume that you see them as misbehaving. Nobody wants that opinion being placed on them, so they're just not going to want to be around the police."*

17-year-old Black girl

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for examples, '[Cross-national comparison of youth justice](#)' (pages 44-45)

30. Explore opportunities for wider use of safer schools officers, PCSOs and neighbourhood teams to build better relationships with children and normalise / informalise contact with the police. (Tenet 3)

The importance of police interacting with children as children on the streets:

*" They are more sensitive in the schools. There are certain things that you will see officers out of school do that the officers in school won't do. In school officers are very interactive, and nice to the kids. They are going to say "Hi". But if you look at an officer outside, they are going to think you're suspicious."*

17-year-old boy

31. Increase the use of social media that children use (i.e. not Twitter or Facebook which are primarily used by adults). Provide an engaging police presence in children's own online neighbourhoods (similar to @yourpolice.uk on Instagram). Work together with children to find out what content and platforms would be most appropriate. The [YPAG peer research on Knife Imagery](#) (pp25-26) is an example how meaningful collaboration with children can better inform social media delivery. (Tenet 3)

## Children as victims and witnesses

32. There is a clear definition and measuring of 'safeguarding' understood by officers and shared with partners. There are clear procedures when there is a matter of concern, aligned with [Working Together](#) guidance. (Tenet 1)
33. The safeguarding priority and duty is clearly understood to extend to children as witnesses. A suitable safeguarding assessment is made in all situations where there is potential for a child to be present (e.g. at home). (Tenet 1)
34. The presumptions against use of police powers (including handcuffs) are clearly understood to extend to situations where a child witnesses actions, particularly against members of their family. (Tenet 1)
35. Clear and revised training and guidance on working with children witnessing action, detailing how children should be engaged with and informed, awareness of vulnerability, and minimising stigma. (Tenet 1, Tenet 3, Tenet 4)

Need to ensure that police contact as victims and witnesses is sensitive and not stigmatising:

*"It's funny cos it's oftentimes when you call the police for something that's happened to you, you even feel like, "Oh my gosh, have they come in to police me or to police the crime". (...) It's the way that they were asking the questions, very closed, very biased. "Oh, so what happened, did you do anything to cause this to happen?" (...) It's almost alluding to us having a part to play in something that we were completely defenceless in."*

17-year-old girl



36. It is important to empower children by hearing the voice of each child involved in each incident. The police may not always be the most appropriate agency to carry this out, but the child should always feel that their experience and need is heard. (Tenet 3)
37. Consider how to ensure the mandatory follow-up check of child by non-criminal justice partners. (Tenet 1)
38. Children taken into protection are not in a police station unless there is a dedicated room and staff qualified in childcare. Work with local social services to ensure non-police emergency accommodation always available, including on release from arrest. (Tenet 1)

""[Partners are slow to respond]...because they're like, 'Oh, they're in a place of safety'. But they're not because [the police station is][ not really a safe place because we heighten everything."

Criminal Justice Professional

39. If a child is taken into protection in a station, they do not come into contact with any suspects (adult or child) at any point, including at the entrance. (Tenet 1)

## Police powers

40. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance and training that there is a clear presumption that body worn cameras are always on for any entire contact with a child (not limited to the procedure) when police powers are used or likely to be used. (Tenet 1)

The importance of cameras for the entire contact:

*"Once they've searched you, they usually turn off the cameras and that. Usually, when I've brought my camera [phone], that's when they decide to turn it on."*

17-year-old boy

41. Body worn camera footage of incidents involving police powers is actively used for assessment and reflection about the implementation of Child First policing, both at a local organisational level, and in officer supervision and for personal development. (Tenet 1-4)
42. There is an expectation that there are routine random checks on footage involving children established by senior officers (Inspector or above) with advanced CF/safeguarding training in each area (and/or additional scrutiny by MOPAC/voluntary body and Safeguarding Boards). This would help the police to assure themselves that officers are taking a CF approach and would identify opportunities for professional and organisational learning (Tenet 1).

