

## USING AN IDENTITY LENS:

Constructive working with children in the  
criminal justice system



## About Us

**Nacro** is a national social justice charity with more than 50 years' experience of changing lives, building stronger communities and reducing crime. We house, we educate, we support, we advise, and we speak out for and with disadvantaged young people and adults. We are passionate about changing lives.

**The University of Salford's** School of Health & Society specialises in using innovative research methods to produce constructive messages for policy makers and practitioners. Professor Neal Hazel is the Chair of Criminology and Criminal Justice. He is a member of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, and former HM Deputy Chief Inspector of Probation for England and Wales.

## Foreword

I am very pleased to be able to write a few words of introduction for this toolkit, which is a really valuable addition to the work of Youth Justice practitioners with children and young people. We know that identity is a really complex issue for all young people and that it is something that they struggle with during adolescence. We also know, just how much more complex that this can become when young people have labels, judgements and opinions imposed on them through contact with the criminal justice system. Desistance research shows just how important developing a pro-social identity is in reducing the chances of future offending.

This toolkit allows practitioners to consider the evidence around identity from the research and to develop a greater understanding of the importance of identity to behaviour. It also bridges the gap between theory and practice and provides tools for practitioners to put their improved understanding into practice, supporting a concept of 'working constructively' with young people to develop a pro-social identity. The toolkit clearly supports the implementation of a 'Child First, Offender Second' approach and I'm sure will be of great benefit in developing both Youth Justice practitioners and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) thinking around this important issue, and as a result improve YOT practice and improve outcomes for children and young people across the sector.

### **Andy Peadar**

Chair Association of YOT Managers

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## How to use this toolkit

This toolkit has been developed ultimately to help divert children away from progressing further through the criminal justice system and promote their positive outcomes. It supports the application of principles derived from research evidence about identity and offending to youth justice practice in the community. It is designed to help you to reflect on how each element of your work can be aligned to the identity-focused approach, advocated in the National Standards for Youth Justice and the sector's *Child First* guiding principle. The National Standards instruct that Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) must work in a way that develops a child's pro-social identity and ensure all work is constructive and future focused. This toolkit can provide a framework to help achieve this. This can also be applied when working with young adults in the criminal justice system, but here we have referred to 'children' throughout.

- **Section A**

- **Why help children develop their pro-social identity?**

- Read this section to understand how the lessons in relation to children's identity and offending have developed, the importance of identity to behaviour, what pro-offending and pro-social identities can look like and how these can be disrupted. We explore the building blocks for identity development and how these can form how a child feels about themselves and their place in the world.

- **Section B**

- **How can we help children develop their pro-social identity?**

- Read this section to understand how practitioners can frame their support to best help a child develop their pro-social identity. You are introduced to the framework for Working Constructively, made up of the Constructive Casework model for support, the 5Cs characteristics of effective work, and Identity Awareness. We also explore working with victims, diversity and other important questions.

- **Section C**

- **Considerations for working constructively in different community contexts.**

- Read this section to help you relate the framework to your work with specific disposals and in different contexts. We explore factors that might be particularly relevant to community disposals and referral orders.

- **Section D**

- **Tools to help you work constructively.**

- Use the tools in this section to aid you in working constructively. There are exercises that you can use or refer to in working one-to-one with children, as well as a checklist to help you reflect on whether and how your work is constructive.

# SECTION A

## Understanding the importance of identity

### 1. Introduction – How the lessons from Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) are important for all disposals

#### What was Beyond Youth Custody (BYC)?

The BYC programme was an England-wide learning and awareness programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund, which ran from 2012 to 2018. It was a partnership of Nacro, ARCS (UK), the University of Salford and the University of Bedfordshire. Rooted in the views and experiences of young people, the programme produced a robust evidence base to challenge, advance and promote better thinking in policy and practice for the effective resettlement of young people leaving custody.

BYC asked why resettlement practice and outcomes had not improved, despite us already knowing ‘what works’ statistically in reducing offending (e.g. suitable accommodation, early education placement). What it found missing was a clear understanding of ‘*why*’ resettlement worked for some young people and not others, and ‘*how*’ support only sometimes made a difference. Without that ‘theory of change’, explaining ‘*how*’ effective resettlement worked, support agencies lacked a shared aim to guide casework.

The programme found that resettlement was successful when it involved a personal journey for young people, where they **shift their identity from one that allowed offending to one that encouraged a positive and constructive future**. Research found that young people’s resettlement after custody reflected a process called ‘secondary desistance’, found when adults stop offending in a sustained way.<sup>1</sup>

BYC concluded that effective resettlement required that **the role of all services should be to facilitate this shift in identity**. In order to help policymakers and practitioners consider how this could be achieved, BYC turned the research findings into a framework consisting of: (1) a model for organising casework (what we’re calling here “Constructive Casework”) to facilitate identity shift, and (2) a set of five principles (“5Cs”) that showed how services could support this shift in identity (Constructive, Co-created, Customised, Consistent, and Coordinated) This framework was published in 2017.<sup>2</sup> BYC also started to explore how practitioners’ actions could best *underline* rather than *undermine* identity shift (what we’re calling here “Identity Awareness”).

Later, this BYC framework was translated by the Youth Justice Board into its new guidance for “how to make resettlement constructive”<sup>3</sup> and informed the new National Standards for resettlement.<sup>4</sup> The Youth Custody Service has also adopted the BYC framework for its “Constructive Resettlement” approach.

In turn, the Constructive Resettlement approach is starting to be embedded across national practice. Camden YOT, for example, has adopted its own version of this – Enhanced Constructive Resettlement – demonstrating how the framework and principles of BYC can be applied in practice when working with children.<sup>5</sup>

## Why develop the BYC framework for community disposals?

Practitioners adopting the BYC casework model and principles to frame resettlement services have found that they are just as applicable upstream, for all children in trouble with the law. For example, Lewisham and Medway YOT (see case studies throughout) and as referenced in ‘How to make resettlement constructive’.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the development of pro-social identity for any child involved with a YOT guidance provides a framework for understanding and facilitating positive outcomes. This means an identity where a young person is empowered to make better choices in their behaviour and wider life decisions, promoting a positive contribution to society.

Similarly, the Youth Justice Board has recognised how central identity development is to positive outcomes across youth justice in its *Child First* guiding principle for the sector. Reflecting the importance of ‘positive youth justice’<sup>7</sup>, this principle, endorsed by the Ministry of Justice directly incorporates the BYC model and principles as its ‘theory of change’, calling for all youth justice services to:

“Promote children’s individual strengths and capacities as a means of developing their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society”.<sup>8</sup>

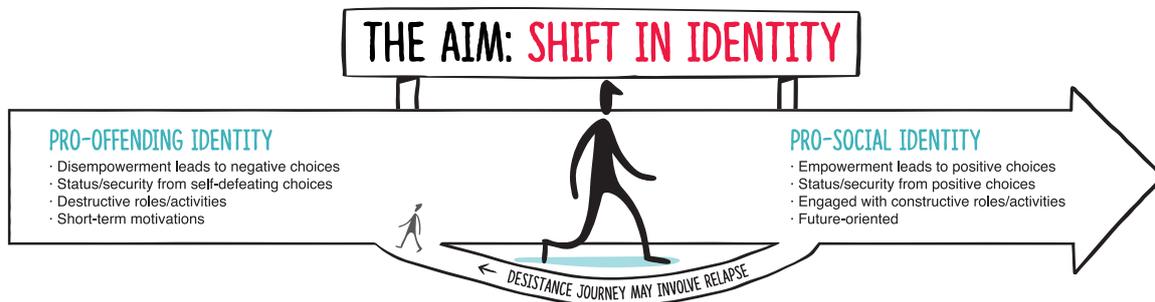
This guiding principle underpins the National Standards. They make it clear that court orders should be planned and managed by working constructively. In managing an effective court order, YOTs **must** “assist the child to build a pro-social identity to enable sustainable desistance”. Similarly, for out-of-court disposals, the National Standards state that YOTs **must** ensure that plans “focus on promoting a pro-social identity and aiding desistance from crime”<sup>9</sup>.

This toolkit outlines how these principles can be applied beyond custody and resettlement, helping children on earlier disposals towards positive outcomes and preventing offending. However, it is worth noting that legislation and guidance around youth justice practice can sometimes appear to run somewhat contrary to principles of ‘constructive’ working, prescribing types of assessments, reporting and planning that may increase criminogenic labelling. The aim of this toolkit is to provide an approach which can be embedded over time and shape current practices, encouraging practitioners to think about how they can work more constructively to better promote positive outcomes which, in turn, prevents offending.

Further, the principles of this toolkit would also be beneficial when working with young adults (aged 18-25), for whom the Beyond Youth Custody programme also found this identity shift was central to successful resettlement. While they are legally adults, and the structures around them are part of the adult criminal justice system, the identity awareness approach can be applied in working with this group.



## 2. Identity development



### Identity: Who we are and our place in the world

A child's 'identity' is a shorthand way of referring to how they think about themselves and their place in the world. Each of us has a personal narrative about ourselves running in our head to make sense of who we are and how we fit into the world around us. That is our identity, or 'self-identity'. We constantly (and usually subconsciously) think about our lives much the same as a story or film, with ourselves as the central character.

