

Pathways in and
pathways out:

*The role of non-violent
siblings in non-abusive
pathways for young
people*

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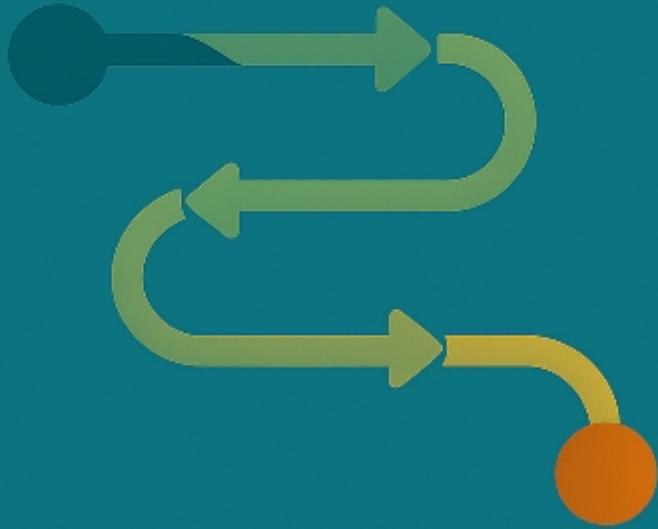


Family violence experiences are strongly associated with onset

- Evidence drawn from population studies
- Primary mechanisms/framework for explaining this is social learning theory;
 - family relationships teach us effective and appropriate methods for conflict resolution
- But, not all young people who experience family violence go on to perpetrate violence themselves...why?



Explaining Pathways In



- Pathway 1: Family dynamics / strain
- Pathway 2: Learned behaviours
- Pathway 3: Instrumental violence
- Pathway 4: Trauma responses
- Pathway 5: Misogyny and entitlement

Pathway 1: Family systems strain

*When
connection
does not feel
safe*

- Experiences of DFV can undermine and change the dynamics of family systems, and relationships between members
- Young people may be “parentified” because of the impact of the abuse on protective parents
- Young people may “blame” the protective parent for the abuse they experienced
- Young people may feel that one sibling is being “favoured” more so than them or other siblings
- Attachment can be disrupted by traumatic events, CSA, separation from caregivers, absence of caring relationships, caregiver mental illness and substance use, parental rejection and blaming
- Disrupted attachment:
 - Undermines our feelings of safety
 - Undermines our confidence in our ability to explore the world
 - Shapes our internalised beliefs about ourselves (e.g., am I worthy of love?) and others (e.g., are other people trustworthy?)



Pathway 2: Learned behaviours

*When abuse is
seen as legitimate
and normal*

- Children learn about safety, trust, and relationships through early caregiving.
- Children who experience DFV may come to see violence as a legitimate or effective relational strategy
- This is especially likely when:
 - abusive behaviours get the result that the young person wants (e.g., compliance)
 - peer groups reinforce the behaviours
 - when they are not held accountable for their behaviours.
- **The behaviour may begin as reactive but evolve into patterned coercion over time.**





This behaviour was quite normalised in my household, so I did it without much thinking

(Bethany, 18-year-old female, user of violence)

Me being abused from a young age, led to mentality when angry that violence is acceptable

(Mark, 17-year-old male, use of violence)

I believe it was due to the presence of it in my own household and seeing my parents hit us from a young age

(Leah, 17-year-old female, user of violence)

it was the normal form of making someone do something for you in our household

(Nora, 20-year-old female, user of violence)

Just being around people yelling all the time and being verbally abused a lot I thought it was a normal and appropriate way to communicate

(Lou, 20-year-old female, user of violence)

Pathway 3: Instrumental violence

- Like other forms of interpersonal violence, AVITH may serve children and young people in some way
 - Feelings of control
 - Feelings of power and strength
 - Retaliation
 - Self-protection

*When abuse gets
you what you want*





Always winning arguments

(Ben, 18-year-old male)

The need to stand up for myself

(Harlem, 19-year-old male)

Self defense, anger, trying to protect my younger siblings, increasing my self esteem by feeling more powerful

(Liam, 20-year-old male)

Seeing that my dad used violence against me in a way that showed me that it was completely useless for me to fight back because I wasn't strong enough. Then used that mentality to use violence against my younger sister because she was an easy person to show that I'm stronger than them *(Niamh, 19-year-old female)*.

