Research Report

WAITING FOR THE NEXT BIG BLOW-UP:
FAMILY BREAKDOWN AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

CENTRE POINT

ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Contents

Key findings

- Family breakdown is the leading cause of youth homelessness. Over two-thirds (68 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness say family breakdown was the main reason or one of several reasons they became homeless, and only 12 per cent say their experience of homelessness was unrelated to family breakdown.

- Nearly one in five (19 per cent) of young people indicate they have been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night due to a problem in their household.

Background factors

- Young people with experience of homelessness responded to questions about their family life growing up very differently than the general population of young people, reporting higher levels of domestic abuse, parental mental health or substance use problems, financial pressures, overcrowding risk, and care system experience.

- Each of these factors is associated closely with the likelihood of reporting frequent arguments with a parent/carer and/or their partner.

- Young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and/or neurodiverse were more likely to report frequent arguments with their parent(s)/carer(s) and reported higher rates of abuse.

Conflict triggers

- The topics that trigger arguments between young people and their parent(s)/carer(s) are similar for young people with experience of homelessness and the general population of young people, but young people with experience of homelessness are much more likely to report conflict triggers in general.

- Young people with experience of homelessness reported more frequent arguments with their parent(s)/carer(s), with 59 per cent saying they argued often or all the time as compared to 27 per cent of the general population of young people.

- Over one in ten (12 per cent) of young people who identify as LGBTQ+ report gender identity and pronouns as a conflict trigger, and 15 per cent of this group say their sexual orientation is a conflict trigger.

Leaving home

- Nearly half (47%) of young people with experience of homelessness were asked to leave their family home or given an ultimatum.

- Nearly a third of young people with experience of homelessness (32 per cent) indicated they had to leave home for their own safety, with women much more likely to select this option than men.

- Just under a third (32 per cent) of young people got accommodation through the council or a charity. Over a quarter of young people with experience of homelessness (27%) stayed with a sibling or other relative after leaving home, and the same proportion slept rough or spent the night on transport.

- Interviews revealed several instances of gatekeeping and safeguarding failures on the part of local authorities.

Preventing family breakdown

- Our research shows that preventing family breakdown is an effective way of reducing youth homelessness, but only one in four young people with experience of homelessness ever received support related to family conflict.

- Preventing family breakdown requires a multi-level approach combining increased support for families that are struggling, upstream prevention to identify and reduce risk factors in children, and intergenerational mediation for young people and their parent(s)/carer(s).

- Investing in early prevention and crisis intervention will reduce local authority spend on temporary accommodation and cost to public services more generally, in addition to improving outcomes for young people.

Introduction

Most young people (aged between 16 and 25) supported by Centrepoint became homeless because they left or were made to leave their family household before they were ready to. Friends or family no longer willing or able to accommodate is consistently the most common reason for youth homelessness in general, with over half of young people presenting to local authorities naming this as the reason they became homeless (54 per cent in 2022-23 and 52 per cent in 2021-2022).[1] Behind these figures are individuals and families with diverse, complex, and often very painful stories.

Using a national representative poll of young people, a survey of young people with experience of homelessness, interviews with young people with experiences of homelessness and interviews and focus groups with mediation and other professionals, this report explores multi-faceted and complex associations between intergenerational family conflict and youth homelessness. In doing this, the report focuses on why and how family conflict escalates to the point where a young person is no longer welcome or safe in their family home – and what can be done to prevent this.

Young people with and without experiences of homelessness argue with their families over similar things: rules, money, school performance, seeing friends, identity and lifestyle, to name but a few common conflict triggers. However, the risk of conflict escalation is much higher for households that are experiencing poverty, overcrowding risk, domestic abuse, parental mental health and/or parental substance use challenges, and for young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and/or are neurodiverse. Just over one in ten (12 per cent) of young people indicated that their experiences of homelessness were unrelated to family breakdown. Young people reported a variety of leaving home experiences involving different degrees of choice and coercion. Drawing on current interventions, this report outlines a three-level vision for preventing family breakdown: societal in the form of improved services for struggling families and benefit reform, community-level in the form of school-based relationships support, and interpersonal in the form of accessible and quality intergenerational mediation services.

Methodology

A **policy and literature review** examining previous research on family breakdown and youth homelessness in the UK and mapping the relevant policies and strategies.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 21 young people (aged 16-30) with lived experience of homelessness before the age of 25. Interviews were conducted online and in-person during September and October 2024, and young people received a voucher for their participation. Four supported accommodation services were visited to facilitate participation: two in London and two in North England.

Semi-structured and informal interviews and focus groups with over 30 professionals who support young people with experiences of homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, including support officers, prevention workers, mediation professionals, psychologists and healthy relationship advisors.

A **national poll** delivered to a representative sample of over 2,000 young people aged 16-25 across the UK by Opinium, and a **survey** in which 107 young people with experiences of homelessness in England aged 16-25 participated. Both were delivered during December 2024. Young people who responded to the national poll may or may not have experience of homelessness, whereas young people who responded to the survey have all experienced homelessness. Although the sample size of the latter was small, the two data sets allow us to compare the responses of young people with experience of homelessness to those of the general young population. Any statistical assertions in the report are based on general young population data to ensure validity, unless otherwise specified.

Policy context

Conceptualising family breakdown

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has been key to the framing of family breakdown as a social policy issue in the UK, and in 2013 it identified "family breakdown" as one of five main routes to poverty.[2] In 2021, research commissioned by the CSJ established a link between experiences of family breakdown (conceptualised as parental separation) and a range of social issues, including homelessness - with one in five (22 per cent) British adults who had experienced homelessness also experiencing family breakdown before turning 18. The CSJ also found that young people growing up in the poorest 20 per cent of households were two thirds more likely to experience family breakdown than their counterparts in the 20 per cent richest households. Additionally, family breakdown was associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing debt, difficulties paying bills and mental health problems.[3] However, since these associations are complex and not always linear,[4] survey data alone is unlikely to offer a comprehensive explanation of family breakdown.