A child's identity is formed through interacting with the world, processing the way they relate to others, which is in turn reflected back to them by other people. It's an ongoing process, and we can see identity development as a journey. This journey is especially intense at times of transition – when the world around us changes and we need to consider how that affects who we are.

Adolescence is a time of particular intensity for identity development, when our journey can have a very bumpy ride that causes 'growing pains'. You could regard 'maturation' as the shift in the way we think of ourselves and our place in the world (including our roles) from *child* to *adult*.

This time in our lives also contains a number of important social transitions, including starting to become more independent from our family, changing schools and leaving school, considering our sexuality, and finding new hobbies and interests. We can see how this part of a child's identity journey is played out publicly in the subcultures they join. They demonstrate their development symbolically, like wearing graphical t-shirts, getting a tattoo or even graffitiing on a wall (literally displaying their identity as a tag). You'll have heard about people taking a gap year (maybe travelling) in order to 'find themselves' – they are actually talking about trying to sort out how they think about themselves and their place in the world, or their identity.

There may be many different elements to a child's identity, reflecting the roles and characteristics that we associate with ourselves. Again, these are developed as a result of interacting with others in the world. Particular elements may come to the fore in certain situations where they are in particular roles, such as son/daughter or schoolchild, and they may vary in importance and dominance to overall identity.

Considerations of diversity may be particularly important to a child's identity, particularly their gender and ethnicity. We also know that diversity seems to affect the relative importance of other elements of our identity. For instance, status from achievements/jobs is typically more important to boys and relationship roles more important to girls.<sup>10</sup>

## Behaviour: guided by our identity

The way that a child behaves in any given situation is guided by their identity. We all rely on our personal narrative to inform how we play out any situation, subconsciously asking ourselves, “What would my life-story character do here?”. For instance, a school pupil behaves in a certain way in class because of how they see themselves in that role, in combination with other elements of their identity.

Imagine that you're friends with the director of a soap opera. They want to introduce a character based on you, and ask you to provide a pen-portrait to the screenwriter on what you're like. How would you describe yourself and your place in the world so they can develop the character? Write it down.

The screenwriter is writing your first scene. An acquaintance of your character comes into the café to talk to you, offering you an opportunity to make some money, which might not be completely legitimate but is a sure thing. Based on your pen-portrait, get the screenwriter to play out how you should react to what is clearly a criminal opportunity.

This is how we think about how to act in any situation in our own personal narrative or soap opera. It is how our identity guides our behaviour.

Our reliance on our identity becomes more obvious in times of stress or when we admit that we are unsure how to behave, such as in going into a job interview or on a date. What do our friends and family advise us? “Just be yourself”. Effectively, that means relying on our established identity to guide our behaviour.

Consequently, when a child behaves in a way that is negative or anti-social (and may even be defined as offending), we know that their identity has allowed that. An element of the way they see themselves or their place in the world is guiding them to act antisocially in that situation. They may not necessarily see themselves as antisocial, but they are accepting a characteristic or role that is conducive to antisocial behaviour.

This does not mean that the child should take on responsibility for their identity, or even that they are fully capable of doing so. As we have seen, it results from their interactions (and constraints) with the world around them. Parents have known for generations about the importance of a child's identity to their behaviour, and it informs much of ‘positive parenting’. We are aware that children tend to live up or down to people's expectations of them, which is why parents recognise the importance of praising a child as ‘a clever girl/boy’, or ‘my good boy/girl’.

We've also known for decades how labelling a child as a delinquent, or even just a problem child, can worsen their behaviour.<sup>11</sup> ‘Labelling’ a child as an *offender* seems to produce a self-fulfilling prophecy. As well as facing obstacles from social stigma, the child takes on the characteristic of *being bad* as an element of their identity, which guides them negatively in their future behaviour.

Recognising the crucial importance of a child's identity to their behaviour means that we can develop tools to better understand negative behaviour from their perspective. It prompts us to look out for clues to their behaviour in how they express their identity. It also provides us with a focus to help them develop their behaviour towards positive outcomes in a *Child First* way. We call this “using an identity lens”.



It also means that we need to recognise how the way we interact with each child will influence the way they see themselves and their place in the world: as with positive parenting and labelling, it can foster a positive or negative identity.

## What a pro-offending identity looks like

When a child sees themselves and their place in the world in a way which allows offending behaviour, we describe them as having a 'pro-offending identity'. This does not necessarily mean that they think of themselves as offenders, although (as we know from labelling), children who do can also be considered to have a 'pro-offending identity'. What this term means is that there is an element of their identity which is conducive to offending behaviour.

It might be that they see themselves as a hardman on the streets, which means they may be more likely to engage in a fight. It might be that they see themselves as a someone who "doesn't take any crap", which again may mean they are more likely to react aggressively in a situation. Similarly, if they think of themselves as a sharp street-kid, they would know that their character in their life-story is 'allowed' to engage in a dodgy deal, or even sell drugs.

Take a moment now to think of a child you are working with or have worked with. Consider what elements of their identity may allow their offending behaviour.

Do you know how they see themselves and their place in the world? Have you detected part of their character in their own life-story that would guide their behaviour negatively in a certain situations?

The offending part of a child's identity is often tied in to how they gain status or security, which can be related to masculinity, femininity and other cultural measures. It may well be marked by a disempowered position in the world eg. experience abuse, which they view as limiting positive choices. The identity may be defined by self-destructive roles or activities.

It may also be characterised by short-term motivations, particularly when there is a lack of confidence in their identity journey. Being unsure about their positive or pro-social identity may see a child 'trying on' elements of an identity that are pro-offending.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that having a 'pro-offending' identity means that the child is prone to all types of offending or offending in general; it does not. Nor does it mean that the same child cannot have an identity with both pro-offending and pro-social aspects (and other aspects); we are all more nuanced than that. What this means is that there is an aspect of how they see themselves that has allowed the behaviour that society has deemed an offence. Nor does it mean that this aspect of identity (and corresponding behaviour) is necessarily uncommon or 'abnormal' for children; it may be an expected part of growing up to think of yourself, and behave, in that way. For example, having in a playground fight in which someone gets a black eye may be a 'normal' part of having a schoolchild identity and a common part of growing up. Although we have seen children convicted in this context, it does not mean that the (schoolchild) identity allowing the 'offence' would allow any other types of offending, nor that violent behaviour would occur in any other context.

There is a recognised danger in then labelling or treating this child as an offender – it may well foster an identity that allows for offending behaviour beyond that context. It is important to realise, therefore, that having a 'pro-offending' identity does not mean that we see the child as problematic in themselves or 'at risk of offending'.<sup>12</sup> It does not mean that we should 'grab' them into criminal justice system to deliver an intervention assessing and addressing their pro-offending identity. Quite the opposite to this deficit focus: Taking a *Child First* approach to build their strengths, develop a (pro-social) identity to achieve positive outcomes, preferably with support that does not risk stigma, just as we would want with any child.

## What contributes to a pro-offending identity?

Looking through an identity lens, we can recognise that what we have seen as ‘criminogenic factors’, or ‘risk factors’, are interactions with the world that leave the child with a pro-offending identity. Children in the criminal justice system are often vulnerable, with a history of victimisation and trauma. They may have been subject to social injustice, and been excluded from social structures (such as mainstream school) and suffered wider social exclusion. All of these have a place in the child’s personal life-story and affect the way they see themselves and their place in the world.

We also know that children identifying as Black and from other minority ethnic groups are more likely to face stigmatising experiences and barriers that can negatively shape the way they see themselves in the world. Being treated as a problem, as undeserving, as more likely to be a knife-carrier etc will all increase the likelihood of a pro-offending identity.

Understanding the importance of a child’s identity allows us to recognise how these criminogenic factors result in offending behaviour. It is not a decontextualised or deterministic relationship, where factors lead to an offence – there is a child in the middle. Instead, the effect on any factor gets played out in behaviour through how it leaves the child seeing themselves and their place in the world. Focusing on identity provides a common language for practitioners from different agencies, based on our contemporary understanding of offending and desistance.

Working in a future-focused and positive *Child First* way, these factors contributing to a pro-offending identity should not be seen as risk factors for a potential offender but as barriers to the child’s pro-social future. They will need to be addressed in order to help the child see themselves and their place in the world more pro-socially, leading to positive outcomes for the child and their community.

It is also important to be aware of the messages that the child is receiving about their identity from parents, family members and other organisations they are engaging with. Collaborating with them to be identity aware and work more constructively to foster the child’s identity positively is crucial in sustaining the work you do with them.

## What a pro-social identity like looks

When a child sees themselves and their place in the world in a way which promotes positive behaviour and outcomes, we describe them as having a 'pro-social identity' (literally, the opposite of 'anti-social'). A pro-social identity provides a framework in which the child is empowered to make the right choices in their behaviour and with wider life decisions, including relationships. It guides the child in any situation to act in a way that allows them to fulfil their potential.

The child recognises that they can gain status and security from being who they are and making these positive choices accordingly. A pro-social identity may be marked by the child being more future-oriented in their motivations and choices, being more confident in their identity development journey. The positive identity provides the potential for individuals to exercise agency over their future behaviour.

When a child with a pro-offending identity develops it into a pro-social one, they replace the need to maintain status and peer respect through negative behaviour. For example, wearing the identity of a construction worker through work-experience on a building site replaces the need to prove their masculinity by being a 'tough street-fighter' or a gangster.