From experiencing violence and being sick of it. Standing up for myself came out in the form of verbal abuse towards them

(Lucy, 19-year-old female)

Pathway 4: Trauma-based dysregulation

*When violence is
a survival strategy*

- Traumatic events can cause the brain to stay in a constant state of threat.
- The stress response system is always “on”—ready to fight, flee, or freeze.
- What looks like aggression may actually be:
 - Hypervigilance - interpreting everyday situations as dangerous
 - Emotional overload - reacting explosively due to poor regulation
 - Survival learning - using aggression to feel safe or in control
- Some young people appear calm or compliant at first. Once they feel secure, suppressed trauma surfaces—through anger, fear, or violence.





Originally, I had three of them, but the older one became extremely violent, and I just couldn't cope with him, and felt that better to have the two, um, or you know, I didn't want to send all three, so he had to leave.

The oldest boy, he was really good for the first couple of months. He helped me find my way, if you will. But after about three months, he just refused to do anything. He changed almost overnight. It was - it was as if he - and obviously I've reflected on this - it was as if he, felt that the boys, his brothers were okay, and he didn't have to be the parent anymore.

Eleanor, female, victim-survivor of AVITH.

Pathway 5: Misogyny and entitlement

*When abuse is
used to punish
and control*

- Violence is not just about emotion or trauma—it's about power, entitlement, and gendered control.
- AVITH often involves sons using violence toward their mothers. This can include coercive, controlling, or degrading behaviours—mirroring the gendered dynamics of adult IPV.
- Some young men express resentment toward maternal authority or blame their mothers for:
 - perceived failures to protect them from DFV
 - 'breaking up' the family, or
 - failing to fulfil their gendered role as carers.
- May be more likely in situations where children are mandated to have visitation with the abusive parent (i.e., have ongoing exposure to abuse)

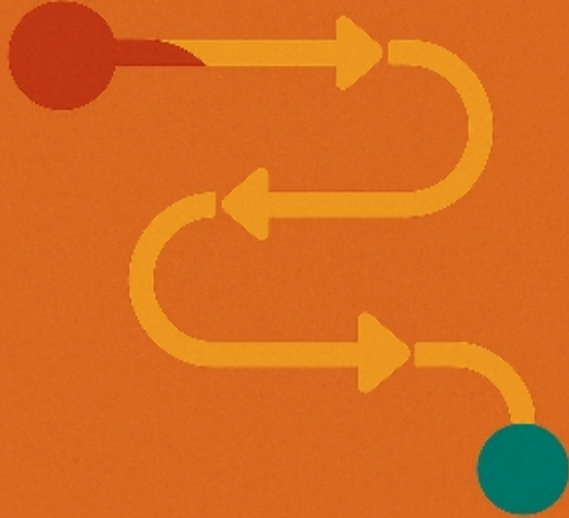




There has been a follow-on of violence within my home when we first left, where the boys themselves became violent. We have worked through that and as a result the middle son...he's now living with his father. Not the best choice but safer for the rest of the family that he's not with us. He very much follows his dad...The misogyny and the hatred of relationships. It's all there. They feed off each other. The hatred of me - not hatred but you know what I mean. It's not a healthy environment, however, he is loved. He's safe there, and we couldn't do that for him here.

Ruby, 45-year old woman, victim-survivor of IPV and AVITH.

