

# Waltham Forest Strategic Partnerships 7minute briefing: 5:59

For all those working with adults, children and families



Strategic Partnership Boards  
SAFETY SAFEGUARDING WELLBEING

Message from our children: "The small things you do can make a big difference to the life of a young person"

## 1. THIS STORY

**5:59** is a short film that has been created by a group of young people. This briefing aims to set out the key learning that can be taken from 5:59.

Jamal's experiences are sadly not unique. Organised criminals purposely prey on children and vulnerable adults. Often those who are being exploited don't see themselves as a victim.

This is why it is so important to take a trauma-informed approach.



## 2. OWING OLDERS = RISK

In one version of the film, Jamal is supported to get away from exploitation. It's important to remember that he 'owed the olders half a brick'. This is known as drug debt which is just one of the ways that organised criminals use to exploit children and vulnerable adults. Debt can also be incurred through other means, such as weapons or money and isn't like a bank loan that you pay off eventually. The 'olders' have power and control and will make up their own terms that come with threats.

Even though Jamal escaped, it's likely that there was still a risk of harm to him and his family. Drug debt doesn't just disappear, even if the child gets away and the risk can increase if a child is re-arrested and more drugs are seized again. Drug debt is a hidden risk that's difficult to assess as children and young people won't necessarily recognise it as such and will likely be unwilling to talk about it.

Another aspect to think about is constrained choice. You saw Jamal acting tough, as though he'd chosen that path but in many cases, due to their circumstances and the impact of trauma, a young person may not be in a position to make any choice at all. Find out more in the [Safeguarding Adolescents Practice Guide](#)

## 3. CHILDREN FIRST

It is so important that we see children as children first.

It may be tempting to view and treat some children as mini adults which can often be the case for Black children who are more likely to be perceived and treated as adults, sometimes referred to as 'adulthoodification'. This could lead to them receiving less of, if any safeguarding response than to their white counterparts.

Read about [Child E](#), who was thought to be older. You can also read about why Black girls' and women's [experiences of child sexual abuse](#) are often missed.

Making a connection with a child or vulnerable adult in a reachable moment could be potentially life changing for them.

## 6. SAFETY PLANNING

Safety planning is key to keeping children safe. You should make sure you have gathered information from everyone to inform that plan, including the child.

Relocating and excluding young people from specific areas can help to safeguard but that doesn't mean the debt /risk fully goes away. A safety plan should be reviewed regularly. Consider what other processes you could use such as [Exploitation Risk Panel](#) or [National Referral Mechanism?](#)

## 5. WORKING OUTSIDE OF SET HOURS

The film presents two versions of events. The outcome for Jamal is good in the version where the worker answers the call at 5:59pm, just before she is due to finish work.

It's important to note that not everyone would be able to do that. What's also important to consider is, if on the occasion she wasn't able to directly support at that time, what are the alternatives? Who else could she have called to get help?

## 4. EMPOWERING PARENTS

Parents need support too. They shouldn't be judged either. Organised criminal activity is complex to understand and can be distressing, especially for parents whose children are being exploited.

It's crucial that we work with parents to raise awareness and improve understanding. There are services that can help with this, such as [Ask Us](#). There are also parent workshops which are offered online for free.

## 7.

Read on for  
**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Visit [www.walthamforest.gov.uk/strategicpartnerships](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/strategicpartnerships) for other useful resources

## Another story: MIKE

14 year old Mike first became known to services due to missing episodes, and was allocated a missing outreach worker, who offered support. Due to further concerns the missing outreach worker referred him to the Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) to discuss his circumstances with multi-agency colleagues and to request additional support for Mike.

Soon after, Mike was arrested for robbery, carrying weapons and drug offences. Everything he was carrying was seized. There were more concerns about Mike as it seemed clear he was being exploited and now owed a drugs debt because of the drugs and weapons taken away by police.

This led to Mike being allocated a social worker and a youth at risk worker. There was still input from the missing outreach worker. They worked together to support Mike and his mother. A referral into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) was made for Mike by his social worker because of the concerns that he was being trafficked for criminal exploitation. Mike was also allocated a police officer from the Met Police Exploitation Team. Mike continued to go missing for periods of time, however the professional network continued to work with Mike and his mother to offer support to keep him safe, including one to one work with Mike around grooming, child criminal exploitation, peers, substance misuse, safety and weapons awareness.

Despite this incident and the support he was getting, Mike continued carrying weapons that he felt he needed for his protection. Those around him and those working with him started to notice changes in his appearance. He had started to lose weight and he wasn't looking after himself. Mike also stopped going to school. He was worried about his own safety and threats he'd received. The social worker and missing outreach worker contacted education to try to come up with a plan for him to safely get back to school.

Mum and Mike have a close relationship and she was a protective factor in his life. She was helped to understand the issues that Mike was going through. She was advised about what she could do with Mike to help him to keep safe, and she encouraged him to access support.

Mum requested to be moved away from the area to keep Mike safe. The social worker contacted housing to initiate the request, and Mum was supported by all the services to find and move to an area that they felt safe in and that they would be safe in. Since relocating Mike has been able to return to education safely and is no longer carrying weapons. He has joined a local gym and is looking healthy. He appears to be thriving and he says he feels a lot safer now.



## Key ingredients for good support:

**COLLABORATION**



with parents,  
carers,  
professionals

**TRAUMA INFORMED**



Each child is  
individual

**PERSONALISED**



What  
went on  
before?

**SHARING INFORMATION**



Talk to each  
other

**RECORDING**

**FLEXIBILITY**



Different ways of  
working?

**PERSISTENCE**

**CREATIVITY**

**RISK ASSESSMENT**



Risk doesn't  
disappear

**HARNESSING REACHABLE MOMENTS**



Having the  
right  
conversation  
at the  
right time



## 7. WHAT YOU CAN DO

**READ** the WF [Safeguarding Adolescents Practice Guide](#)

**USE** the interactive WF [Safeguarding Adolescents Resource Pack](#) to better understand Jamal's story

**WATCH** another short film by WF young people called '[language matters](#)'

**SHARE** 5:59, the film and this briefing widely within your networks

**REFLECT** on Jamal's and Mike's stories. How do you and your agency work with children and young people in drug debt and those who are exploited? Use the three questions across in team discussions or in supervision

**JOIN** the Safeguarding Adolescents Practitioner Network.  
Contact [strategicpartnerships@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:strategicpartnerships@walthamforest.gov.uk) for more information

**REFER** any child or young person you have concerns about to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Call **020 8496 2310** or email [MASHrequests@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:MASHrequests@walthamforest.gov.uk)

For concerns about an adult, contact the safeguarding adults team.  
Call **020 8496 3000** or email [WFDLiaison@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:WFDLiaison@walthamforest.gov.uk)

To find out more about Ask Us, visit <https://ask-us.org.uk/>  
For details about other support available, including for parents, email [communitysafety@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:communitysafety@walthamforest.gov.uk)



No matter, where you work, you have an important role to play. Use these questions to reflect on how you work with those exploited:

SOCIAL CARE

HEALTH

POLICE

EDUCATION

COMMUNITY

PROBATION / YOS

EARLY HELP

HOUSING

1. Where do you see yourself / your agency in Jamal's and Mike's story?

2. What examples are there in your services of support given to children or adults who are exploited?

3. How could you ensure Jamal and Mike got the help they needed if you couldn't take the call at 5:59pm?