Although the existing literature recognises the role of family breakdown in causing youth homelessness in the UK[5] as elsewhere, homelessness research that focuses on the young people's relationships to their parent(s) or carer(s) is rare.[6,7] In 2016, Centrepoint research identified the chief causes of family breakdown, including financial pressures, parental mental health challenges, and domestic violence. However, the research stressed that, because these factors are often mutually reinforcing and multi-level (e.g. structural and interpersonal), it can be difficult to establish cause and effect.[8] Other research has highlighted the association between family breakdown and youth homelessness among specific groups,[9] such as LGBTQ+ people. A 2021 report by the Albert Kennedy Trust showed that many of the young people the charity supports experienced sexual abuse, humiliation, and threats of eviction related to their sexuality or gender before they left or were made to leave home.[10]

Relevant policies

Welfare reform. Welfare reforms introduced between 2010 and 2019 left many families and young people more vulnerable to poverty.[11,12] Measures introduced during this time removed the link between Local Housing Allowance rates and local rents, limited eligibility for Employment and Support Allowance to twelve months, and introduced a cap on the total amount of benefit that can be claimed by a household as well as a two-child limit to benefit payments that went into effect in 2017.[13] Changes to benefits rules also limited the amount of Housing Benefit a single person under 35 can claim to the Shared Accommodation Rate. This, along with the lower Universal Credit standard allowance for under 25s,[14] made it more difficult for young people to move out of their family or foster home. Following the 2024 General Election, the new Government committed to reviewing Universal Credit but has so far resisted calls to scrap the two-child limit as a matter of urgency.[15]

Family help. Following the disappearance of Sure Start children's centres providing pregnancy and early childhood support, in 2011 the Government introduced a family help programme aimed at improving employment and school attendance rates, improving outcomes for children, reducing anti-social behaviour, supporting families in need and reducing costs to public services. The Troubled Families Programme was launched in 2011 and rebranded the Supported Families Programme in 2021, when its funding was increased by 40 per cent. As with the Troubled Families programme, there was no focus on families at risk of relationship breakdown or young people at risk of homelessness – though the department was exploring "the potential to monitor key indicators in the priority areas" including family breakdown and homelessness.[16]

Family hubs. In its 2021 autumn budget, the Johnson Government committed £301.75 million for the development of Family Hub and Start for Life services in nearly half of local authorities in England. Jointly led by Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, this programme enabled 75 local authorities to set up family hubs for the delivery of joined up, enhanced services. Family hubs have been mainly focused on families with infants and very young children, however, families with young people up to 19 years old (25 years if they have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)) technically fall within its remit – with the majority of funding allocated to Start for Life programmes.[17] The programme is meant to replace the Sure Start services that provided support from pregnancy to early childhood throughout the 2000s, but there is concern that funding for family hubs is too limited to plug the gaps left behind by Sure Start services.[18,19]

Reducing Parental Conflict. Department for Work and Pension's Reducing Parental Conflict programme delivered support across local areas in England between 2018 and 2021 to reduce the impact of relationship distress on children. While doubtlessly beneficial to some families, the programme demonstrates that family conflict or breakdown has been conceptualised mainly with reference to the parental relationship. Together with the focus on support around early years in the family hub program, this may explain why there are limited intergenerational mediation offers for parent(s)/carer(s) and young people in conflict.

Family test. The Family Test, a framework that policymakers across departments should use to systematically evaluate the impact of new policies on families, was introduced in 2014 and updated in 2021. According to the Children's Commissioner, the Family Test has enabled targeted funding for families "on the edge of services" but excluded children and young people in its focus on adult relationships. The Commissioner recommended considering the quality of relationships rather than the composition of households in the design and delivery of services.[20]

Many of these programmes and policies were absorbed in the Sunak Government's **Stable homes, built on love** strategy for children's care reform (published in 2023), which also announced the Families First for Children (FFC) pathfinder pilot.[21] The strategy takes on board several recommendations made in an independent review of children's care known as the CASPAR review[22], including making greater use of family networks, streamlining early intervention and improving the care experience. In October 2024, the Children's minister Janet Daby said that the family help model initiated by previous Governments will be supported as part of its plans for reforming children's social care, which will balance the system toward early intervention as a way of reducing costs to public services.[23] Although helping families "stay together" is among the aims of the programmes discussed,[24] there is no focus on child to parent/carer relationships and the relation between family breakdown and youth homelessness – despite the clear impact the latter has on a young person's outcomes and on public expenditure.

Background factors

Family breakdown can happen in any household. Our research shows that nearly a fifth (19 per cent) of young people report having been in a situation where they could not spend the night at home due to circumstances within the household, with little variation by socio-economic background, ethnicity, or gender. However, the research also shows that the likelihood, frequency and intensity of conflict increases in families who are facing multiple challenges due to poverty, overcrowding, parental mental health or substance use challenges, or a combination of these and other factors.

Many of these background factors overlap or have a bidirectional relationship, meaning that they reinforce each other. For example, a parent might use drugs or alcohol to find relief from stress or anxiety, which might then make their mental health challenges worse over time, Sometimes, "background" factors (circumstances that contribute to the likelihood of an event occurring) can be the main reason that the young person leaves home, such as when they can no longer tolerate domestic abuse. Most often, however, they contribute to an environment in which disagreement or conflict about topics discussed in the next section are more likely to escalate and result in family breakdown.