The importance of sensitivity to neurodivergence in children, and scrutiny of body worn camera footage:

*"[Police officers] should make sure that they are recording, and they should be able to get into trouble for any sly comment. Especially when it's a little kid, it may tick you off even more than an adult who knows that if they react, they will get into more trouble. When it's a little kid in the moment... There are certain disabilities that aren't visible, like ADHD. If the officer's ticked them off, that can cause them to assault the officer. And I'm sure that the officer would be in favour of that. If they make sly comments, they should get a reprimand or something."*

15-year-old boy

43. Ensure understanding and recognition (through guidance and training) that disrespect, unusual or unexpected behaviour, or lack of cooperation in children can be the expression of childhood neurodivergence. There is a presumption against escalation to use of force before action appropriate to neurodivergence is explored. (Tenet 1, Tenet 3)

The importance of understanding a 'childlike' reaction to avoid escalation:

*"If people are in the group and they see the police, everyone's running. And because everyone's running, that's what's causing the police to panic. And they don't realise, we're just scared. They [children] see what they see on the media, their friends, everyone's got links. How they see police treat them by the police, elders on the block, their friends on the media, they don't like it, everyone's scared. They don't want to be treated like that, so they run. And of course the police come over more, building more tension."*

17-year-old boy

44. Conversely, ensure understanding and recognition that children being in a situation where enforcement of police powers is necessary *may* itself suggest risks in relation to safeguarding, exploitation etc. Consequently, where police powers are used, there is a clear expectation of professional curiosity that would involve appropriate investigation and protection about whether the child has been reported missing, patterns or repeat incidents. (Tenet 1)
45. MOPAC/MPS publish and make easily accessible new guidance for children on their legal rights and responsibilities, which covers rights in the community and police custody (including strip-searching). This should include age-appropriate explainers of why they use certain powers and in what situations. (Tenet 3)

## Use of force

46. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance, and training that there is a presumption of no use of force against a child. The use of force against anyone that could conceivably be a child will have a much higher standard of justification than would be the case with an adult. All officers understand the potential consequences of using coercive force against a child, including the impact of trauma and criminal stigmatisation, and that any use of force should be weighed up against these risks to the safety and wellbeing of a child. (Tenet 1)

47. Incidents are reviewed by a Senior Officer where officers have failed to deescalate/resolve without force, for the purposes of scrutiny and professional development. (Tenet 1)

Understanding childlike actions and vulnerability when justifying and using police powers:

*"Sometimes they use a bit too much force, especially against a little kid. The little kid might not have anything, but he's running just cos he's scared. So some police think that it might give them the right to use a bit more force than necessary. But some people don't know what to do if they are getting chased by a big man that's way taller and way bigger than them. I'm not saying that all police officers are just going to hurt you, but some might not be as pleasant as others."*

17-year-old boy

48. Reaffirm through local policies, guidance and training a clear presumption against use of pain-inducing compliance or restraint techniques unless clearly required for prevention of imminent threat to life. Any use is recorded and reviewed by a Senior Officer and independent case review panel. (Tenet 1)
49. Establish independent Child Case Review Panel(s) for deep-dive review of sample of cases where force has been used against children, including firearms (including tasers), and strip searching (practice review). An example of such an independent panel currently reviews footage from similar incidents in the children's secure estate. Explore how this may involve the local Children's Safeguarding Board. (Tenet 1)

## Handcuffs

50. Reaffirm through local policies, guidance and training that there is a presumption against use of handcuffs at any point. Handcuffing for general risk is not routine, but only where behaviour during the incident shows a clear safeguarding risk. Custody Sergeants are trained and guided to enable them to accept and process children accordingly. Justification of 'reasonable and proportionate' must take into account age and possible trauma. (Tenet 1)

Calling for the presumption against handcuffs, which can be painful or aggravate a situation:

*"Just don't manhandle them. If they've understood that they need to go to the station, they don't need handcuffs. Some kids will generally accept it and you wouldn't need to put on handcuffs. It hurts and you don't have to do that."*

15-year-old boy

*"As soon as you mention handcuffs to a child they are going to act up. It doesn't matter what kid. Some kids may just cry and some get agitated or aggressive, and now you have to use force against a kid which you shouldn't have to."*

17-year-old boy

51. Explore with Officer Safety Training providers how the use of handcuffs can minimise pain for children. For instance, consider how to ensure a presumption that if handcuffed, it is not behind the child's back (particularly during car journeys). (Tenet 1)