The expected positive outcomes from a pro-social identity would include social inclusion, positive relationships with family and peers, wellbeing and security, and constructive achievements such as engaging with training or employment. Conversely, it would also mean a resistance to, or desistance from, offending.

However, a continued pro-social identity is reliant on the continuation of supportive interactions and wider social structure to foster and reinforce it, or it can be disrupted and result in anti-social behaviour.



## What are the building blocks for developing a pro-social identity?

The building blocks for a child developing pro-social identity can be seen as (a) Activities, (b) Interactions and (c) Roles. These are all elements which help us shape the way we see ourselves in the world. They are interrelated, so undertaking a new activity (e.g. joining a football team) can involve a child taking on a new role (e.g. a sporty person), and have that reinforced through interactions (e.g. coach saying that they are a good sportsman, disciplined, hardworker etc.). It may help you to remember that for children to develop their identity, they need “fresh AIR”:

- **Activities**

These might include education or training, employment, or organised leisure. They're not just useful for their own sake but because they allow someone to try on an identity, such as 'a worker', 'skilful' or 'talented'.

- **Interactions**

Our sense of self depends on how our perceived character is reflected back in interactions with family/friends/colleagues and others in the community. Therefore it's crucial that a child has positive reinforcement from family, friends and professionals for their developing identity. For instance, a child who wants to be a student will be helped by a parent praising or even just asking for their considered opinion on a subject (preferably reinforcing a role with “because you're our intellectual one” or similar). Conversely, identity development can be undermined by interactions with family, friends or professionals who might convey that the child is 'an offender' or 'hard/tough' or another label conducive to offending.

- **Roles**

These may be formal roles (like a 'construction worker' or 'student'), but may also be informal roles in everyday life (like 'son to a proud parent', 'artistic person', 'clever child'). They may be roles which emerge within a family (e.g. 'the tech-savvy one who always fixes our TV/IT problems'), friends (e.g. 'the one we go to for advice', or 'the broker who solves disputes') or wider community (e.g. 'the spokesperson for kids in our neighbourhood', or 'the member of the committee').



**ACTIVITIES**



**INTERACTIONS**



**ROLES**

## SECTION B

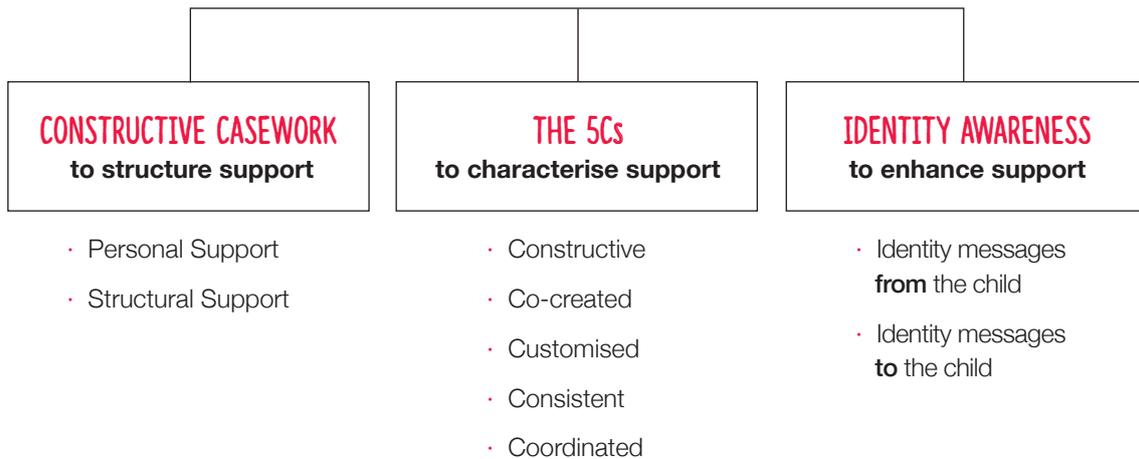
### Helping children develop their pro-social identity

#### 3. Working constructively: a framework for supporting identity development

In line with the theory of change found in the BYC research, and the youth justice sector's *Child First* guiding principle, the role of all agencies working to achieve positive child outcomes in youth justice should be: **Supporting the child to develop their pro-social identity.**

Professional support with the specific objective of developing the child's pro-social identity has been called *Working Constructively*.<sup>13</sup> Reflecting the lessons from BYC, there is now a clear framework for working constructively, consisting of three elements: (1) Constructive Casework for organising support; (2) The '5Cs' characteristics of effective support; and (3) Identity Awareness. This section outlines each of these elements.

#### Framework for Constructive Working

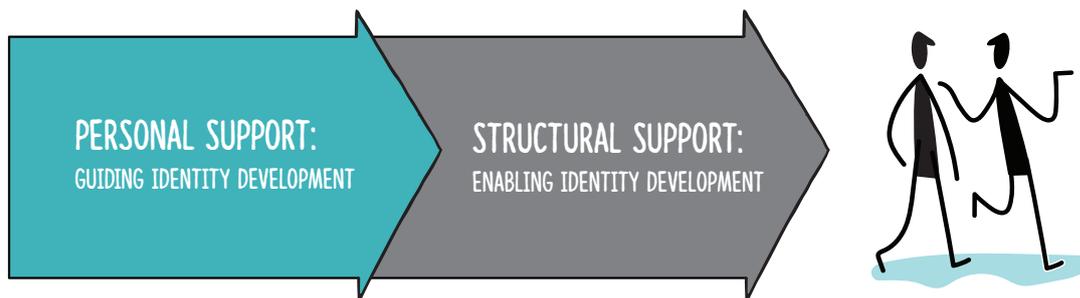


## Constructive Casework – to organise support

Constructive Casework is a model of thinking about and organising support, focused on facilitating identity development. It is important that an overall support package includes two different types of help for the child, both of which are necessary for that development:

- 1 **Personal Support** – to guide the child's identity development
- 2 **Structural Support** – to enable the child's identity development

The Constructive Casework model can be used across all work with children, with personal and structural support working together to support identity shift and development.



### ***Personal support - guiding identity development***

In Constructive Casework, Personal Support has a meaning that moves beyond befriending or supervision - it sees the professional focus specifically and deliberately on guiding the child's identity development.

Personal Support can be focused around four key questions which allow those working with the child to think through and plan for who they want to become in the future:

1. What is the child's identity, and what elements of it allow offending?
2. What are the child's strengths, interests and goals that can inform a pro-social identity?
3. What pro-social future self can a child develop?
4. What are the routes to that pro-social self?

Professionals need to ensure that the processes for each intervention allow them to offer the personal support to explore these questions with the child.

## Change hooks

If a child has established an identity which allows offending, it can help for them to create a turning point or 'hook for change' (as the research literature calls it). This is an event in their present or near future which provides a narrative reason for altering their identity to one that is more pro-social, and so likely to produce more positive outcomes. In our internal life-story, such an event helps us separate off the past and see ourselves or our place in the world somewhat differently from before. They may imply a new role, or just a reason for doing things differently. In personal support, a professional can help the child identify a change hook and use it to promote identity development. Change hooks can include:

- **A significant birthday**, such as 16 or 18. The internal narrative may be, "I'm a grown up now. I was immature then, trying to act big. Now, I'm a responsible adult/older person."
- **A new relationship**. "I'm now a partner with responsibilities. I have to look out for them as well now. I'm now a man/woman."
- **Moving house, or moving out from home**. "This is a new start. People don't know me here as a troublemaker."
- **A new child**. "I'm a parent now. I have to be a responsible parent. I need to set an example. I'll be a provider."
- **A new job**. "I'm now a working man/woman. I'm earning and can be proud of it. I won't mess this up. I'll show them. I'm now a man/woman."

Additionally it's worth considering that the change hook could be something less major, it could be a small success which makes them open to believing that success and change is possible. For example, starting a new year at school or getting a place in a sports team where they have more responsibility or are a role model to other children around them.



## Diversity

The child should be encouraged to question the influence of every aspect of their life and the demographics which might influence how they think of themselves (and behave). Importantly, this includes diversity, which is crucial to identity. Although, the child may or may not feel that it plays a big part in their lives, shining a light on it may help them (and you as the practitioner) better understand its influence. Look out both for elements that may allow offending, as well as strengths for pro-social identity and behaviour. For instance:

- **Gender** – What does it mean to them to be a girl/woman, boy/man or gender fluid? What does a good/strong man or woman look like? How do they try to be like that?
- **Ethnicity** – Is their ethnicity important to them? What does it mean to have their cultural background? What do others think of their ethnicity?
- **Family** – What does it mean to be part of their particular family? What are their family's values? What do other think of their family?
- **Neighbourhood** – What does it mean to be someone from their neighbourhood/estate/town?

The BYC programme explored the links between diversity, intersectionality and identity and how this needs to be considered in resettlement planning.<sup>14</sup> Some of the principles of practice highlighted useful questions to consider:

Do you:

- Identify how each service user sees and prioritises different elements of their identity?
- Tailor interventions for service users and help them build a positive, integrated identity?
- Seek to promote understanding and acceptance of diversity among all service users?
- Explore what communities or networks could support service users – locally or more remotely?