Domestic abuse

Centrepoint's Databank consistently ranks domestic abuse as the second most common reason for youth homelessness, after family or friends being unwilling or unable to accommodate a young person. More than one in ten (11 per cent) young people that presented to local authorities for homelessness and housing support in 2021-2022 and 2023-2023 indicated they were fleeing domestic abuse.[25] Domestic abuse is when someone behaves abusively to someone they are personally connected with, meaning they are partners, ex-partners, or family members. Abusive behaviours can be physical, sexual, emotional, or economic.[26]

Graph 1. Experiences of family life while growing up (age 0 –18)

	General young population	Young people with experience of homelessness

Among Centrepoint staff and other professionals, there is a perception that domestic abuse is becoming both more common and more complex. In the first three months of the 2024-2025 financial year, Centrepoint's Helpline received more calls that mentioned domestic abuse within the family than in the previous financial year. Based on their incident log, we can project a three-fold increase for the financial year 24/25. One mediation professional working in London said abuse was not only becoming more frequent but also more intense:

> **"I heard almost unimaginable things, things I would find hard to shake off after getting out of a session."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

This resonates with Women's Aid most recent annual audit of domestic abuse services, which details a perception of increased and more challenging workloads among staff - linking this to pressures related to the cost-of-living crisis.[27] The connection between financial pressures and domestic abuse is borne out by our polling data, which shows that young people in households in the lowest socio-economic group are most likely to report witnessing domestic violence sometimes, often or all the time (27 per cent as compared to 18 per cent of the three higher socio-economic groups taken together).

Young people with experience of homelessness were nearly twice as likely to report witnessing violence between a parent/carer and their partner sometimes, often or all the time than the general young population (41 per cent and 21 per cent respectively), and our national poll showed an association between reporting this and frequent arguments. Several young people recounted traumatic experiences of witnessing domestic abuse during interviews, with one person describing an episode as "the worst thing I've ever seen." A Centrepoint psychologist confirmed that many young people experienced domestic abuse as very distressing, even if it is not directed at them. They added that abusive behaviours can also trigger conflict between the young person and a parent or carer, particularly when they are directed towards a sibling. Recounting the event that resulted in him becoming homeless, one young person said that after finding out his stepdad had been sexually abusing his younger sister, he confronted him about it "and just completely lost it." The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children and young people witnessing domestic abuse as victims, although this has not resulted in a significant change in service provision and funding. Women's Aid Annual Audit showed that many organisations are trying to fill these gaps by providing services for children and young people at their own expense.[28]

Half (50 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness, and nearly one in five (19 per cent) of young people, reported experiencing emotional, physical or sexual abuse by a parent/carer while growing up sometimes, often or all the time. The latter figure was nearly twice as high for LGBTQ+ young people compared to heterosexual young people (29 per cent and 16 per cent respectively). Several young people recounted episodes of physical violence between them and a parent or carer in the lead up to them leaving home. "What we hear a lot is that there will have been emotional, verbal abuse going on for a long time and then they've had this big fight, it's gone physical and that has been kind of the last straw," one mediation professional explained. More indirectly, a history of being abused by a parent might contribute to a young person's decision to leave home when a seemingly unrelated conflict arises, as was the case with a young person whose story features in the section on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Parental mental health problems

Parental mental health problems can put a strain on relations between young people and parents or carers, particularly in the absence of support. Nearly half (48 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness reported that a parent or carer struggled with mental health difficulties often or all the time, as compared to nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of the general young population. Young people who reported arguing with their parent or carer often or all the time were much more likely to report frequent parental mental health difficulties than those who argued rarely or never with a parent or carer (48 per cent and 10 per cent respectively). More than half (51 per cent) of those who reported having experienced abuse at the hands of a parent or carer often or all the time indicated frequent parental mental health problems, as compared to nearly a third (31 per cent) of those who never or rarely experienced abuse.

This indicates a strong association between poor parental mental health, conflict and abuse. One mediation professional gave the example of a parent who was struggling with low mood and anxiety and was "taking it out" on her daughter by being hyper-critical towards her. The mother of one young person we interviewed admitted herself to a mental health unit after her behavior at home put the young person and her sibling at serious risk of bodily harm. Several other young people referenced a parent's mental health condition as a contributing factor to tension at home, with one person saying she used to "clash hard" with her parent whose psychiatric conditions were made worse by her drug use. Her example hints at the way that mental health challenges might be triggered or exacerbated by other pressures, with half (50 per cent) of young people who reported frequent parental mental health challenges also indicating their parent(s)/carer(s) struggled financially often or all of the time. Young people from households in the lowest socio-economic group were more likely to report frequent parental mental health challenges than those from households in the top three socio-economic groups (30 per cent and 22 per cent respectively).

Parental substance use problems

Among young people with experience of homelessness, 31 per cent indicated that they saw their parent or carer drunk or high often or all the time while growing up, as compared to 18 per cent of the general young population. The latter figure rose to 41 per cent if only considering young people who reported experiencing abuse at the hands of a parent/carer or their partner, demonstrating an association between reporting abusive behaviours and parental substance use. Young people who reported arguing with a parent or carer frequently were more than three times as likely as those who reported rarely arguing with a parent or carer (36 per cent and 9 per cent respectively) to say that they saw their parent or carer drunk or high often or all the time.

Parental substance use problems can interact with and exacerbate other issues.

> "Mental health [problems], substances, and domestic abuse are like a toxic triangle. It just escalates everything."
>
> **- Healthy relationships specialist**

Several young people said alcohol use made their parent very violent. Additionally, parents might be psychologically and unemotionally available to their children due to substance use, and this can impact on the child or young person's ability to form and maintain relationships. "Even though you are physically in the house, if you're comatose on your bed, you're not available to parent that child," a Centrepoint psychologist explained. One young person recounted spending a lot of time at home by herself during early childhood because her dad was out drinking, demonstrating how parental substance use challenges can lead to neglect.

Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) are an alternative to normal care proceedings involving children who are at risk because of the substance misuse of their parent(s). In FDACs, parents and the judge work closely with a specialist intervention team to address the reason the child is being placed into care such as substance use and any related mental health issues. FDACs were piloted in London in 2008 and have since spread across England, covering 38 local authorities and 21 family courts as of 2024.[29] FDACs are independent from the local authority and child protection. A 2023 national impact evaluation showed that children with a primary carer in FDAC were more than four times as likely to be reunited with their primary carer compared to those with a primary carer in normal family court proceedings, and their probability of being placed in local authority care reduced dramatically.[30] This provides a persuasive evidence-base for rolling out the intervention nationally. Since care-experienced young people are at increased risk of homelessness, reducing the number of young people going into care by supporting parents with substance use challenges could in turn help reduce youth homelessness.