### **Firearms (including tasers)**

52. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance and training that there is a presumption against the use of any firearm (including tasers), either drawn or used, by exception for imminent threat to life. (Tenet 1)

Calling or the presumption against use of tasers:

*"These two kids were in the park fighting. Instead of the police doing normal thing like separating it, they go for their taser straight away and taser one of them to the floor. And they nearly hit his head. Just separate them, just separate them!"*

15-year-old boy

53. Greater scrutiny of any firearm use, including safeguarding report to Local Authority, justification to MOPAC, and scrutiny by the recommended Child Case Review Panel. Justification of 'reasonable and proportionate' must take into account age and possible trauma. All cases of firearms (including tasers) must be referred to IOPC. No use of 'drive-stunning' against children. (Tenet 1)

### **Stop and search**

54. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance, and training that there is a presumption against the use of both 'stop and account' and 'stop and search' with children. The four Child First tenets are included in stop and search training. Stop and search requires justification on the grounds of safeguarding. (Tenet 1)
55. MOPAC and partners consider how, within current legislation, a local policy decision could be made to move away from using 'suspicionless' stop and search with children. If suspicionless stop and search is permitted and carried out, it is scrutinised by a Senior Officer and justified in writing to MOPAC / Child Case Review Panel. There is also community engagement with children in the area explaining the reasons for suspicionless searches, preferably within non-stigmatising reasons. (Tenet 1, Tenet 4)

Children recognise the need for radical 'switch' to improve police-child relations – stop and search:

*"I don't know how many times in years of growing up, I've been harassed by police, not just me. They don't target us correctly. If you're going to target us [on the basis of] "OK, out of these 100 people, one of them is definitely going to have a knife so let's land them all up and grab them." Why would you do that? Why not come inside [a youth club] and host an event or become friendly with us. That's the reason that we see lights and run. I feel there's a problem here that the police need to learn to switch."*

16-year-old boy

56. Guidance and training on stop and search includes acknowledgement of the different ways in which children present, without or without police engagement, and how these may not be sufficient safeguarding grounds for justifying a search (e.g. children coalescing in a group, or having hands in their trousers, or smelling of cannabis). (Tenet 1, Tenet 4)

The importance of recognising childlike behaviour:

*"I could be chilling out with my friends and we never used to do anything about crime, and they come up to us. "You look like you're on drugs", and stop and search. It's like, "What the hell?" We're just kids hanging out in a group."*

17-year-old girl

*"I'd say it's to do with age. Is that what they deem as antisocial behaviour – us chilling outside or us being in a group? A group of people or maybe us listening to music out loud and the speakers sitting on the front? They look at that as antisocial behaviour and we're up to no good. But what they see as antisocial is what we see as normal and what they don't [see as normal]. What I think the police don't understand is that we work with the resources that we have."*

16-year-old boy

57. Date of birth should be sought before decision to search, or presumption of being a child if uncertain. (Tenet 1)

## Engagement

58. Expectation that searches are carried out in a non-aggressive manner that is appropriate for a child and vulnerable person. (Tenet 1, Tenet 3)

Concern with 'aggressive' engagement by police officers:

*""The way police stop young people, particularly young black boys, is so aggressive and so difficult that they then respond in a way that's kind of almost been set up""*

Non-criminal justice stakeholder

Importance of an age-appropriate approach to avoid trauma reaction:

*"It's all about the approach, the way they approach you. If I see a police officer in a car and they are coming up slow, and not just rushing up and putting you in cuffs, that's alright, I know they're calm. But when they come and quickly leave their car and jump up, run to you, put you in cuffs, all of that, and shouting all these words, my reaction is not going to be, 'Oh yeah, you can stop me now.'"*

15-year-old boy

59. Police always introduce themselves and adopt a practice of giving an ongoing commentary to children on what they are doing and why. In part, this recognises the importance of explicit and ongoing reassurance and explanation for children with neurodiversity needs. (Tenet 3)

Childlike escalation if children do not understand police action:

*"Some kids are not going to know better. Some kids are going to feel that if they are being disrespected, they should disrespect back."*

16-year-old boy

60. Consultation with children locally where any particular search operation which may impact on children is planned. Ensure notification to youth organisations and children's services to inform children of the reason for the operation, duration etc. (Tenet 3)

## **Safeguarding**

61. Parents or carers are told when a child is stopped and searched. A post-search welfare check is made on all children searched. (Tenet 1, Tenet 3)
62. A Merlin with attention to any safeguarding information should be completed with any stop and search, or alternative form that requires more detailed consideration of the safeguarding associated with searching. A safeguarding assessment includes a police review of all interactions with that child. (Tenet 1)
63. Police officers are required to write more detailed report on the pros and cons of each decision, including recognition of potential harms (Tenet 3).