## **Structural Support – enabling identity development**

Structural Support sees any practical support (eg. accommodation or education/training) for the child in terms of whether it is specifically and deliberately **enabling** the identity development routes established during Personal Support. Any structural support offered to enable identity development needs to be based on the answers to the four key questions in Personal Support.

All Structural Support offered should **always** be aligned and appropriate to the plans made in Personal Support. Practitioners should be able to articulate to the child how any practical arrangements are going to help them move towards who they want to be. If practical arrangements, unrelated to where the child sees themselves going, are put in place, they are less likely to engage with them. For instance, a well-intentioned YOT officer may have found a training course opportunity in construction, but this is unlikely to engage a child whose Personal Support has helped to see them identify a future and as routes to be an entrepreneur.

Consequently, it would normally make sense that most Structural Support arrangements (like education, leisure activities) are made after, or at least concurrently, progress is made in Personal Support. The usual exceptions to this rule are urgent practical arrangements (such as accommodation), and activities that are specifically intended to help the child's confidence or self-esteem.



## The 5C characteristics of effective support

The BYC programme found 5 key characteristics of support, detailed below, applicable to all identity work with children.

### 1. CONSTRUCTIVE

The overall objective of the diversion support should be to help the child develop their identity, and agencies should consider the purpose of all intervention in relation to that objective. The support should look to the future, rather than focusing on past behaviour in a way that risks underlining the pro-offending identity. The support should motivate the child for change, and ensure that it empowers the child to make positive choices (and the more vulnerable the child, the more attention needs to be paid to empowerment). Everyone involved should always look towards positive child outcomes rather than framing discussion around negative deficits (like risk of offending).

### 2. CO-CREATED

A child's identity is personal to them, and can only be developed by them, so it's crucial that they are involved with any planning. Such co-creation will also help ensure that the child considers the support as relevant to their needs and future, and so is more likely to engage with it. In addition, we know that everyday interactions are crucial to developing a child's pro-social identity, so families and friends should be brought on board where appropriate. They can be helpful supporters in motivating and empowering the child, highlighting their strengths, feeding-back to the child 'who' they are, and providing roles and activities which reinforce it.

### 3. CUSTOMISED

As every child's identity and personal development journey is unique, their diversionary plan and support needs to be individualised. Children should not be fitted to generic interventions. As diversity is crucial to a child's sense of who they are and their place in the world, considerations of the child's self-identified characteristics (including ethnicity and gender) are essential in any support package.

### 4. CONSISTENT

Understanding and developing the child's identity should be the focus of all those involved from the start, including YOT agencies, panel members and police officers, who all need to use an identity lens to both look for identity clues and be aware of how their own interactions with the child can underline or undermine pro-social identity development. Where possible, professional support relationships should be stable in order both to help build trust with the child and to better ensure consistent messages around their strengths and pro-social identity.

### 5. COORDINATED

In order to achieve consistency in messages to the child, it is important for the support to be managed. Building the route to a pro-social self for the child is likely to involve a number of agencies, possibly across sectors, so work should start early to broker support. Making those agencies aware of *who* the child wants to be and the constructive developmental journey they are on (rather than focusing on the behaviour/risks to manage) can help engage that support.

## Identity Awareness to enhance support – make every interaction count

Everyone involved in diversion processes and disposals should make sure they are 'identity aware', including those assessing children, making decisions and undertaking interventions. Being identity aware will ensure that practitioners can make the most of any interactions they have with children to understand their identity and to actively underline rather than undermine positive development. Remember, you are looking out for messages about the child's own identity (how *they* see themselves and their place), rather than clues to inform *your* view of them.

There are two aspects to being identity aware:

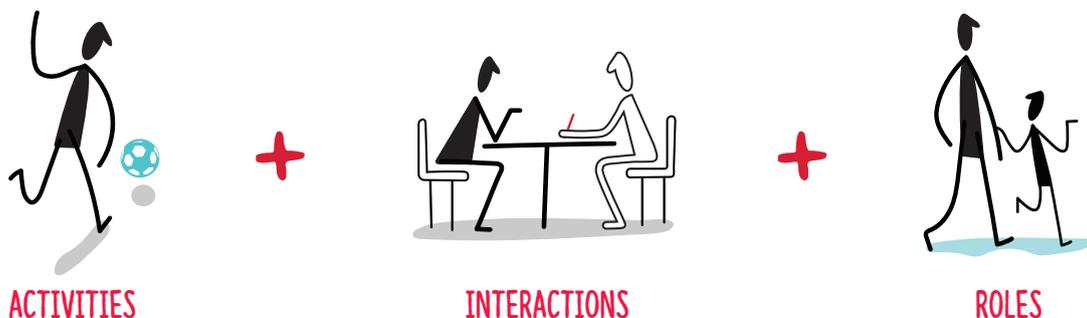
- 1. Be aware of the messages that the child is giving you about their identity.** Look for the clues that the child tells you in order to better understand how they see themselves and their place in the world, or who they might aspire to be. For instance, do they stress a particular aspect of their life – might that suggest it is important to how they see themselves? Do they stress a particular role or job that they have – and is that important to their identity? Do they focus on a particular relationship – and what does that mean for how they position themselves?

See anything that the child says or presents to you as a potential clue to explore. You may judge it to be incidental (don't jump to conclusions), but it may offer a deeper understanding if you look under the surface. For instance, wearing a particular club's football shirt is unlikely to be accidental or without thought; it represents not just an allegiance, but an identity worth exploring. It might raise questions as to what supporting that club means about them – not just what, but 'who' does it mean to be an explicit supporter of that club?

- 2. Be aware of the messages you are giving the child about their identity** – about themselves and their place in the world. This is particularly relevant if you are talking about their offending behaviour – are you reinforcing that who they are is defined by what they have done? It is important to separate them as a person and their behaviour. Similarly, it is important to avoid negative labelling when you discuss their needs or 'risks' – be careful not to imply that these are part of who they are.

For instance, what are the implications for their identity of being 'a looked after child'? Research has indicated that children may act how they *think* a looked-after child *should* act, which may be negatively. Alternatively, they may resist any labelling, with frustration, anger and negative behaviour.

It is also important to be aware of the people around them – family, peers etc. and how this might be impacting upon how they see themselves.



## **Working through an identity lens: Medway Youth Offending Team**

Since May 2018, Medway YOT has adopted an approach aimed at supporting the identity disruption and shift principles. In every case, both in and out of court, exercises are completed around three identity-themed questions with the child within the first six weeks.

1. Who am I?
2. Who do I want to be?
3. What does my journey look like to get there?

To address the last question, plans are co-created with the child to explore how they will get to their future goals. The first two questions use identity hooks, such as thinking about heroes or how they think other people view them to form their constructive plan. This plan is revisited and added to throughout supervision.

Staff use the Asset Plus Pathways and Planning module/Additional External controls section to record professional multi agency actions to address safeguarding and potential risk related issues. Separating the young person's plan from the practitioner's plan has been important in enabling staff to feel they have the space for creativity and freedom when completing the young person's plan.

Notable changes in Medway's work since this approach was embedded include more meaningful engagement and creativity from both children and staff.

## SECTION C

### Working constructively at each stage of the process

#### 4. Assessing with the child

It's important that assessments and reports to the court or panel support in the objective of helping the child develop a pro-social identity. Assessment should be considered in relation to the first key question in Personal Support (as part of the Constructive Casework model): **What is the child's identity, and what elements of it allow offending?** When outlining the offence, the reports should try to understand what it was about the child's identity, or disruption to it, that allowed the offending.

When establishing the needs of the child, try to understand how these relate to identity development. Look at the child's circumstances through an 'identity lens', considering how they shape the way the child sees themselves and their place in the world. In other words, don't just see the offence or risks/needs as decontextualised or happening on their own, but see them within the framework of the child's identity. This helps give all parties a common language, based on our contemporary understanding of offending and desistance.

It may be possible that, by looking at information gathered using an approved assessment framework, e.g. care history, you can get a good idea of how circumstances might have influenced identity. However, clearly in order to fully understand how the child sees themselves and how this has been shaped, it's necessary to engage them. This may mean more one-to-one work, with an emphasis on building trust and motivation.

Children completing low-tier orders or out-of-court disposals are less likely to have an entrenched pro-offending identity. Hopefully, these children would not see themselves as criminals, nor as having an established role which involves criminal activity. They may, however, have particular relationships (like offending peers) or circumstances that promote an identity which allows offending – like being thought of as 'tough' or a 'bad kid', but these may be at an early stage of formation that is only recently affecting behaviour.



## Identity disruption

The fact that offending behaviour has taken place means that there may have been a recent disruption to the child's pro-social identity. The child may still see themselves generally in ways that are conducive to positive outcomes, but something has happened to challenge or disrupt this. This disruption may be because of a temporary or longer-lasting event, but has seen the child react accordingly. For instance, they may have become a looked-after child, had a family break-up or lost a role model: something has interrupted the existing status, role or stabilising relationship.<sup>15</sup> The offending behaviour may be as a result of frustration or anger at others trying to define them differently, or may be to resist a new identity, or to try to establish a new one.