Explaining Pathways Out



- The majority of young people who experience DFV do NOT go on to use these behaviours against others
- ...WHY?
 - How do we avoid onset (i.e., the use of AVITH)
 - How do we avoid the persistence/escalation of AVITH into IPV?

Having one positive adult in a young person's life, can significantly reduce negative outcomes attributable to traumatic experiences



The role of relationships in resilience/ desistance pathways

Relational goods - behaviour is motivated by a desire to maintain access to the 'goods' inherent within relationships (Weaver, 2013; Weaver & McNeill, 2015)

Access to prosocial others provides the opportunity for role-modelling; an alternative self to model the self on (Nixon, 2020)

Mitigation of the negative impacts of traumatic life events (Dirks et al., 2015).



What about siblings?

- Having positive relationships with pro-social siblings has been shown to improve outcomes for “vulnerable” populations:
 - Trans/Non-binary
 - Foster/OOHC
 - Experienced trauma



What about siblings?

'...the sibling relationship is unique in its longevity and can be one of the most influential relationships in one's life. Therefore the impact siblings have on one another should not be minimized'

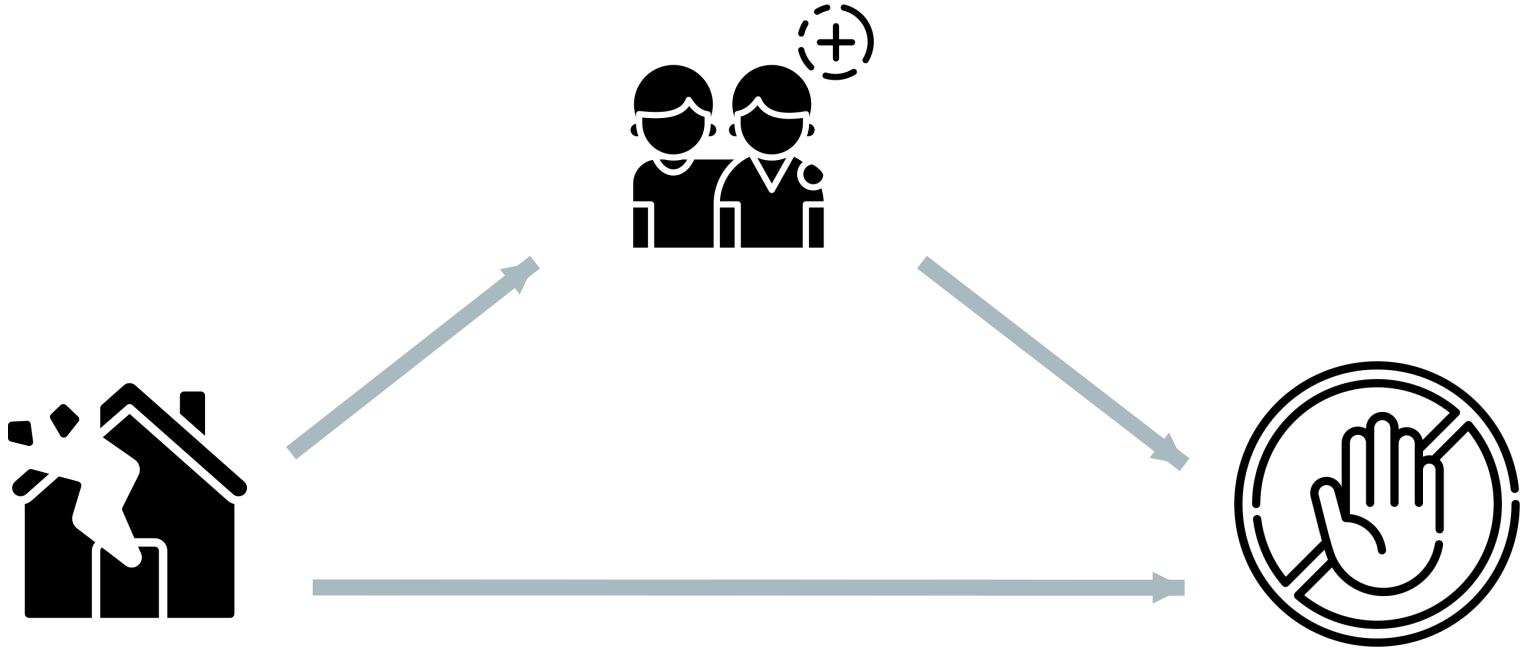
(Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007: 148)



What about siblings?