Case study from a 17-year-old Black girl – her first experience of being searched at age 13-14 years old:

*"I was in year nine and they stopped and searched me, even though I didn't fit the description that I overheard on the radio. They were looking for a 5-foot 7 male, and I'm a girl and about 5-foot 1. It was a shocking experience. Beforehand, I used to hear about police on the tv and it would be like, "Yeah, ok." You never think that it will happen to you, but it's quite shocking when it does.*

*They came to me from the back, and I saw four police officers, and I just was going to school at 8 in the morning. They took my phone and I had to get it back the next day. I had to ask the man to give me my phone, but they wouldn't. And so I had to ask to use the police radio thing to phone my mum. They said that they took my phone for evidence, but I didn't understand that because why they would do that if I hadn't done any crime; I was just going to school.*

*If they'd explained the situation and they said that I fitted the description, but then that was a lie. And they could have been more verbal than physical. They held me and were physical. All white men."*

## Scrutiny

- 64. Monitoring, reporting to, and interrogation by MOPAC of any disproportionate or discriminatory patterns or allegations involving children (e.g. why in particular areas, ages, results). (Tenet 1)
- 65. Expectation that disproportionality in race and age should be addressed, with more justification and scrutiny required. (Tenet 1)
- 66. Consider how a panel involving children might be established to review footage of a sample of stop and search incidents, with the intention to increase practice scrutiny and inform organisational learning around stop and search. (Tenet 1, Tenet 3)

## Strip searching /More Thorough Searches Intimate Parts Exposed (MTIPS)

- 67. MOPAC and partners consider how it would be possible move away from strip-searching children either before or after arrest, including use of millimetre-wave scanners. It is noted that the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has [called on the UK](#) to ban strip searching children. (Tenet 1)
- 68. Otherwise, continued focus to ensure the presumption that strip searching/MTIPS is only done in exceptional circumstances (only if there is strong reason to believe that the life of the child or someone else is in imminent danger). (Tenet 1)

Intimate searching as a traumatic and event for a child:

*"It's an invasion of privacy. I know it sounds wrong, but I've had my ball sack lifted with a hand glove, like literally, and I'm thinking, "Is that even allowed?". Certain things, it's just not necessary like. It's not like they found anything by doing that. That makes me feel very uncomfortable. It's not a nice feeling. I even had to force a joke cos the room was so tense, I was like, "This is the last layer, lads". It was so intense. And I didn't have anything, I was just holding my hands in that area like [in sweatpants waistband]."*

17-year-old boy

69. Very clear rules are published for strip searching / MTIPS of children specifically. These would include details of when, where, and how searching should be carried out. (Tenet 1)
70. Searches only by officers appropriately trained in working with children, including trauma informed work and safeguarding duties. Consider whether post-arrest strip searching requires non-police medic to undertake, in police presence (nurses are already employed for intimate swabs/searching). (Tenet 1)
71. Searches only take place in child-friendly environments. (Tenet 1)
72. Appropriate adult always required to be present (emergency appropriate adult always available [needing partnership], or otherwise cannot be left unattended). (Tenet 1)
73. Meaningful engagement with children, explaining the reasons why any strip search is necessary. Consider how it could be possible to facilitate choices for the child and appropriate adult about who does the search, how it is done, where it is done etc. (Tenet 3)
74. Presumption that Local Authority Children's Services are always informed of a strip-search, with agreement for follow-up. Presumption that parents always informed. Aftercare plan required for each occasion. (Tenet 1)