Neurodiversity

More than half (56 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness reported having a diagnosis (33 per cent) or thinking they need a diagnosis (23 per cent) for ADHD, autism and/or a learning difficulty or disability, as compared to 35 per cent of general young population. Among the general population, young people who had not received a diagnosis but think they needed one were least likely to report feeling emotionally supported at home often or all the time (42 per cent versus 69 per cent of people who did not indicate neurodiversity), more likely to report arguing with a parent often or all the time (37 per cent versus 20 per cent), and more likely to have been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night due to circumstances at home (26 per cent versus 15 per cent).

Professionals confirmed that a lack of understanding and support around a young person's neurodiversity can impact on household relationships in multiple ways. If a young person is struggling at school because of unidentified or unmet SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), their pent-up frustration might result in difficult behaviour at home.

One mediation professional gave the example of a young person with autism who was being bullied at school and became aggressive towards his mother because he did not know how to regulate his emotions. Neurodivergent young people were more likely to report frequent physical or verbal aggression towards a parent/carer than other young people (28 per cent and 17 per cent respectively).

> ## "It's like they're releasing all of the difficulties they've had throughout the day in that safe space at home with parents."
>
> ## - Mediation professional

A small minority of young people interviewed for this research had to leave home because of their violent behaviour believed earlier diagnosis could have prevented some of the impact their (suspected) neurodiversity had on their relationships at home. One young person who had to leave home because he was violent towards his younger sister shared how behaviours related to his neurodiversity would lead to fights with his siblings, and how his family had been much more understanding since he was diagnosed with autism following a mental health crisis. The young person believed that if he had received his diagnosis earlier, conflict at home might not have escalated and his subsequent street homelessness could have been prevented. This was echoed by another young person who recalled "lashing out" at home due to problems he suspected were related to neurodivergence.

Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of young people indicated they thought they have autism, ADHD or a learning difficulty but have not received a diagnosis. Most professionals interviewed for this research agreed that schools should be supported to pick up on early symptoms of neurodiversity or learning difficulties, with one Centrepoint psychologist pointing out that whether a young person gets assessed as having SEND or "behavioural problems" can have a crucial impact on their outcomes. Schools might be less likely to pick up on SEND among young people in care who are moving between different areas and schools, with one young person who grew up in care explaining his needs related to foetal alcohol syndrome were only identified the age of 16.

Even if a referral is made, waiting times for a first appointment for an assessment relating to autism have increased sharply since 2019, with median waiting times reported to be over 300 days in 2023 and rising to more than two and a half years in some parts of England.[31] Recent analysis by the Guardian found that SEND provision is in a state of chaos due to increased demand that has coincided with shrinking public spending budgets and the erosion of specialist support for neurodivergent children.[32] Centrepoint psychologists stressed, however, that more timely diagnosis alone is not enough: young people and their families need to be able to access treatment and support around neurodiversity and the impact it can have on communication styles. Moreover, one mediation professional emphasised that efforts to meet special educational needs in schools should involve parents. She gave the example of a parent she had worked with recently who was "completely in the dark" about her daughter's SEND assessment.

Overcrowding risk

Only a quarter (25 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness reported that everyone in their household had their own bedroom all the time while growing up, as compared to nearly half (46 per cent) of the general young population. White young people were twice as likely to report this than Black young people (50 per cent and 25 per cent respectively), and only a third of Asian British young people had their own bedroom all the time while growing up. If bedrooms are shared by occupants who are ten years or older, who are of opposite sexes and who are not a couple, a household is overcrowded by official standards.[33] This means that not having one's own bedroom is not the same as living in an overcrowded household: it depends on the gender and the age of the people sharing the room.

Sharing close quarters can, however, lead to tension and contributes to the risk of conflict escalation. "Even with the most loving relationships, if you share a living space you always get on each other's nerves at some point," said a mediation professional after explaining that many of the families he works with live in overcrowded homes. One young person who called the Helpline last year had been sharing a two-bedroom house with two other family members, which led to incessant arguments that eventually resulted in the young person's mother asking them to leave. Our general young population poll revealed associations between sharing bedrooms and the frequency of conflict, the occurrence of abuse, and likelihood of reporting risk of homelessness due to circumstances at home.

Our evidence suggests that sharing close quarters acts as a magnifier of other family breakdown risk factors. One young person shared how challenging it was sharing a bedroom with his sibling, whose disability manifested in disruptive behaviours that made it difficult to sleep. He explained his family could not afford to move into a larger place because of the rising cost of living, nor could the young person afford to move out on their own. "I've become quite angry because I'm so fed up with the whole situation, so I'm getting into heated arguments with my mum," the young person reflected. This is not an example of overcrowding, as the young person and his sibling were both male. However, the example demonstrates how close quarters turned an issue that might have otherwise been challenging but manageable into a source of frustration and conflict.

It is very difficult to get support from local authorities on the basis of overcrowding. "The bar to prove it is really, really high," a Centrepoint staff member explained, adding that, if a young person is sleeping on the sofa, they will be told that they've already got somewhere to stay. "It almost feels like it's at that point where, if you've got a roof over your head, you're not seen as eligible for support." Our research suggested this was part of a wider trend of local authority gatekeeping, as discussed in this report's Leaving home section.

The increasing cost of living, rents in the private sector and the decline of social housing mean sharing close quarters is likely to become increasingly common. As part of its Get Britain Building strategy and review of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Government should invest in social housing. This should include building more one bedroom and studio social housing to increase move-on options for vulnerable young people stuck in unsafe, inappropriate or overcrowded households.