- Siblings may be particularly important in contexts where relationships with protective parents has been undermined
- Protective parents report feeling less “capable” due to:
 - the impacts of the abuse on them,
 - feelings of guilt and shame for their children’s experiences (e.g., difficulties establishing boundaries), and
 - fear of their children (Kaspiew et al., 2017)





Methods



Data collection method

- Survey of 5,000 young people (16-20 yrs)
- Recruited through online research panels (non-representative)

Survey domains

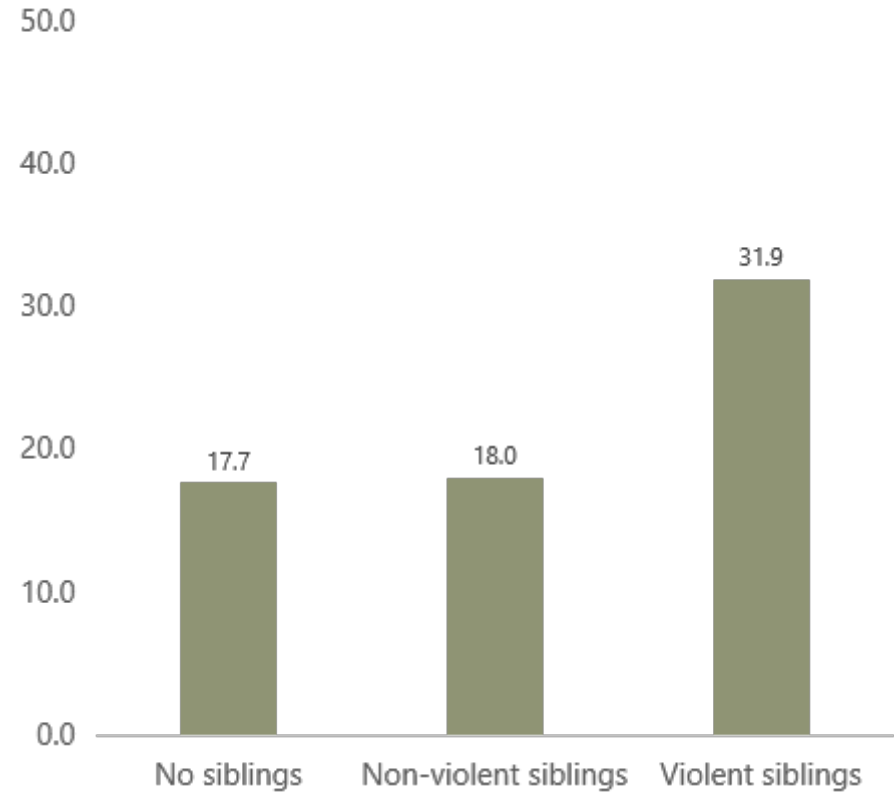
- Sociodemographics
- Experiences of family violence prior to 18 years (witness and target)
- Perpetration of AVITH
- Help-seeking behaviours
- Impacts

Definition of family violence

- Physical violence, sexual violence, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, property damage, threats, gender and sexual identity-based abuse