In that case, it will be useful for any assessment to try to understand: **What may have recently disrupted that identity to allow offending behaviour?** Possible disruptions to a child's pro-social identity include:

- A recent difficult transition for the child, which has challenged the way they see themselves and their place in the world, e.g. changing schools, moving into care.
- Recently starting/stopping an activity/interaction/role which has upset the way they see themselves.
- A newly discovered structural barrier which frustrates their aspirations, e.g. unable to join a team.
- A recent trauma, e.g. sudden loss, which has upset their view of the world and their place within it.

Elements of self assessment will be key here: is someone or something undermining a previously established way that they saw themselves or their place in the world? Has there been a transition? Has there been a change in role? Is there a new influence telling them something different about themselves? Has their status changed in some way? Is there a new relationship, or has an old one ended, meaning they see themselves differently?

## 5. Writing reports and intervention plans with the child

In order to aid professional partnership working and co-ordination, reports need to be explicitly framed in relation to identity - around helping the child or young person develop a pro-social identity. If all partner agencies have an 'identity informed' common language and understanding about why children offend and how they desist, they are more likely to: (a) co-operate with providing support and (b) provide consistent positive messages to the child.

Don't forget - the building blocks for developing identity are (a) Activities, (b) Interactions, and (c) Roles. The programme should consider how a combination of each of these will add up to helping the child develop their pro-social identity.

The plan should be co-created with the child, so that they see it as relevant to their future. Engagement with this planning process, and motivation for compliance to it, is best achieved using child-friendly paperwork co-developed with the child, e.g. a graphical interface instead of the usual text form. The YOT will then need to transpose this onto official forms for court/case management purposes, and will need to complete and record a separate assessment to assess and plan for public protection, with co-creation used where possible.

The recommendations to the court contained in the plan or panel should correspond to what the child's needs to develop their pro-social identity. In line with Constructive Casework, the plan should explicitly contain both (a) personal support specifically focused on guiding identity development, and (b) structural support to enable the development, based on routes to a pro-social self, identified through personal support.

In the case of the youth rehabilitation order, when you are considering recommending specific requirements, you should consider how each may affect the child's identity. Is it likely to support their pro-social identity development or would it undermine it, and possibly increase labelling?

The National Standards for Youth Justice<sup>16</sup> state that a court should have confidence in the effectiveness of recommended supervision. To build this confidence, it would be helpful for magistrates and the judiciary to be informed of the evidence-based rationale for recommendations, framed in relation to facilitating pro-social identity development for positive outcomes for sustainable desistance.

It is worth remembering that any contact with youth offending services, however light touch, can have a labelling effect on a child.<sup>17</sup> When considering the amount of support specified or offered to a child, particularly for out-of-court disposals, you will need to balance (a) the needs of the child for support in identity development against (b) the risks that further involvement with services can increase labelling effects. You can mitigate against this risk to some extent by framing any work clearly for the child and family as being about helping the child achieve their aims and be who they want to be, rather than addressing the risk they pose as a potential offender.

## Medway YOT

This case study highlights the type of identity awareness work currently being done at Medway YOT.

“I was allocated 14-year-old Cathy after she received a Youth Conditional Caution for Arson. She had a history of struggling with her mental health, self-harming and attempting suicide. She had struggled to socialise with peers, didn’t attend school regularly, and had a very low opinion of both herself and professionals. She wasn’t getting on with her parents, and didn’t see any positive future for herself.

Cathy told me that she felt “dark” in herself. Knowing that she is interested in art and painting, I suggested that we start a journey using the art theme style, implicitly underlining how being artistic is part of who she is. For her [sentence] plan, we explored her journey using paintbrushes. Going from dark to light, she created a visual to show where she feels she is currently as a person, where she wants to get to and how she will get there. We also explored who she believes her supporters are and how they could help her get to ‘who’ she wants to be.

Using this style of work really helped Cathy engage and explore all the elements and milestones of her life and how she feels about who she is. The dark to light paintbrushes helped visualise the shift from an identity that allowed offending to one that would help her move on to a more positive future.

Following the work we did with Cathy, she: has re-engaged with CAMHS; hasn’t attempted suicide; hasn’t self-harmed; and achieved 100% attendance during her last term at school. She also hasn’t offended. From her own perspective, Cathy says that, since engaging with the identity awareness work, she feels she’s made positive steps, that her mental health has improved, and that she can express herself positively.

Further, Cathy states she socialising more with friends, has attended the local youth centre with peers, and has started to build a stronger relationship with her mum. She also stated she wants to go to university to continue her education and become a social worker, so she can support young people similar to her.

Cathy is proud of herself for the goals she’s achieved. Exit planning has now started so that she can continue her developmental journey without the involvement of the YOT.”

## 6. Setting compliance conditions

In the case of youth conditional cautions, children must agree to accept conditions that can be reparative, rehabilitative or punitive in nature. Official guidance states that punishment conditions should only be used where the other types of conditions are unsuitable or insufficient. From an 'identity lens' perspective, conditions perceived as judicial punishment are likely to carry stigma and foster a criminal identity.

Working constructively, rehabilitative conditions should always look to develop the child's pro-social identity. The best way to do that is to arrange conditions which enable Constructive Casework. This requires specifying that the child participates in elements of Personal Support to guide identity development, as well as pre-identified Structural Support.

Of course, specifying participation does not guarantee a child engaging with the service (just the service engaging with them). In fact, in and of itself, specifying conditions to a child that they must follow may build resentment and make engagement harder. The key here will be to try to ensure that the child is on-board with conditions. This is more likely to happen if (a) the child sees it as relevant their future (their place in the world), and (b) if they are co-created with the child. The two are, of course, related.

It is important to avoid activities which could publicly shame the child, as well as those which risk labelling them in any way pro-offending. If another agency is suggesting or including a condition which might risk labelling or underlining a negative identity, explain the situation in terms of working constructively.

Conversely, any explanation of out-of-court disposals to the child (or their supporters) should look for and counter any self-labelling or stigma. You should emphasise that they are helping to resolve a bad situation so they can leave that episode behind and move forward as a child who will learn and grow from it.

When discussing conditions with partner agencies, try to explicitly frame the child's 'needs' in relation to their identity development. Encourage professional partners to look at the circumstances, and possible responses, through an 'identity lens'. In other words, don't just see the offence or 'risks'/'needs' as decontextualised or happening on their own, but within the framework of the child's identity. This helps give all parties a common language that is based on our contemporary understanding of offending and desistance.

## Lewisham YOT

This case study highlights how Lewisham YOT has been using identity awareness activities with children subject to community disposals.

“Mark came to the attention of the YOT after he was given a Youth Conditional Caution for possession of an offensive weapon in a public place.

Part of the intervention delivered was 1:1 work, which included identity awareness activities undertaken over a number of sessions. The aim of this was to explore his identity through fictional characters, and we discovered that Mark’s favourite character was the superhero, Black Panther. We discussed all the positive qualities that Mark admired about the character. Using the film and the characters in it really helped Mark explore positive qualities and reflect on how he sees himself and his place in the world.

We then talked about who Mark wants to be, existing qualities that he can build on, and the everyday behaviour that his hero would exhibit (and not exhibit) towards his family and community.”

## 7. Delivering support

### Personal support

Supervision sessions are often the primary time to explore the four key questions for personal support to guide identity development.

However, everyone in contact with the child during a programme of activity, including informal supporters, can help to explore them. Likewise, everyone has a part to play in fostering and reinforcing progress in identity development. This underlines the importance of the 'co-ordinated' characteristic in the 5Cs, with the case manager ensuring that all supporters are feeding in information, as well as making sure that everyone is on the same page with regards to who the child wants to be and how they are going to get there.

If it becomes clear that the child has not yet established a pro-offending identity, the key questions in Personal Support would be used more to guide the fostering of their existing pro-social identity and identify how to remove any disruption to it:

- **What are the child's strengths, interests and goals that can inform a pro-social identity?**

What are the elements of their previously established pro-social identity? What strengths, interests and roles have fostered and reinforced it previously? What particular relationships and interactions reinforce elements of that established pro-social identity?

- **What pro-social future self can a child develop?**

Where could the previously established pro-social identity lead the child? What kind of teenager and adult would this suggest they can become? What place would someone with their strengths and characteristics occupy?

- **What are the routes to that pro-social self?**

What activities, interactions and roles can help develop the existing pro-social identity towards that positive future self? What practical help is needed to facilitate those? What support is needed to address any disrupting influences?

### Arranging Structural Support

In all interventions that follow the Constructive Casework model, the answers to the four key questions in Personal Support inform the Structural Support needed to enable identity development. It's important that each element of Structural Support agreed with the child, whether it's education or another activity, should form part of the route to their pro-social self, and everyone should be clear about how it is doing so.

There may be a tendency to think of any education, work or leisure as intrinsically good for child for its own sake or because it fills their time, but the wrong choices at the wrong time can disengage or disillusion a child. Activities should always be considered in terms of how they help a child on their individual journey or life story. This means that support programmes need to be customised to the developing identity rather than fitting whatever generic interventions may usually be available to a YOT. For instance, a child's developing identity as an entrepreneur might be better fostered with some work experience shadowing a local businessperson rather than in a job at a car garage.

Again, if there is no established pro-offending identity, this Structural Support will be targeted at facilitating the routes for developing the child's existing identity and addressing any barriers that have disrupted it. This may include introducing practical measures to facilitate recovery from traumatic events that prompted recent identity disruption.