### **Scrutiny**

75. Senior officer (at least Superintendent) authority is required prior to strip-searching. (Tenet 1)
76. Detailed report with justification to MOPAC scrutiny and Child Case Review Panel (see above) on each strip-search case. Scrutiny of trends and disparities in relation to areas, officers etc. by senior officers and panel. (Tenet 1)

## **Encounters and arrest**

### **Safeguarding priority**

77. Expectation that all encounters with children are needs focused even if offence-driven, with attention on understanding around the child, to inform positive outcomes (and recognise safeguarding opportunities) (Tenet 1)
78. Expectation that police officers always have 'professional curiosity' to understand why the child may have behaved in the way that they did, and what has led them to be there. It is important that officers are enabled and encouraged to always look for the signs of abuse and exploitation; offending in a child should not be taken as an indication that the person is not a victim, but recognised as a symptom of a problem. Officers are discouraged through training and guidance to see any incident as primarily about the offence or needing an offence-focused solution (arrest, charge). Police more routinely take children home in order to better understand their context. (Tenet 1, Tenet 2)

Case study from a 17-year-old girl – offence focused vs child focused (“a safety unit”):

*“I was at crowded bus stop and there was a lady with a pram, and I was trying to move out of her way, but I couldn’t leave without budging into somebody else because it was crowded. And she budged past me really hard and she called me the N word. I was with my sister and my cousin, and we all started arguing with her because we weren’t going to allow her to verbally assault me like that. And she was getting in our faces, and it was becoming very loud because there were other black people who didn’t like what she did as well.*

*And there were stationed officers who were part of the Metropolitan Police and they came up to us and they started yelling in our faces and saying that she has a baby. (...) They were just yelling in our faces and they grabbed us and they pulled us away from the crowd. They weren’t giving us any time to speak or not any space to speak. He took us to the police van, and he said that he was calling the police officers that could take us to a station because we were causing a public disturbance. (...)*

*[The police officers who arrived were] two ladies and they were being nice to us and asked us what happened. We obviously explained and stuff and they couldn’t understand why we were even [arrested by the police]. And we told her that he didn’t give us any time to speak, and she was very understanding. She called our auntie and drove us to my cousin’s house. She was very nice and very accommodating. An experience like that does show you that police officers can be nice and caring, the way that they should. And you know, like a safety unit in a way.”*

79. [Vulnerability Assessment Framework](#) is used for every child at the point of arrest, but it is supported by training for frontline officers to ensure they understand how the VAF is used for children and what issues to be alert to e.g. neurodiverse issues particularly (embedded into frontline officer training). (Tenet 1)
80. Officers are enabled to talk more to children without worrying about tainting evidence, asking leading questions etc. (Tenet 2, Tenet 3)

### **Presumption against arrest**

81. Local policy, guidance, and officer training makes it clear that there is a presumption of the adult responsibility to find a constructive solution rather than arrest. Officers are enabled to deal with the process in ‘slow time’ to explore constructive solutions rather than effecting an early arrest. Where a constructive solution is not found, there is a requirement to justify why the case could not be dealt with informally and constructively (e.g. returning to a place of safety, constructive diversion). (Tenet 4)

The importance of an age-appropriate approach to children:

*“Some officers will genuinely come over with the intention to just speak to you, ask you if you’re doing anything bad and that; they’ll generally have a talk with you. But then there’s some officers that, as soon as they see a group of children, rather than speaking with them as if they are people, will run up to them and expect them not to run. If they’re running at you full force, you can’t expect [children] not to run.”*

17-year-old boy

82. Review by a Senior Officer of footage where child arrested for actions against the police or public order offences. This recognises the adult responsibility of the police to de-escalate, with

any arrest raising concerns. Regular review of data to detect arrest patterns for officers, triggering refresher training and support where appropriate. (Tenet 4)

Importance and awareness of child immaturity and vulnerability to escalation:

*"Just the way they approach you. They can say things to a child that would push their buttons, but that wouldn't really push an adults' button. Because adults are more mature. So when the police say immature stuff that they know will get on someone's nerves, kids take that another way and get aggravated. You've got some who say it on purpose."*

17-year-old boy

*"They'll get to you mentally as well as physically. (...) They make little sly comments and that are a bit cheeky sometimes. Unprofessional. They know how to get into your head and wind you up. They want a reaction. They want to nick you, they want to arrest you. If they stop me but don't find anything on me so they can't nick me they want to make me go psycho, for them to get a reaction, for something to happen (...) An adult is more likely to sit on that if the officer says something back, the kid is going to get more heated because they take it more personally. That's a kid."*