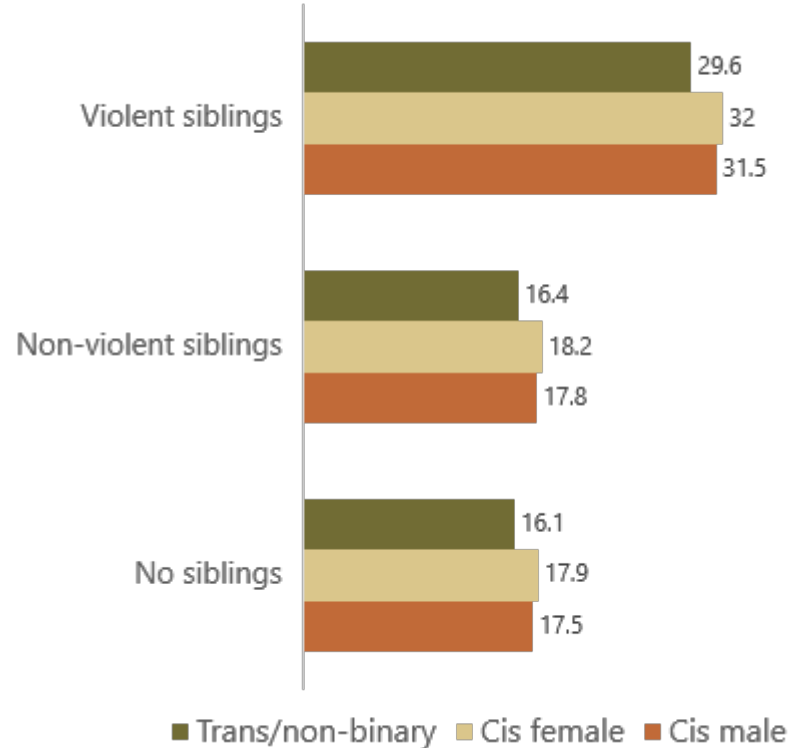
Model 1: Non-violent siblings vs violent siblings

Presence of non-violent siblings decreases risk of AVITH by 15%



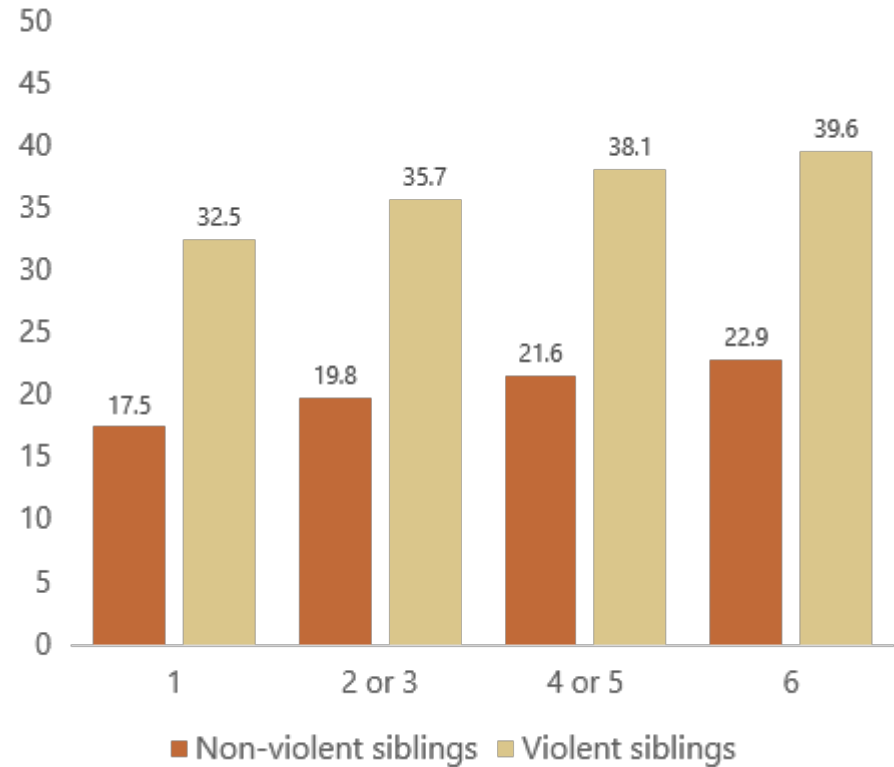
Model 1: Non-violent siblings vs violent siblings