Financial pressures

Overcrowding is symptomatic of the financial pressures many households are under. The UK continues to be in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis that came on the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic and a decade of austerity, with Citizens Advice recording the highest number of cases related to cost of living in January 2024.[34] Lower-income families and single mothers were disproportionately impacted by benefit cutbacks discussed previously.[35] Many young people who experience homelessness come from households that have struggled to make ends meet. A third (33 per cent) of this group reported their parent(s)/carer(s) struggled to pay bills or buy basic items often or all of the time, as compared to 17 per cent of the general young population. Young people in the general population who grew up in the households in the lowest socio-economic group were more likely to report arguing with a parent or carer often or all the time than those who grew up in households in the top three socio-economic groups (36 per cent versus 25 per cent).

As a response to these pressures, some parents or carers might ask a young person to leave home before they are ready to. "The parent is working, and their child is not contributing, and they want to downsize as much as anybody wants to downsize because when it comes to rent, heating, putting the kettle on, running the shower, it all adds up," a mediation professional explained. "So, some parents come to me saying, 'look, I know it's not his fault but I can't afford to keep him here, I'm not getting paid enough.'" Centrepoint psychologists explained that when households are under financial pressure, the expectation that a young person will contribute financially and "pick up the slack" in terms of childcare is often out of step with the young person's reality. This can contribute to conflict, as several young people confirmed.

Half (50 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness indicated that money was a source of tension between them and their parent or carer -this was the second-most common trigger of conflict among both this group and the general population of young people. Worries about personal or household finances can also contribute to the risk of family breakdown in more indirect ways, such as when it exacerbates parental mental health difficulties, substance use challenges or domestic abuse. Several interviewees had experienced, or worked with, parents who became more violent after developing financial problems. "It seemed like the dad was under a large amount of stress," one mediation professional explained, reflecting on one such case. "It doesn't excuse his behaviour but it probably triggered it."

Household composition

Young people with experience of homelessness are much more diverse in terms of household composition than the general young population. While 65 per cent of the latter reported they mainly lived with both biological parents while growing up (between the ages of 0 and 18), this was true for just over a fifth (22) of young people with experience of homelessness. Instead, they were much more likely to have mainly lived with one their parents (30 per cent), a parent and their partner (14 per cent), a foster family or in care (9 per cent), or a relative that is not their parent (9 per cent). Among the general population, young people who indicated they argued with a parent all the time were twice as likely to report growing up in a lone-parent household than those who indicated rarely arguing with a parent or carer (21 per cent and 10 per cent respectively). Those growing up mainly with a parent and their partner were most likely to report arguing with a parent or carer often or all the time (41 per cent).

This does not mean there is a causal relation between parental separation and the breakdown of the relationship between a parent and young person as other factors can have an impact. Lone-parent families are more impacted by changes to benefit rules such as the two child limit and benefit cap and the cost-of-living crisis, and are more likely to experience the challenges highlighted above.[36] Young people who indicated that they grew up in lone-parent households were more than twice as likely to report that their parent(s)/carer(s) had difficulties paying bills or buying basic items often or all of the time than those who grew up with both biological parents (29 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). The same is true for likelihood of reporting frequent parental mental health challenges (39 per cent versus 16 per cent respectively). This shows that lone-parent families are more vulnerable to the factors associated with family breakdown.

> **"I often see single parents struggling with their own difficulties, and then the stress of supporting a family on top of that."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

Care system

At least 40 per cent of homeless young people currently supported by Centrepoint are care-experienced. The charity Become found that 10.7 per cent of care leavers aged 18 to 20 were homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2022/23 (based on local authority presentations for housing support).[37] Our research suggests that household dynamics may contribute to the overrepresentation of care-experienced peoplein the population of young homeless people in the UK. Two-thirds of young people with experience of homelessness who had grown up mainly in care were asked to leave home, as compared to 47 per cent of their counterparts who had grown up mainly with at least one parent or relative. A third (33 per cent) of the former indicated they never felt emotionally supported by their carer, and none felt emotionally supported all the time.

These figures were reflected in conversations with young people who were care-experienced, several of whom spoke of feeling unloved and uncared for as a young person and being treated differently to siblings who were biological children. They also drew attention to the lack of consistent support from the local authority. "Every time I felt like I got close to a social worker, I had a new one, and I wouldn't even know it," one young person recalled. "How are you meant to trust someone if they're constantly changing, and if you can't trust your foster parents, who do you turn to?" Like several of her peers, this young person emphasised the impact that negative experiences in foster care can have on a young person's outcomes, not only in terms of housing but also in terms of mental health, education and employment.

The Government has promised to overhaul children's care, with coverage mainly focused on its plans to regulate private care home and foster care providers.[38] This was one of the recommendations made in a 2022 review of children's social care. Other recommendations included ensuring that there is suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year-old care-leavers, backing kinship carers using kinship care allowances, improving community support for foster parents, and reform foster parent recruitment. The Government should implement these recommendations to improve the experiences of young people living in foster families. It should also invest in supervisory social workers to improve the consistency of and trust in young people's relationships to social services. As one Centrepoint psychologist pointed out, children's social care often mirrors the fractured relationships young people have experienced at home due to high staff turn-over.

The Government recently introduced an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill that would prevent care leavers from being classed as becoming homeless intentionally by local authorities.[39] This is a very welcome development that should be matched by clear guidance for local authorities around assessing young people who have had to leave home before they were ready to more generally.