16-year-old boy

83. Children are engaged in finding appropriate resolutions, with training and guidance to officers to be enabled to do so. (Tenet 3)

The need for the police to work collaboratively with children to find solutions:

*"If they came up to us and said, 'Listen, you've been a little loud, and we've been told, so and so, and we think these are the steps that we wanna take forward', I'm more than happy to oblige. If they were coming over in a respectful manner. Bit it's like they coming over as a gang, as if to abuse their authority. If they're coming over knowing what they want to do in a sense, and sort of handling the situation how they want to, which isn't how it should be handled."*

16-year-old girl

84. Effective diversion requires dedicated partnership working. Police officers are enabled to be aware in a timely way of services available to children in their area as well as a route into accessing those services (Tenet 2)

### **Reducing stigma during arrest**

85. Local policies, guidance and training to ensure that arrests (and other contact) limit the potential of stigma for the child. Officers are enabled to be 'identity-aware' (alert to where criminogenic stigma could occur) in contact with children. (Tenet 2, Tenet 4)
86. Local policies, guidance and training to ensure that police are aware of the opportunities to support pro-social identity development in different contexts with children. (Tenet 2)
87. Ensure police processes and procedures are not experienced as punitive in themselves. Officers need to be aware that it is not the responsibility of the police to ensure the child accounts or is punished for their actions, nor to shock, discipline or punish the child. No

matter how well meaning, this could have negative effects, particularly with neurodivergent or traumatised children (Tenet 4)

The need to be 'identity-aware', reducing stigma and avoiding pro-social identity disruption:

*"The police officer should make them understand what they've done, but don't make them think it's the end of the world. A lot of the time you get arrested, they make it seem that, "you're going to jail and you're not coming out, just understand that as soon as you get in, you're never coming out"*

17-year-old boy

*"[In the car] have a normal conversation. Talk with [the child]. Encourage them. Show them that everyone makes mistakes but it's your choice if you want to improve"*

16-year-old boy

*"If you're in the car, don't make the person seem so terrible. Everyone makes mistakes. Rather than them making it seem like your whole life's over, they should encourage you to move forward and improve yourself. Rather than, "Every time you do something bad, you're coming back here." They should want to encourage you, not deter you away from the police in a way that just makes you end up hating them. They don't end up giving you opportunities to fix yourself."*

15-year-old boy

## Police custody

### Taking children into custody

88. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance, and training that there is a presumption of not detaining a child into police custody. Consider a higher level of authorisation for a child's detention (particularly for lower-level offence allegations). Justification is required on safeguarding grounds. There is a presumption that children are bailed to attend police station at later time. The Home Office [Concordat for Children in Custody](#) provides guidance to local authorities and the police which aims to prevent the detention of children in police stations; local protocols are developed to support implementation. (Tenet 4)
89. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance, and training that there is a presumption that child will be detained in a police station for minimum time necessary. Review the use of PACE rules in relation to children, and how to discourage time in custody. The speedy progress of children's custodial processes and investigations are prioritised before adults. (Tenet 1)
90. Time in police custody should never be used to discipline a child, nor the child given the impression that it is a punishment. (Tenet 4)

#### Case study:

A 16-year-old girl was arrested late afternoon at her home for criminal damage (graffitiing her tag on a bus). She was taken into the station. The investigation team were not ready to interview, so the child was detained overnight. This resulted in her missing her GCSE exam the following day.

91. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance, and training that there is an expectation and presumption that children would only be held overnight in very exceptional circumstances. Arrangements in place with partners to ensure that appropriate adult, children's services officer, and emergency accommodation are always available in a timely way. Children's services are contacted as soon as it is conceivable that any proceedings would not be completed by the evening. If emergency accommodation is not available, there is a presumption that the child is released overnight with appropriate bail conditions to an adult. (Tenet 1)

### Treatment in custody

92. Reaffirm through local policy, guidance, and training that there is a presumption of vulnerability for any child in custody, irrespective of their offence. (Tenet 1)

*"Police officers generally very often will see what's in front of them rather than the broader concern. So if the child is in custody... you find most officers are interested in whether or not that child [has] got something criminal on them or not. And if they haven't, then actually they're not interested in the wider safeguarding".*

Criminal Justice Professional

93. There is recognition through training or guidance that custody can be traumatic for a child, and that they remember each interaction and are particularly sensitive to the effect of power differentials in such a powerless situation. (Tenet 1)

Children are vulnerable to each interaction and sensitive to issues of power:

*"Police act differently when parents are around. They were giving me bad attitude and then when I was leaving, they were "have a good time" cos my parents were there.*

16-year-old boy

*"When they talk to you, they will talk to you in a very disrespectful way but when the parents are there, as soon as a parent is there or an adult, they talk in a more respectful way cos they know that the adult would have a problem with them talking in a disrespectful way."*

15-year-old girl

94. Local policy, guidance, and training clarifies a presumption that the child would always need legal advice. Rather than asking if the child wants legal representation, consider asking if there is a reason why a child would not want one. Refusal triggers the need for additional support and advocacy. (Tenet 1)
95. Solicitors and other legal advisors receive training in children's rights, needs, development and Child First. (Tenet 1)
96. Children are not processed or held in areas with other adults, including the same entrance or desk. Child only custody centres are adopted throughout. It is noted how child-only custody suites were successfully introduced for the Notting Hill Carnival. Local policies, guidance and

training ensure that having children-only facilities does not undermine presumptions against arrest and detention. (Tenet 1)

Need for separation of adults and children:

*"Separate the kids from the men in the police station. In reception, in cells. (...) If I'm in a police station and banged up next to someone who is shouting all night, banging on the walls, that's going to have an effect on my mental health. (...) I've been [in cells] next to people and we've talking, literally."*

15-year-old boy

97. Police review through an 'identity lens' all environments where the child is placed (consider external input with this) and procedures, language etc involving children. Opportunity to collaborate with children locally, drawing on their experiences. (Tenet 3, Tenet 4)
98. Children are held in child-friendly rooms, provided with information, stimulation (e.g. books, digital devices), and food/drink appropriate to their developmental needs. Again, ensure that having child-appropriate facilities does not undermine presumptions against arrest and detention. (Tenet 1)

Need for cells and procedures to be age appropriate:

*"When you get taken to cells, the treatment there is like poor. When I got arrested, I was just in the cell. If I asked, 'How do you treat the kids different from the adults?', they wouldn't be able to tell me now, cos everything that the adults do, we do. But if you asked the difference between adults and children in prison, they'd be able to tell you. But we're the ones in the station who haven't even been charged yet."*

15-year-old boy

## Support as children

99. Children are given contact access to supporters at all times when in cells, either appropriate adult or support agency who are able to advocate for them in a timely way (perhaps by telephone – e.g. Barnardo's). (Tenet 1)

Need for appropriate safeguarding and wellbeing concern in custody:

*"They'll come every hour and they'll ask if you're alright, but they'll leave even before you say 'yeah'. Or they say that they'll get back to you, but they don't get back to you."*

15-year-old boy

100. There are frequent checks on the child's wellbeing (recorded with outcomes noted). The child is able to contact an adult and make wellbeing requests in a timely way, with decisions and actions recorded (and made available to the child and appropriate adult). (Tenet 1)



101. Children should be engaged with a choice of relevant wellbeing support in custody, working with the appropriate adult and others to make choices. (Tenet 3)
102. Youth workers are present in all custody suites working alongside custody officers and liaising with children about welfare needs and other risks (Project Engage is fully rolled-out). Children are asked about their life, challenges and who they want to be in the future, informing constructive support outside of the custody suite. (Tenet 2, Tenet 3)
103. Children's Services should always be informed immediately of a child in custody (Merlin report submitted and roll-out of Operation Harbinger or equivalent commitment to live information sharing). (Tenet 1)