Non-violent siblings
reduced risk of AVITH
regardless of gender of the
young person



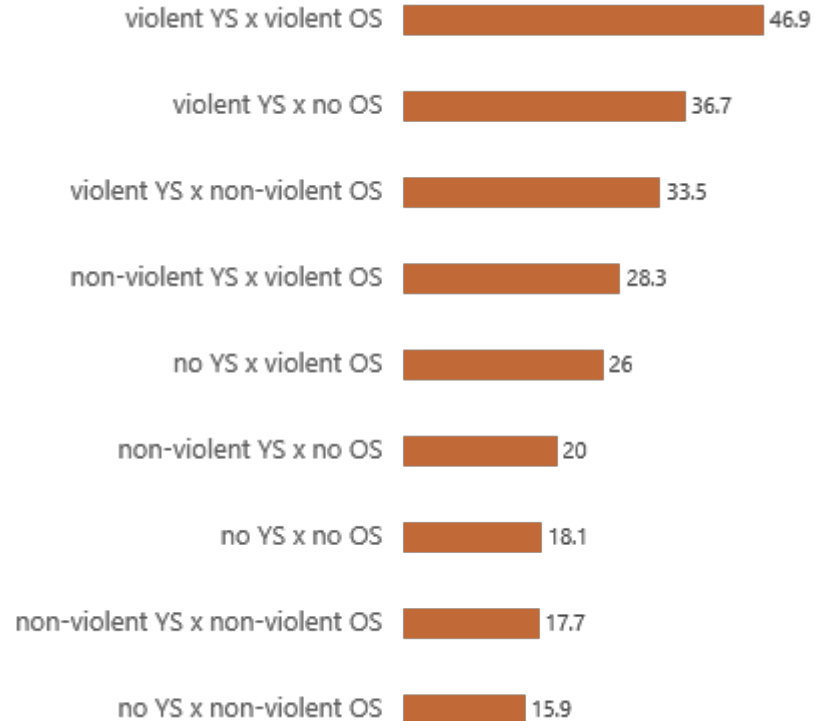
Model 2: Household size

- After controlling for sibling count non-violent siblings still significantly reduced AVITH risk
- The protective effect of non-violent siblings appears slightly weaker in larger families (6+ siblings)
- Bottom line: it's the behaviour of siblings – not how many you have – that drives AVITH risk.