The Bill also mandates local authorities to offer a family group decision-making meeting if children or young people return to their family.[40] This should be strengthened to include an offer of family mediation, delivered by an independent organisation.
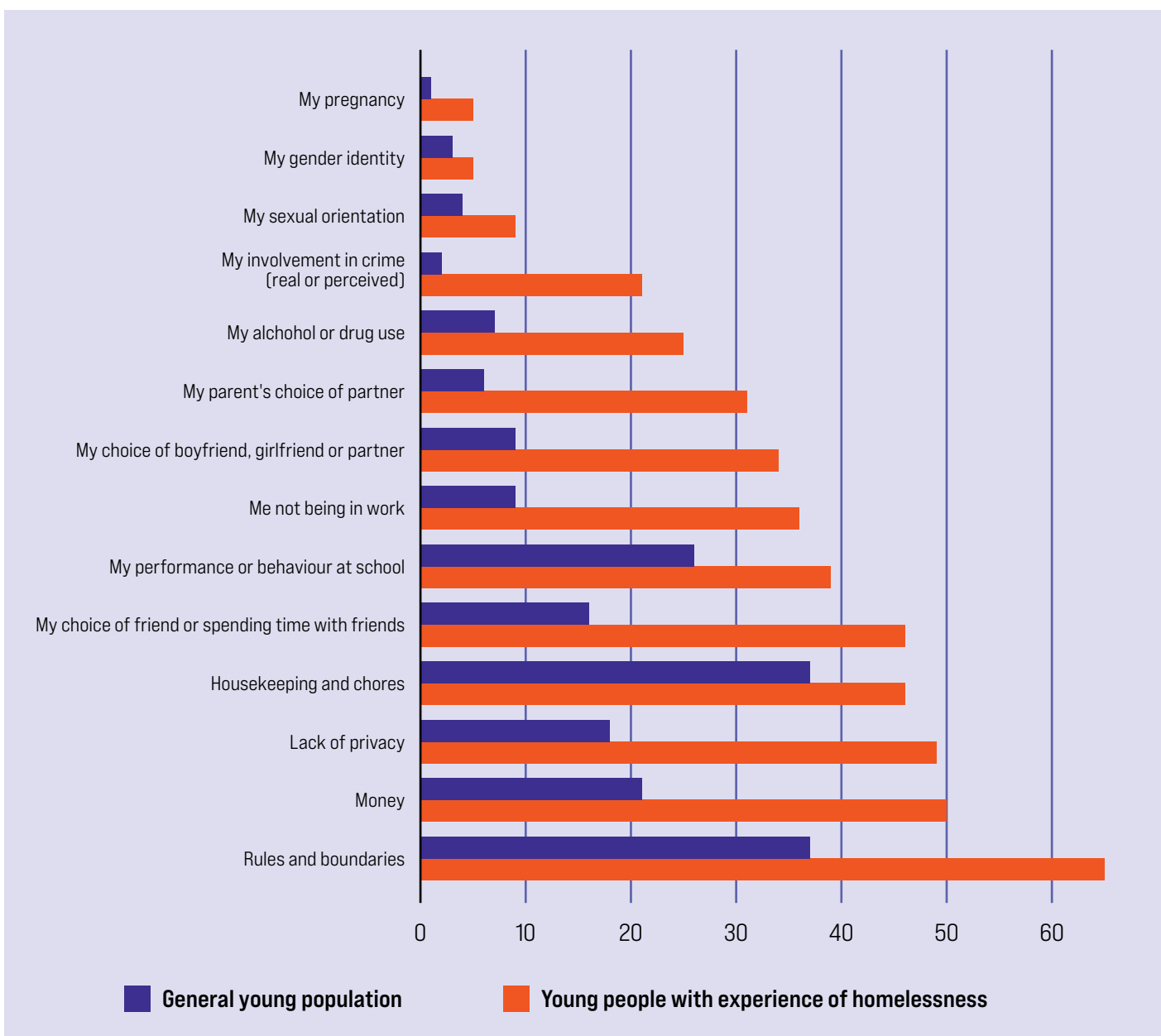
Conflict triggers

Each of these background factors (parental mental health or substance use problems, overcrowding risk, financial pressures, domestic abuse, being care-experienced, unmet needs related to neurodiversity) contribute to the development of environments in which disagreements are more likely to escalate into conflict or even a breakdown of relationships. To understand differences in how conflict is triggered and what it looks like among young people from different backgrounds, we asked young people what they and their parent(s)/carer(s) usually argued about and what shape these arguments took. We found that young people with experience of homelessness and the general young population had disagreements with their parent(s)/carer(s) over similar topics, but that arguments were much more likely to take place and to escalate among the former group.

Graph 2: What would you and your parent(s)/carer(s) usually argue over?

Legend:
- **General young population** (purple)
- **Young people with experience of homelessness** (orange)

Rules and boundaries

Rules and boundaries were the most common conflict trigger among both young people with experience of homelessness and the general young population, and this was confirmed in conversations with mediation professionals. They said that parents might be overly strict because of experiences they went through as children themselves, but that this often has a counterproductive effect. "She thinks she's protecting me, but she's doing the opposite," said one young person of their mother, who used to bar them from leaving the house to see friends or visit the shop. "It just makes me want to do whatever it is she's shielding me from." Mediation professionals also said that disagreement over rules is normally an expression of a more significant underlying problem, outlined in the previous sections.

Parent's new relationships

Young people with experience of homelessness are much more likely than the general young population to have grown up mainly with a parent or carer and their parent (14 per cent and 5 per cent respectively). This partially explains why nearly a third of young people with experience of homelessness (31 per cent) report a parent or carer's choice of partner as a conflict trigger. One mediation professional confirmed that a parent's romantic relationship can complicate household dynamics. "It's difficult enough looking after and tolerating your own teenager sometimes," she said, "so a stepparent might feel that they don't have to put up with things."

Conversely, young people gave a plethora of examples of inappropriate or abusive behaviours by a parent's partner, from initiating conversations with a young person while they're showering to sexually abusing a sibling. Several young people interviewed for the research described fights or physical altercations with a parent's partner, which in some instances led to the young person being made to leave home. As one mediation professional explained, many mothers she worked with picked their partner over the young person to meet their own needs, which might be related to their own histories of trauma. This dynamic understandably left many of the young people who described clashing with a parent's partner feeling hurt and frustrated.

Performance and behaviour at school

Performance and behaviour at school ranked fifth as a conflict trigger for young people with experience of homelessness and second for the general young population. Mediation professionals explained that performance at school or missing classes is a common source of tension at home, not least because parents tend to get the blame for school refusal and might even be fined for it. Perhaps reflecting ethnic disparities in rates of exclusion,[41] young people from ethnically minoritised groups were more likely to report this as a conflict trigger than white people. Young people who think they might have ADHD, autism or a learning difficulty or disability are also ten percentage points more likely to select school performance or behaviour as a conflict trigger than those who do not.