There may be structural areas of the child's life that could be addressed to promote a pro-social identity, or indeed that have been identified as a barrier to one. For some lower-tier disposals or shorter sentences, practitioners may not have enough time to address these fully during work with the child but can support the child and/or their family to think about how changes could move them more towards a pro-social identity.

### **Motivation and engagement**

Interactions with police and the process of receiving a disposal may have caused the child to start labelling themselves and assume the people around them have also done so. Willingness to engage with practitioners outside of complying with conditions may vary, as some children may feel it will further embed this label. They may not think of the work done by YOTs as positive and future-focused, so it could take time to motivate them to engage with you.

Framing the work you can do with the child as supporting and working *with* (and not *to*) them should help to promote engagement. They may only think of work as being geared towards punishment and not geared towards helping them move forward. Some children subject to youth conditional cautions will have had very little prior experience of criminal justice agencies, but some may already be known to you and motivation will similarly vary.

## 8. Working with Referral Panels

### Preparing for panels

By the end of the first panel meeting, the legislation states that the panel and child should agree a programme which prevents reoffending. However, if the programme is to be meaningful, the development of this programme cannot be left until the panel meeting. In particular, the child needs to be engaged in designing the programme prior to the initial panel meeting. This is for three main reasons:

1. A panel of adults can be intimidating for a child and may not encourage meaningful collaboration. The power difference between adults and children, let alone the one created by judicial authority, means that children may not feel able to put forward their ideas (nor objections to others).
2. It takes longer than the time available in a panel meeting to explore a child's identity, how it may be developed, and what is needed for it to do so.
3. The child may be more engaged with the programme if they feel that it originated with them rather than with the panel.

Children facing referral orders will be at different levels of motivation to engage with the process. They will have gone through a judicial experience that was likely negative, and quite possibly traumatic. The experience may have enforced an 'offender' label, detrimental to a pro-social identity. The child may feel socially excluded and disengaged from their community, again, all feeding a pro-offending identity. Crucially, the more this is reinforced, the less likely they will feel able to change it to a positive narrative.

Engagement and motivation is crucial in the referral process. It is important to help the child see the panel and programme as an opportunity rather than a burden:

- De-emphasise the justice-system context for the panel. Frame it instead as about helping them move their lives forward – more akin to youth work than justice work.
- Underline that the planning is led by them – just showing an interest in what they think and hope for will help.
- Assure them that the panel will try to help work out how to achieve their plans.
- Focus on positive outcomes that can be achieved (like respect, a role, fitness) rather than negative ones (like helping them to stop offending).

### Preparing panel members

It is essential that all panel members understand the framework for working constructively, as outlined in this toolkit. They should recognise the importance of identity to the child's behaviour and that their role is to help the child develop their pro-social identity. It is necessary to explain how this helps children achieve positive outcomes and how this relates to reduced offending and safer communities.

It would be useful for any training for panel members to include 'identity awareness', so that they are conscious of how their interaction with the child can underline or undermine identity development. They should understand the risks of 'labelling' and the need to be future-focused and constructive. As such, as a practitioner you may feel it prudent to remind panel members frequently of the crucial role they can play in how the child thinks about themselves moving forward.

Everyone involved should be clear that the referral order plans should be 'co-created', so that the child sees the process as relevant to their future. Panel-member training should include skills to engage with the child.

## Panel meetings

The panel should be focused less on what the child has done, and more on who they can become. In the panel meeting, all parties should explore plans for how the child can become who they want to be, and not reinforce the pro-offender identity. For instance, the panel should not focus on trying to ensure the child voices responsibility for the offence.

As a general rule, the panel should try to concentrate on helping the child look positively to the future. The meeting can be presented as an opportunity to help the child become who they can or want to be. The panel is a group of adults who want to help the child grow up as a constructive member of their community, and can advise them on how to do that in a way that moves them on from past mistakes.

The YOT worker will have already explored the context for the offence, considering background factors informing the child's identity that might have allowed offending. As such, it is important to minimise focus on the offence and move on as quickly as possible.

The meeting should always look towards positive child outcomes rather than framing discussion around negative deficits (like risk of offending). It should aim to motivate and empower the child for change.

Referral Order Guidance<sup>18</sup> states that the contract should be developed through a process of "co-production with the child". This requires panel members to facilitate meaningful engagement and involvement of the child, with ideas primarily coming from the child themselves. The guidance also stresses drawing on the child's strengths.

## 9. Working with victims

Legislation states that the principle aim of any referral order programme should be the prevention of reoffending, and that this **may** include a restorative element (Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000, s23). Given our understanding that preventing reoffending is dependent on the child's pro-social identity development, it's essential that the agreed provision supports and does not undermine this development.

Current restorative practice is often much wider than more traditional models of offender-victim conferencing and should be aimed at building positive relationships with family, peers and school, for example.

Looking through an identity lens, the primary consideration for if and when to work with victims is: what is the likely effect on the child's pro-social identity development? Any restorative justice activities should be dependent on whether they pave the route to a pro-social self, as mapped out during personal support sessions.

Practitioners working with the child should be clear in their plans about how any 'restorative justice' activity will foster that development. Crucially, they should be careful and explicit in ensuring that revisiting the offence/relationship does not risk underlining the child's pro-offending identity. As always, practitioners need to ask themselves how any activity or interaction will affect the way the child sees themselves and their place in the world.

Mediation or reparation might be appropriate if the child is at the point where it will act as a 'change-hook', closing that chapter in their life-story and looking forward more constructively. Mediation with a victim known to the child may help to redefine the way they see each other, so that future interactions will foster their pro-social identities and challenge pro-offending ones (e.g. recognising that they are both good people trying to do their best rather than just hard and oppositional). If the child recognises that a problematic relationship with the victim is a barrier to their engagement with local activities, mediation might help unblock it or even turn it into a supportive one. Likewise, if the child's guilt over the offence is stopping them from seeing themselves constructively, reparation may help them move forward.

The time at which restorative justice takes place in the child's developmental journey is also important. Mediation towards the end of an intervention may allow the child to highlight how far they've come in their developmental journey, which both cements that change for themselves and reassures the victim.

However, practitioners should avoid any process that further labels the child as a criminal, and so makes it harder for them to develop positively. Particular caution should be taken with any activities which require the child to go back over the details of the offence, which might undo any progress made moving the child forward. It's also important to consider how we frame offences as mistakes, rather than as part of who they are. This will help to stop the child identifying in a pro-offending way and see the mistake as something they can move forward from.

Whilst it is recognised that current practice can be offence-focused, remember that working constructively with the child means being future-oriented, looking towards a pro-social future self, in order to produce positive child outcomes and safer communities. Any work that can be done to minimise focus on the offence will help to achieve this.

## 10. Exit planning

Research has shown that unless arrangements are made for some continuation of support following the end of a statutory intervention, progress made can be lost – so exit planning should start early in the support process. In many cases, this means involving agencies outside the youth justice system, and may include informal supporters. Again, those continuing support should be helped to understand the child's pro-social developmental journey and encouraged to reinforce it. They have a vital role to play in the case of any lapses, explaining to the child that the behaviour is compatible with who they are or where they are going.

In the case of referral orders, the final meeting during the last month is a good opportunity to set goals for the future and work with the child to create a plan once the order is over. This may include family members acting as supporters where appropriate. In addition to this, plans and exercises looking to develop their identity further in the future should be given to the child.

Referral order guidance states that a 'sign off' letter or certificate of completion when the contract has been successfully completed should be provided to the child. This could be employed as a useful tool in any order to reinforce positive developments in the child's identity. Ideally, the paperwork would highlight 'who' they have shown they can be rather than simply 'what' they have done. For example, rather than noting that "You have been helpful to others, particularly when...", it may foster pro-social identity more effectively to state that "You have shown us that you are a helpful person, particularly when...".

## SECTION D

### Tools to help you work constructively

#### i. Exercises to explore identity

We have developed six exercises, to be used either in sequence or individually, to help guide an identity-focused approach. The overall objective of these exercises is to aid practitioners explore and develop the child's identity, both self-biographically and framed in a wider narrative. These can be used in one-to-one sessions with the children you are working with (referred to throughout the exercises as 'C').

#### These exercises explore two main themes:

##### 1. Self-examination through an autobiographical lens

- What are the important events in your life (both good and bad)?
- Who has been an important influence?
- What lessons do we draw from those experiences?

##### 2. Narrative as a frame of reference

- What is the story you tell others about where you come from and where you are going?

These exercises have been developed to be used flexibly and as a guide, and are not intended to be overly prescriptive. It might be that some can be used more than once to reflect where the child sees themselves in five or ten years time.

Most importantly, co-creation needs to be at the heart of this work, allowing the child to lead the session and have space to explore how they feel about their identity at the present moment.

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CHARACTERS

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# ACTIVITY 1

## Exploring their own identity

Approx. 30 mins

### Session objective

An introductory session exploring with C how they feel about themselves and their identity.

### Method

In this session you will be using archetypes/characters (see page 33). The archetypes are models that represent a pattern of behaviour, and represent aspects of character traits we can all easily identify with.

The aim of this session is to really get C thinking about how they see themselves and aspects of their identity. Throughout this session, it's important to discuss how our identity can shift from one aspect to another due to particular contexts and situations. Encourage them to think about the here and now.

