

Safer Dunfermline – education scheme on violence and knife prevention

A programme for secondary school students which includes a series of lessons and workshops to teach children about violence and knife crime prevention.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Violence (other)
Organisation	Police Scotland
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Region	Scotland
Partners	Police Education
Stage of practice	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	October 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Children and young people
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Aim

The core aim of the violence prevention transition project is to address the heightened risk of violence and social conflict during the transition from primary to secondary school.

The initiative aims to provide early intervention through a peer-led and youth-empowered approach. This is to prevent students from experiencing increased vulnerabilities due to shifts in peer dynamics, exposure to new social pressures, and the influence of digital platforms.

By embedding these lessons into the school transition process, the Safer Dunfermline aims to:

- prevent violence before it starts by fostering respectful relationships and positive behavioural norms from an early stage
- empower young people to act as active bystanders and take responsibility for creating a safe school environment
- promote leadership and mentorship among senior pupils, equipping them with valuable skills while reinforcing a positive school culture
- provide a sustainable violence prevention that is a core part of the school transition process

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Safer Dunfermline are to:

- increase awareness of violence and knife crime prevention
- reduce early involvement in violent behaviour incidents
- improve leadership skills for senior pupils
- improve cross-year relationships between the students
- improve inclusivity across the school by encouraging mentorship and peer support across year groups

Description

The peer education pilot at Dunfermline High School (part of the Safer Dunfermline initiative) focuses on early violence prevention within the school's transition programme.

Safer Dunfermline uses a toolkit that combines resources from two established programmes, Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) and No Knives, Better Lives (NKBL). MVP was originally developed in the United States and focuses primarily on male-perpetrated gender-based violence. The project team identified a need for a more balanced approach, providing students with a more comprehensive understanding of violence prevention, inclusivity and empathy.

In partnership with YouthLink Scotland, the toolkit was expanded to include:

- girl-on-girl violence
- internalised misogyny
- positive masculinity
- healthy conflict resolution
- complexities of social media-fuelled conflicts

By adapting existing resources, the toolkit was developed at no additional financial cost. The only resources required were the time and expertise of teachers, police officers, and YouthLink Scotland staff who supported and led the project.

Pilot rollout

Dunfermline High School was strategically chosen for the pilot due to the centralisation of its cluster feeder primary schools within Dunfermline itself. Unlike other secondary schools in the region, whose feeder schools extend across wider geographical areas, this centralised structure made logistical planning simpler and more efficient for the pilot phase. 16 senior pupils were chosen and trained face-to-face on how to use the toolkit. The pupils then delivered five separate workshops to Primary 7 pupils across seven feeder primary schools in the cluster.

These workshops focused on preparing younger students for their transition to secondary school while fostering positive relationships between year groups. They gain early exposure to violence prevention, while the secondary school aged peer educators build their leadership skills and play a positive role in their school community.

The content includes:

- equipping pupils with knowledge of the causes, consequences, and legal implications of violence
- raising awareness of peer pressure, social media conflicts, and their role in escalating violence
- providing strategies to resist peer pressure, resolve conflicts, and seek help when needed
- fostering responsibility and promote positive role modelling within the school.

Unlike traditional top-down educational methods, this programme gives senior pupils ownership of the learning process, creating a sense of responsibility and leadership. By allowing older students to deliver workshops, the initiative bridges the gap between year groups, encouraging more relatable and impactful conversations that resonate with younger pupils. This project fills a gap left by traditional interventions, offering a sustainable, youth-driven model that embeds violence prevention into everyday school life and ensures long-term cultural change across the student body.

This program is now integrated into the cluster primary school's annual priorities as deliverable outcomes.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the project is on an ongoing basis and is still in the early stages. Initial feedback has been positive and further data captures are ongoing to establish any reduction in related offending.

Overall impact

The initiative has had a significant impact on the primary and secondary school pupils involved. Over 350 Primary 7 students across six feeder primary schools have participated in interactive workshops that address gender-based violence, positive masculinity, social media-fuelled conflict, and respectful relationships.

For the 16 senior pupils trained as peer educators, the programme has developed their leadership, communication, and mentoring skills, while fostering a stronger sense of responsibility and pride within the school community. Early feedback from teachers and staff highlights improved confidence and personal development among these pupils.