All young people who spoke about struggling at school related it to neurodivergence. One care-experienced young person said he always got in trouble at school due to unidentified learning needs.

> **"They just didn't understand me, and I was very easily influenced by the wrong crowd because I wanted to be accepted."**
>
> **- Young person**

Mediation professionals confirmed that if a young person is excluded from school, they are spending more time at home or around peers who parents or carers might worry are a negative influence, and both factors can further fuel conflict. One survey respondent explained that they were being bullied at school, which led to arguments over school absences with their parents. These examples demonstrate the importance of understanding the underlying reasons behind a young person's behaviour or performance at school. Professionals stressed that intergenerational mediation helps to facilitate this understanding among parents, and that parents might worry about being judged when engaging with teachers or social services.

Involvement in crime

Over a fifth of young people with experience of homelessness (21 per cent) reported their real or perceived involvement in crime as a common trigger for conflict at home, as compared to only 2 per cent of general young population. Involvement in crime came up in only two of the 21 interviews conducted with young people. One young person had been asked to leave home after committing a serious crime, which had made him and his family the target of harassment and intimidation.

Mediation professionals confirmed that a young person's involvement in crime (or suspected involvement in crime) can contribute to tension at home in multiple ways, particularly if the young person is involved in county lines networks of drug supply and distribution. Not only might a young person bring the household to the attention of the police and/or social services, family members might also become targets of intimidation by rival groups or, if a young person is suspected of "snitching" (sharing information with law enforcement), by their peers. At the same time, it was acknowledged that it can be hard for a young person to extract themselves from county lines networks as this might put them and their family members at more immediate risk.

Sexual orientation & gender identity

Our research supports existing evidence that LGBTQ+ young people are at increased risk of homelessness due to family breakdown,[42] with this group being almost twice as likely to report that they have been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night due to circumstances at home than heterosexual young people (31 per cent and 16 per cent respectively). Over one in ten (12 per cent) of young people who identify as LGBTQ+ report gender identity and pronouns as a conflict trigger, and 15 per cent of this group say their sexual orientation is a conflict trigger. There were no significant discrepancies in likelihood of reporting sexuality or gender-identity related conflict along lines of gender, religion and ethnicity, but LGBTQ+ people who were also neurodivergent were more likely to report identity-related conflict. LGBTQ+ young people in general were much less likely to report feeling like they could be themselves at home while growing up often or all of the time compared to the general population (45 per cent versus 73 per cent). They also reported far higher rates across a range of abusive behaviours, including name-calling (52 per cent versus 32 per cent), humiliation (43 per cent versus 18 per cent), and physical violence (23 per cent versus 11 per cent).

We spoke with several young people for whom their sexual orientation or gender identity was a key factor in them becoming homeless. One young person interviewed for this research was given the choice between breaking up with his partner or leaving home when his mother found out he was in a same-sex relationship. Several young people shared experiences of being mocked or dismissed when it became clear to a parent that they identified as trans or non-binary, and mediation professionals recalled examples of this too. As the latter pointed out, there is often little support available locally for parents who are concerned or confused about their child's gender identity, which might push them towards transphobic online content.

As was pointed out by mediation professionals, there is often little support available locally for parents who are concerned or confused by their child's gender identity.

> "What tends to come up time and time again, is young people who are trans or non binary and they have a preferred name and a preferred pronoun, and parents just aren't following that."
> - Mediation professional

In many of the examples shared with us, conflict related to sexual orientation or gender identity were a tipping point rather than the sole reason a young person had to leave home.

For example, the young person who was given an ultimatum told his siblings that he left home because of the violence his father had historically subjected him to. "It's all tied together anyway," he reflected. His is not an isolated case: a Centrepoint psychologist estimated that nine out of ten times there's been some sort of trauma or abuse before the young person discloses their sexuality or gender identity. "So, it's not like everything was hunky dory [before they came out]," she said. "As with the rest of the young people, they're very much waiting for the next big blow-up.".

Mental health problems

A young person's mental health problems can become a source of conflict if there is a perceived lack of understanding from the parent or carer due to generational, cultural, or interpersonal differences. Several young people described how their mental health was only addressed after a serious incident. One young person explained that even after he received a diagnosis for depression after a suicide attempt, his father still would not take his mental health seriously.

> **"He thought it [my depression] was a sham. He'd say it was something I was doing for attention."**
>
> **- Young person**

This young person was made to leave home after quitting his job for mental health reasons, demonstrating how conflict triggers (in this case mental health and not being in work) might interact to create family breakdown. Centrepoint psychologists emphasised the interplay between young people's mental health problems and the difficulties they are facing at home. Several young people gave examples of instances in which circumstances at home made their mental health worse, which in turn contributed to conflict.