**Key themes:** CONSTRUCTIVE · CUSTOMISED

Session leader	Child
<p><b>1</b> Check in – ask C if they have an outcome in mind for the session and explore how you can both work together safely.</p>	<p>C to talk about what they want to get out of the session and how you can both work together to get there.</p>
<p><b>2</b> Introduce the session and talk through the archetypes as characters.</p>	<p>C to say which parts of themselves they associate with each of the archetypes/characters.</p>
<p><b>3</b> Ask C to pick one from the four characters that they think represents themselves. Encourage them to think about the character that resonates with them as who they are and who they see themselves as being, as well as giving personal examples.</p>	<p>C to choose a character that most fits with them at the present moment and give examples of how they identify with them. C to explain which parts of the character they relate to the most and why.</p>
<p><b>4</b> Now ask C to identify five family members/significant people in their life and ask them to match to the characters.</p>	<p>C to use examples of how they identify with the characters they attributed to their family members.</p>

## ACTIVITY 1 (continued)

### Exploring their own identity

#### Reflection activities:

Once you've finished, it's important for C to reflect on the habits, behaviours and attitudes that come with either:

- A. Overplaying the favourite characters
- B. Underplaying the least favourite characters

Ask C to reflect on their characters and how they have a positive and negative impact on themselves, their family and their community.

You can also discuss the interplay of ethnicity and gender, for example feminine stereotypes and how this affects how they see themselves.

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CHARACTERS

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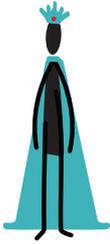
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6

5C CHECKLIST

# CHARACTER QUALITIES



## RULER

- Rational
- Strategic
- Authoritative
- Attentive to detail
- Clear objective
- Sets direction



## WARRIOR/HERO

- Competitive
- Goal driven
- Motivating
- Champion
- Challenging
- Risk taking
- Determined to win



## CAREGIVER

- Compassionate
- Emotionally intelligent
- Reassuring
- Good listener
- Builds trust
- Supportive
- Open and encouraging



## REBEL

- Creative
- Imagineer
- Innovates
- Optimistic
- Visionary
- Provocateur
- Experiments
- Sows seeds

# OVERPLAYING CHARACTERISTICS



## ~~RULER~~ CONTROL FREAK

- Perfectionist
- Overcautious
- Inflexible
- Hypercritical
- Boring
- Cold and distant



## ~~WARRIOR/HERO~~ BULLY

- Intimidating
- Impatient
- Aggressive
- Winning at all costs
- Domineering



## ~~CAREGIVER~~ SMOTHERER

- Suffocating
- Intrusive
- People pleasing
- Unfocused
- Over-emotional
- 'Pink and fluffy'



## ~~REBEL~~ RULE-BREAKER

- Chaotic
- Frustrating
- Unrealistic
- Confusing

# UNDERPLAYING CHARACTERISTICS



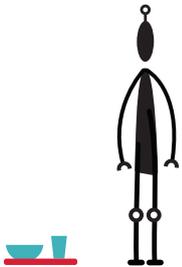
## ~~RULER~~ ABDICATOR

- Lacking authority
- Unprepared
- Vague
- Illogical
- Flaky
- Lack of direction



## ~~WARRIOR/HERO~~ WEAKLING

- Submissive
- Under confident
- Inhibited
- Undisciplined



## ~~CAREGIVER~~ ROBOT

- Unfeeling
- Insensitive
- Removed
- Lacking empathy



## ~~REBEL~~ FOLLOWER

- Unimaginative
- Blinkered
- Dull
- Rigid
- Unaspiring
- Plays safe

## ACTIVITY 2

### Exploring identity in relation to others

Approx. 30–40 mins

#### Session objective

To encourage C to think about how they think they are seen by others.

#### Method

This is a storytelling activity using the archetypes from Activity 1.

**Key themes:** CO-CREATED · COORDINATED

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5C CHECKLIST

## ACTIVITY 2 (continued)

### Exploring identity in relation to others

Session leader	Child
<p><b>1</b> Introduce session as using storytelling to think about themselves and those around them. Ask C to divide a page into 6 equal parts into a storyboard and number them 1-6 in order.</p> <p><b>2</b> Tell C to build a scene using the character they chose as themselves, as well as those of their family/people around them. In this scene, they will have to undergo a mission with obstacles in the way.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> the emphasis here should be on how the characters interact with each other and not so much on the scene context, so try not to spend too long on thinking up a scenario.</p> <p>Using each square:</p> <p><b>Sq. 1</b> – place/setting</p> <p><b>Sq. 2</b> – task facing main character chosen by C</p> <p><b>Sq. 3</b> – things that hinder main character</p> <p><b>Sq. 4</b> – things that help</p> <p><b>Sq. 5</b> – main action/turning point</p> <p><b>Sq. 6</b> – aftermath/what follows main action</p> <p>Use family members as other characters in the story interacting with the main character, exploring their strengths/weaknesses.</p>	<p>C to discuss what they want to get out of the session.</p> <p>C to create this scene, if needed getting prompts/inspiration from favourite films/TV shows but using their own characters for themselves and their own family/people around them.</p> <p>C to fill out storyboard, being as creative as possible and with prompts where needed.</p> <p>C to think creatively about how the people around them fit into the story, starting a conversation between their character and another in the story.</p>

#### Reflection activities:

What has C found out about themselves?

What do they notice about their relationship with others?

Is there any aspect of the story that surprised them?

# ACTIVITY 3

## Identity mapping - exploring identity disruptors

Approx. 40 mins

### Session objective

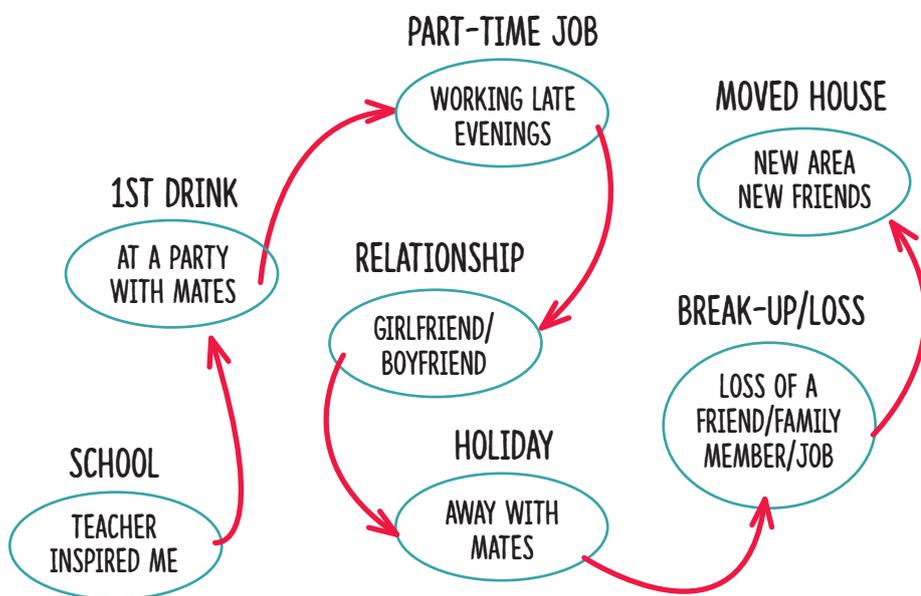
To explore events or landmarks that have shaped who and where C is today.

### Method

This session involves creating a visual autobiography. It can be used to reflect on C's journey so far, pinpointing moments where they feel something changed in their life and how this may have affected them and their behaviour.

**Key themes:** CO-CREATED · CUSTOMISED

Example of a 'Life Map'



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5C CHECKLIST

## ACTIVITY 3 (continued)

### Identity mapping - exploring identity disruptors

Session leader	Child
<p><b>1</b> Introduce the session as a way for C to think about their life up to this point.</p> <p><b>2</b> Ask C to draw a map of their life on a big piece of paper, from birth to now. Encourage them to be as creative as possible in how they present it.</p> <p><b>3</b> Encourage C to consider both positive and challenging times that have shaped who they are today.</p> <p><b>4</b> Ask C to choose 2-3 landmarks from their life that seem most significant to them.</p> <p>Explain to C that during each of the stages an archetype/character would have been present and shaped their identity during that event (good or bad). Ask them to identify which character they think would have been there.</p>	<p>C to think about the significant landmarks, milestones, and turning points that form the map of their journey to where they are now. Get C to think about key decisions they've made, individuals, role models or experiences that have influenced them, detours they have taken, times they were tested and obstacles they have overcome.</p> <p>C to take each one and imagine a snapshot of that landmark. This may be an image of them at the time, the place they were in, the people around them, or it could be something entirely symbolic. C to write a description of what this particular landmark means to them, what they've learned and how it has influenced/impacted them.</p>

#### Reflection activity:

Ask C to consider what they've written – how have these events shaped where they are?