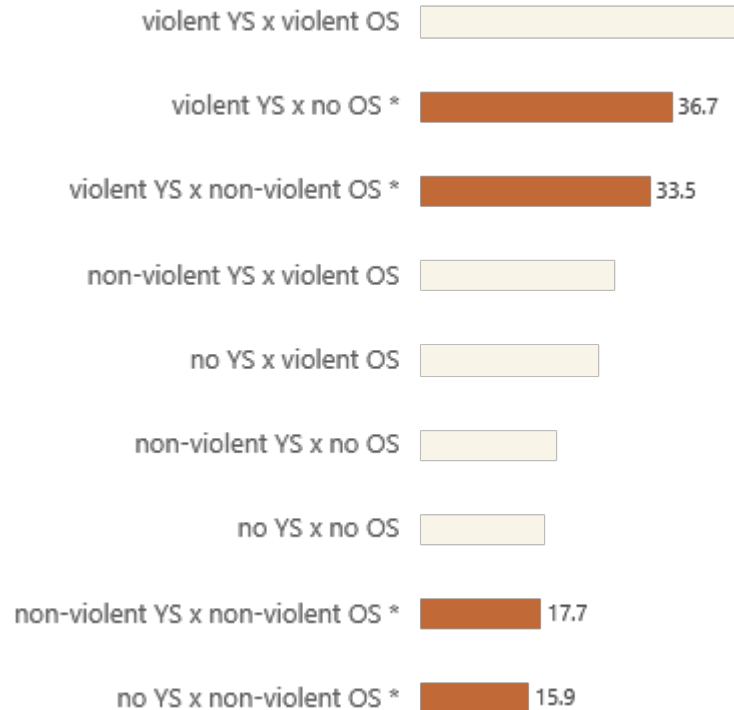
Model 3: Birth order

- **Compounding risk** : violent older + violent younger siblings together produce the highest perpetration risk (46.9%) – risk isn't just additive, it stacks.

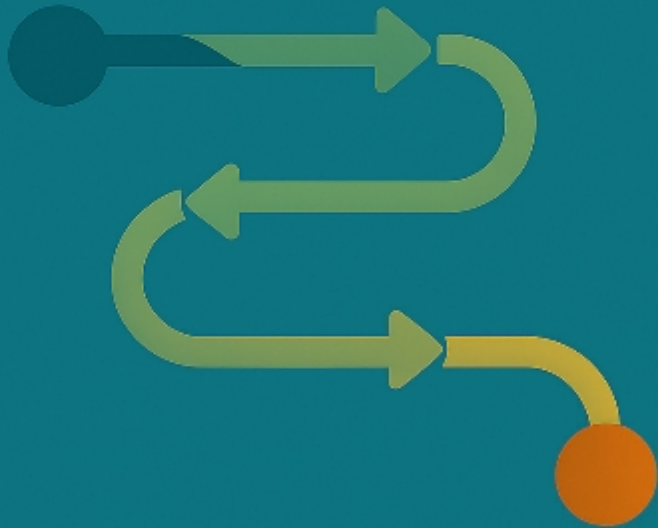


Model 3: Birth order

- A **non-violent older sibling** is **protective** across contexts – whether the younger sibling is violent, non-violent, or absent.
- Having a non-violent older sibling is more protective than having no older sibling at all - may play an active protective/modelling role
- **Non-violent younger siblings** don't show this same buffering effect – their presence looks roughly neutral to marginally risk-increasing compared to having no younger sibling, across all older-sibling contexts.

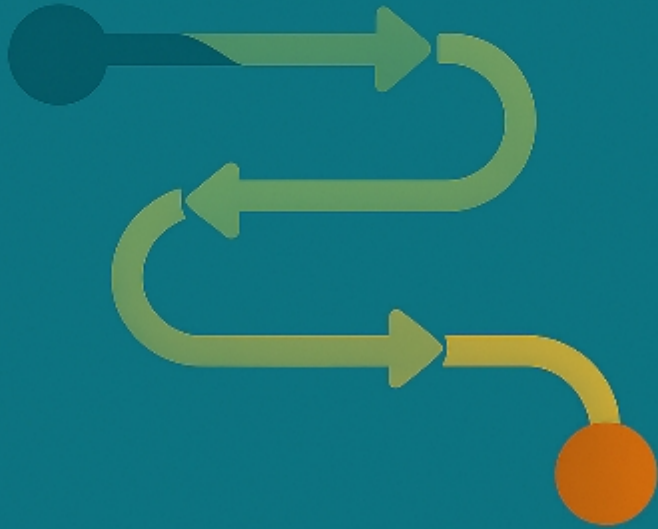


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Explaining Pathways In



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Alternative selves

- Young people who use violence see themselves through the lens of:
 - Shame (“I’m a bad kid”)
 - Defensiveness (“Everyone’s out to get me”)
 - Limitation (“There’s no other way for me to be”)
- Alternate selves show what’s possible: Exposure to people with similar lived experience who have moved away from violence helps young people:
- Role models create “possible selves”—alternative identities that feel achievable.
- Especially powerful when the person modelling change has experienced similar trauma or systemic disadvantage and so speaks from a place of understanding, not authority

THANK YOU

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