While the pilot phase was focused on the Dunfermline High School cluster, discussions are underway to expand the programme across other secondary schools in Dunfermline and West Fife, with interest from other educational clusters already growing. The success of the pilot has set a foundation for scaling the programme regionally.

It has also improved school transition experience. Primary 7 pupils reported feeling more confident and better prepared for the move to secondary school due to the positive relationships formed with senior pupils during the workshops.

There has been a shift in school culture at Dunfermline High School with a noticeable increase in student engagement on issues of violence prevention and respectful relationships. Senior pupils now view themselves as role models, contributing to a more positive and supportive school environment.

There is a broadened focus on violence prevention. The addition of themes such as girl-on-girl violence and internalised misogyny has created a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to violence prevention.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive:

- teachers from both primary and secondary schools praised the programme's ability to address complex issues in an age-appropriate, engaging way
- headteachers noted improved relationships between the primary and secondary schools, enhancing the overall transition process
- peer educators shared that participating in the programme made them feel more empowered, and several have expressed interest in pursuing leadership roles beyond the school setting

The initiative is on course to achieving its initial aims:

- increased awareness among young people on violence prevention, gender-based violence, and healthy relationships
- prevention of early involvement in violent behaviour by addressing issues before students transitioned to secondary school
- development of leadership skills for the peer educators, equipping them with valuable skills for future education, training, or employment

Learning

- One of the biggest successes of the initiative was the ease of collaboration between existing partners Dunfermline High School, YouthLink Scotland, and Police Scotland. They were already aligned in their goals of promoting youth safety and leadership. Leveraging these pre-existing relationships meant that there was already a foundation of trust and mutual understanding, making it easier to agree on objectives and timelines.
- Another key success was the enthusiastic participation of senior pupils as peer educators. Their willingness to take ownership of the programme demonstrated the effectiveness of a youth-led approach, particularly in fostering leadership, responsibility, and meaningful engagement with younger pupils.
- Since the project adapted existing toolkits (MVP and NKBL), there was no need for additional funding to develop new resources. This made implementation more straightforward and allowed efforts to focus on training and delivery rather than financial logistics.
- The integration of the programme into the transition process for Primary 7 pupils also ensured a smooth introduction. This early intervention addressed concerns proactively before issues could escalate at the secondary school level.
- One of the primary challenges was adapting the existing MVP toolkit, which traditionally focuses on male-perpetrated gender-based violence, to be more inclusive and relevant for a younger audience. This required additional research and collaboration with YouthLink Scotland to expand the toolkit's scope to include girl-on-girl violence, internalised misogyny, and positive masculinity.
- Balancing the complexity of these topics while keeping the material age-appropriate for Primary 7 pupils was essential.
- A consistent obstacle was scheduling conflicts with senior pupils. As these students had other academic commitments, fitting training sessions and workshop delivery into their timetables required flexibility and support from the school leadership.
- Additionally, the peer educators had to travel to the cluster primary school independently on foot or using public transport, which had to be factored into the timetabling of the sessions.
- Securing support for the project was a smooth process. The deputies at Dunfermline High School were immediately supportive, recognising the programme's alignment with the school's priorities around violence prevention and student leadership.
- Engagement with the headteachers of the cluster primary schools was also straightforward. During initial meetings, the project leads provided a clear and compelling pitch outlining the programme's objectives and expected benefits for Primary 7 pupils. This quickly secured their commitment to participate in the pilot.

- Once the combined MVP and NKBL toolkit was presented, it received instant approval from all stakeholders. The headteachers also agreed on a timetable for the sessions, allowing the workshops to be seamlessly integrated into the schools' schedules for the duration of the pilot.
- The primary investment was in terms of time and staffing, with teachers, police officers, and youth workers dedicating hours to training peer educators and delivering the sessions. While this wasn't a financial hurdle, it required careful scheduling and support from school leadership to ensure staff could commit without impacting their regular responsibilities.
- The toolkit should be adaptable to meet the specific needs of the target audience. Younger pupils require simplified, age-appropriate language and relatable examples.
- Establishing a feedback loop with educators, peer leaders, and participants ensures continuous improvement and long-term success

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