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5C CHECKLIST

## ACTIVITY 4

### The C and their social community

Approx. 30 mins

#### Session objective

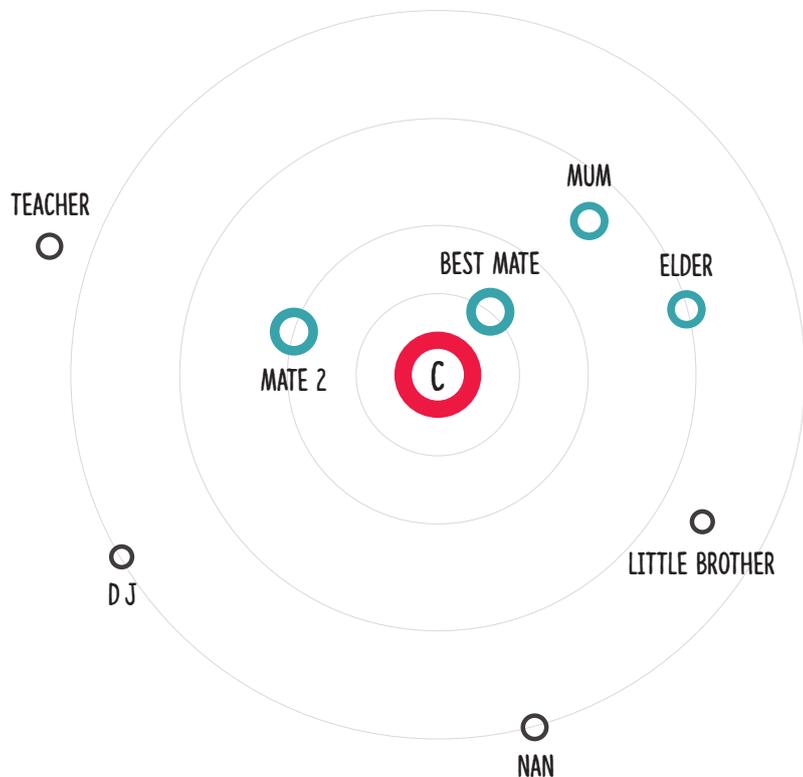
To get C thinking about the relationships and social networks around them.

#### Method

This activity involves visually representing C's social community, getting them to think about their futures and how they might want the support systems around them to change.

**Key themes:** CONSTRUCTIVE · CUSTOMISED

Example of a 'Social Atom' (see following page)



## ACTIVITY 4 (continued)

### The C and their social community

Session leader	Child
<p><b>1</b> Introduce the session as enabling C to think about the community around them, where they sit in it, and where they want to be in the future.</p> <p><b>2</b> Session leader to share this information with C; <b>Social Atom:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A diagram that represents the self in relation to other people, life events and the emotional nature of those relationships</li> <li>– A tool for understanding life relationships</li> <li>– A basis for exploring social dynamics in groups</li> <li>– Clarifies the present and can create a point for change</li> </ul> <p><b>3</b> Session leader to ask C to think about 8 people they associate with in their day-to-day lives. Session leader to allow C to lead but give prompts on how each person has influenced C's identity.</p> <p>Session leader to put the list of the 8 people in eye view, so this can be referred to whilst creating social atom/ community map.</p> <p>Support by recapping some of the things said about each person from the earlier discussion.</p> <p><b>Remember:</b> do not influence their decision – it is purely their perception. This activity can be repeated for their future to show where they see themselves in 5 and/or 10 years. It can be done a few times in different potential scenarios, e.g. if they get a job.</p>	<p>C to list family/significant others they associate with in their day-to-day lives (good or bad).</p> <p>C to share who each person is and how they have influenced or impacted their lives.</p> <p>C to draw on a large piece of paper with them in the centre.</p> <p>They need to place family members/ significant others around the figure of themselves, using physical distance on the paper to represent the closeness of their relationship – i.e. the close they place the figure, the closer their relationship.</p> <p>C to use cut outs of the characters, labelled as people they are placing around themselves based on 'the ruler', 'the warrior', 'the caregiver' and 'the rebel'.</p> <p>C to re-create the map a few times to reflect where they see themselves in the future.</p> <p><b>Reflection activities:</b></p> <p>What has C found out about themselves?</p> <p>What do they notice about their relationship with others?</p> <p>Is there any aspect of the story that surprised them?</p> <p>C should reflect on the social support they can see from the visual.</p>

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5C CHECKLIST

# ACTIVITY 5

## Identifying 'Change Hooks'

Approx. 30 mins

(can be continued or completed at home)

### Session objective

To get C thinking about what they can/want to achieve and what they believe are the challenges they face in getting there.

### Method

This activity uses images and other resources to create an A2 visual representation of their 'New World' in the form of a scene or mood board.

Do encourage C to use a variety of resources, including books, magazines, internet images, drawings/paintings and words.

**Key themes:** CONSTRUCTIVE · CUSTOMISED · CO-CREATED

Session leader	Child
<p><b>1</b> Introduce the session and explain the aims</p>	C to ask any questions and discuss what they would like to get out of the session.
<p><b>2</b> Provide C with the resources to create the image.</p>	C to choose resources they would like to use to create their piece.
<p><b>3</b> Ask C the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What really matters to you?</li><li>• What is integral to your selfhood?</li><li>• What fits (or does not fit) your sense of vocation?</li><li>• What is yours to do in the world?</li><li>• What does your New World look like?</li><li>• What are the facts behind the challenges you are facing?</li><li>• What is your timeline for achieving your vision?</li></ul>	C to cut and stick images etc. onto an A2 size paper, bearing in mind the session leader's questions.

### Reflection activities:

How does C think this mood board might change in 5 or 10 years?

# ACTIVITY 6

## Retelling your story

| Approx. 30 mins |

### Session objective

To get C discussing their future and what lies between them and achieving this vision.

### Method

This activity draws on the mood board/scene from Activity 5, and uses the archetypes from Activity 1.

The session will also lead into reflections on overcoming fear.

As session leader, you should support C in visualising their future – what it looks and feels like to be there.

**Key themes:** CONSTRUCTIVE · CUSTOMISED · CONSISTENT

## ACTIVITY 6 (continued)

### Retelling your story

Session leader	Child
<p><b>1</b> Introduce the session and explain the aims.</p> <p><b>2</b> Ask C to tell their future story using the work created in Activity 5. Ask C to consider different questions drawing on other sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who are the other major characters?</li><li>• How can they help you?</li><li>• What are you able to influence?</li><li>• What can you do little or nothing about?</li><li>• What might get in your way?</li><li>• Character – over/underplay</li><li>• Behaviour – how does this character manifest in you (for this project)?</li><li>• Action/remedy – what can you/your characters do differently?</li></ul> <p><b>3</b> Feed back on what C is saying, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I observed...</li><li>• I imagine that...</li><li>• I feel...</li><li>• My and/or your action is to...</li></ul>	<p>C to ask any questions and discuss what they would like to get out of the session.</p> <p>C to consider questions asked by Session leader.</p>

#### Reflection activities:

C to identify fears and discuss ways of overcoming them.

## ii. 5C Checklist to help evaluate your approach

HOW DOES THE SUPPORT IDENTIFY AND BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF THE CHILD?

HOW ARE ACTIVITIES, ROLES AND INTERACTIONS FACILITATING AND SUPPORTING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT?

HOW DOES THE SUPPORT GUIDE AND ENABLE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT?

HOW DOES THE SUPPORT EMPOWER THE CHILD TO BE ABLE TO MAKE POSITIVE CHOICES?

HOW IS THE SUPPORT ORIENTED TOWARDS THE FUTURE, RATHER THAN JUST THE PRESENT/PAST?

HOW ARE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR THE CHILD TARGETED AND MEASURED?

HOW DOES THE SUPPORT MOTIVATE AND PREPARE THE CHILD FOR POSITIVE IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT?



**CONSTRUCTIVE**

HOW DO SERVICES ENGAGE WITH THE CHILD TO ENSURE FULL PARTICIPATION?

HOW IS THE CHILD ENCOURAGED TO FEEL ENGAGED WITH PLANNING AND ACTIONING SUPPORT?

HOW ARE THE CHILD'S INFORMAL SUPPORTERS PREPARED AND INCLUDED IN PLANNING AND SUPPORT?



**CO-CREATED**

HOW DOES SUPPORT RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY ON IDENTITY AND ITS DEVELOPMENT?

HOW IS THE SUPPORT TAILORED TO THE CHILD'S SPECIFIC IDENTITY ROUTE?

HOW DOES THE SUPPORT TACKLE ALL BARRIERS ON THE CHILD'S ROUTE?



**CUSTOMISED**

HOW IS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THE FOCUS FROM THE START?

HOW ARE ANY TRANSITIONS BEING ANTICIPATED TO PROVIDE A SEAMLESS TRANSITION IN ANY PROGRAMME?

HOW IS THE STABILITY OF SUPPORT RELATIONSHIPS ASSURED?

HOW IS SUPPORT ENSURED AFTER THE END OF ANY STATUTORY PERIOD?



**CONSISTENT**

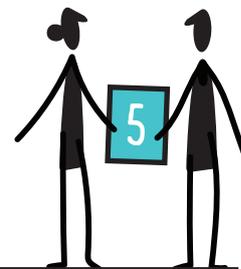
HOW ARE ALL NECESSARY PARTNERS ACROSS SECTORS IDENTIFIED, ENGAGED AND MANAGED?

HOW IS IT ENSURED THAT ALL AGENCIES ARE FOCUSED ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT?

HOW IS PLANNING COORDINATED?

HOW DOES INFORMATION FLOW EFFICIENTLY BETWEEN AGENCIES?

HOW CAN AGENCIES HOLD EACH OTHER TO ACCOUNT?



**COORDINATED**

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