## Interviews

104. There is a presumption that interviews take place at child's home, or neutral venue, rather than under arrest and at the station. Solicitors consider offering their offices for interviews. (Tenet 4)
105. Interviews held in custody are in appropriate environments for children, whether in or outside of the station (e.g. including natural light and with age-appropriate seating). (Tenet 1, Tenet 4)
106. Interviews try to understand the context that led to the child offending, including a focus on safeguarding concerns. They are inquisitive and fact-finding rather than confrontational or accusatorial. Interview questions should be open enough for child to tell their story. (Tenet 3)
107. Explore different ways to engage with children (particularly neurodivergent children) during interviews, including better use of intermediary services, flash cards etc. (Tenet 3)
108. Consider child-only custody investigators. Otherwise, specialist training in child-interviewing. Apply learning from the approach that is used for child victims with children suspected of committing criminal offences. (Tenet 3)
109. Particular attention is paid to safeguarding concerns in cases where cooperating with the police may put the child at risk from others following release. (Tenet 1)

Need to priorities safeguarding and exploitation concerns in interviewing:

*" The police only want [to hear] what's beneficial to them. They will ask questions that they know could get the child into trouble as soon as they leave the station, but they don't care about that. They will make the child think that they have their back and that, but as soon as they are out of the station, they don't really care. It's just for their case, that's all they want.."*

17-year-old boy

## Charging and disposals

- 110. Local policy, guidance, and training clarifies that there is a presumption of diversion unless there is a safeguarding/public protection exception. Presumption of the use of Outcome 22, deferred prosecution. Written justification is needed for not obtaining a diversionary resolution. (Tenet 4)
- 111. There is no use of Release Under Investigation. The period of wait may be stigmatising, and RUIs are considered difficult to scrutinise. (Tenet 4)
- 112. Develop age-appropriate explanation and guidance for children of different options for processes and disposals from police. (Tenet 3)

Children need better explanation of processes and disposals:

*"I've been a cop for years and if I struggle to understand the legislation, the wording of a conditional caution are you expecting a 14-year-old has got speech and language issues?"*

Police Officer

## Definitions

A list of some of the terms used in this position statement and their definitions.

Term	Definition
Child / Children	A child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and legislation in England and Wales.
Child First	A four-point principle that summarises the contemporary evidence base for what is important for working with children in criminal justice contexts.
Criminogenic	Shown to be associated with increasing offending.
Deficit focus	Processes, aims, targets or measures that typically look to reduce negative outcomes (e.g. involvement in crime) rather than positive outcomes (e.g. law-abiding behaviour). A deficit focus or framing can be stigmatising.
Diversion	Intervention approaches that redirect children away from formal processing in the criminal justice system, usually towards informal or formal support from non-criminal justice agencies. This is positive, where possible, because research has consistently shown that criminal justice interventions can be stigmatising and criminogenic for a child.
Drive-stunning	The specific use of a taser (stun-gun), where the weapon is held directly against the person's body. This is used to ensure compliance through pain.
Identity-aware	A child's identity is how they see themselves and their place in the world, and <a href="#">research</a> has shown it to be central to how children behave. Being aware of how we affect children's identity development, as well as the messages they are giving us about their identity, is a core part of <a href="#">constructive working</a> with children. It is particularly important to avoid actions that can lead to criminogenic stigma for the child (a sense of feeling labelled as an offender, which undermines pro-social identity and increases the chances offending).
Identity lens	Considering each situation in an identity-aware way.
Positive child outcomes	The outcomes in life that are considered desirable for any child, including good levels of safety, health, societal engagement, happiness, development, education. These have been consistently shown to be associated with reduced offending.
Professional curiosity	A professional explores and understands what is happening in a child's life rather than making assumptions or taking a situation at face value. In the policing context this means seeing beyond the offence or incident to raise safeguarding concerns that would lead to exploring and understanding why the child might be in that situation.
Pro-offending identity	Children can see themselves in the world in a way that allows offending. They may or may not see themselves as a criminal per se, but an element of their identity encourages behaviour defined as offending (e.g. as 'street wise', or a 'hard man, or a 'bad kid', or a 'gang member').
Pro-social identity	Children see themselves as someone who will benefit other people or society as a whole, and are consequently less likely to get involved in criminality.
Safeguarding	In this document, this term (along with 'wellbeing') refers to the broad concern with the vulnerability of children. It is equivalent to the priority given to 'welfare' concerns for the child in legislation.
Stigma	The attachment of a negative identity or label. This has been consistently shown in research to be criminogenic.