Pregnancy

A young woman getting pregnant can also trigger conflict. Although the proportion young people with experience of homelessness that indicated that pregnancy was something they argued over is small (5 per cent), this is likely because the topic is not relevant for most young people. The manager of a supported accommodation for young parents explained that many of the residents were asked to leave home when they became pregnant due to the persisting stigma on teenage pregnancies, despite these being relatively commonplace in the city in which the service is located. Overcrowding is another reason that young women might be asked to leave: one resident was sharing a four-bedroom house with seven siblings and her mum when she became pregnant. A young woman who grew up in care explained that conflict over her pregnancy and parenting style turned what was already a very challenging situation into an intolerable one, which ultimately resulted in her being made to leave.
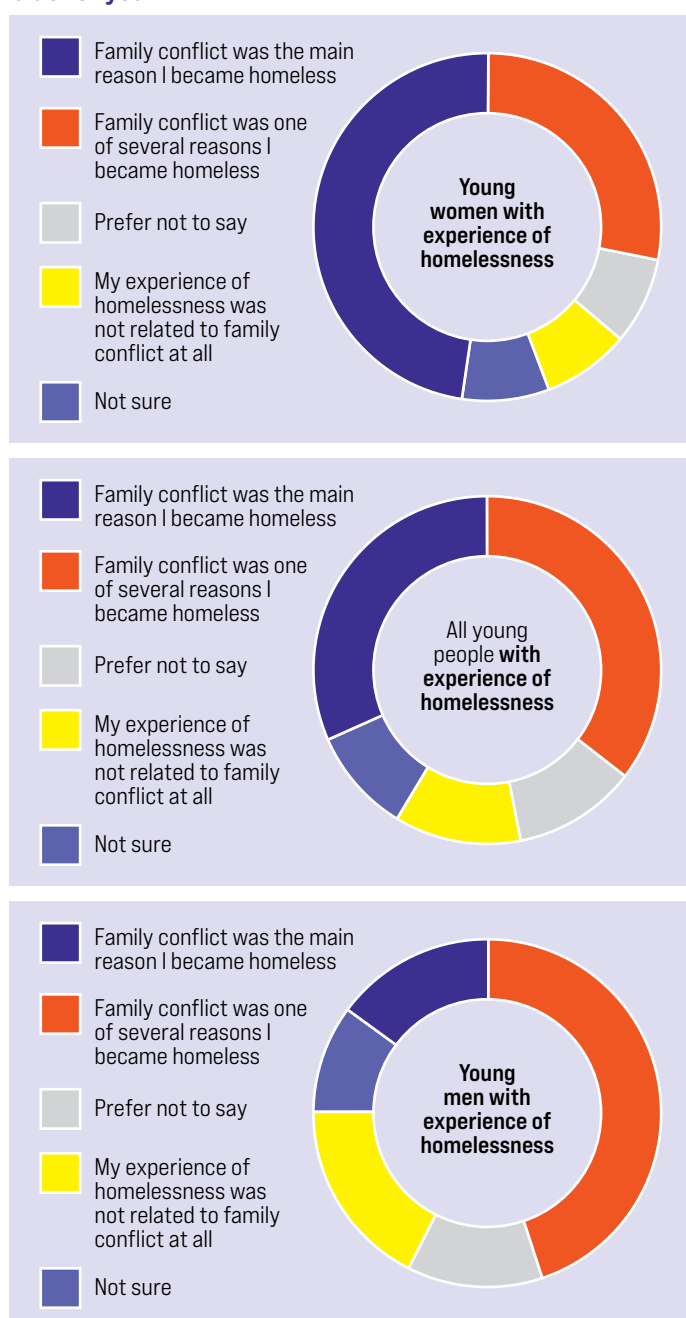
Frequency and intensity of conflict

The topics discussed above can become a source of tension in any household, as graph 3 shows. But young people with experience of homelessness reported a far greater frequency and intensity of conflict than the general young population, which in many cases contributes significantly to the young person becoming homeless. Young people with experiences of homelessness reported more conflict triggers than the general population of young people, as graph 2 shows. Nearly two-thirds (72 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness indicated arguing with their parent(s) or carer(s) often or all the time compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of the general population. In the general population, young people who reported having been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night due to circumstances at home were much more likely to report disagreements that included physical violence (35 per cent versus 6 per cent), threats of violence (45 per cent versus 8 per cent), name-calling (56 per cent versus 30 per cent), humiliation or shaming (51 per cent versus 14 per cent), or isolation (42 per cent versus 18 per cent).

Leaving home

Family breakdown can lead or contribute to a variety of homelessness trajectories and experiences involving varying degrees of agency on the part of the young person. Most young people with experience of homelessness (68 per cent) indicated that they have been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night due to a problem at home, and this figure rose if looking only at LGBTQ+ young people (75 per cent) or neurodivergent young people (78 per cent). Two thirds of young people also indicated that family conflict was either the main (32 per cent) or one of several reason(s) (36 per cent) they became homeless, with only 12 per cent of young people saying that their experience of homelessness were unrelated to family conflict.[43]

Graph 3: Which of the following statements is most true for you

Family conflict was the main reason I became homeless

Family conflict was one of several reasons I became homeless

Prefer not to say

My experience of homelessness was not related to family conflict at all

Not sure

Young women with experience of homelessness

Family conflict was the main reason I became homeless

Family conflict was one of several reasons I became homeless

Prefer not to say

My experience of homelessness was not related to family conflict at all

Not sure

All young people **with experience of homelessness**

Family conflict was the main reason I became homeless

Family conflict was one of several reasons I became homeless

Prefer not to say

My experience of homelessness was not related to family conflict at all

Not sure

Young men with experience of homelessness

Nearly one in five (19 per cent) of young people indicate they have been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night due to a problem in their household. This figure rose to 40 per cent for young people who reported frequent arguments with a parent or carer, demonstrating a strong correlation between family conflict and youth homelessness.

Choice and coercion

The way in which a young person leaves home or is made to leave home often has consequences for the kind of support they receive from local authorities. Nearly half (47 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness indicated that they were asked to leave home or given an ultimatum. Several young people interviewed were locked out after stepping out of the house.

> **"When I went out to go to college I realised all my clothes were on the floor outside, and I banged on the door and my mum just wouldn't answer."**
>
> **- Young person**

Others were explicitly asked to leave home or told they could not return after a period of staying somewhere else. Some were given an ultimatum, such as the young person who was given the choice between remaining in his same-sex relationship or staying at home. One survey respondent wrote that they could only stay if they de-transitioned (e.g. reverted to living as the gender they were assigned at birth). In such cases, a young person might "choose" to leave, but only after being given an impossible or unfair choice by a parent or carer.

Nearly a third of young people with experience of homelessness (32 per cent) indicated that they had to leave home for their own safety, with women much more likely to select this option than men (44 per cent and 25 per cent respectively). Each of the young parents interviewed for this research left home because they were concerned about the safety of their infants, with one mother recounting how she decided to leave after her father threw something at her while she was breastfeeding.

Graph 4. How were you put at risk of becoming homeless?

Legend: All young people with experience of homelessness | Men | Women
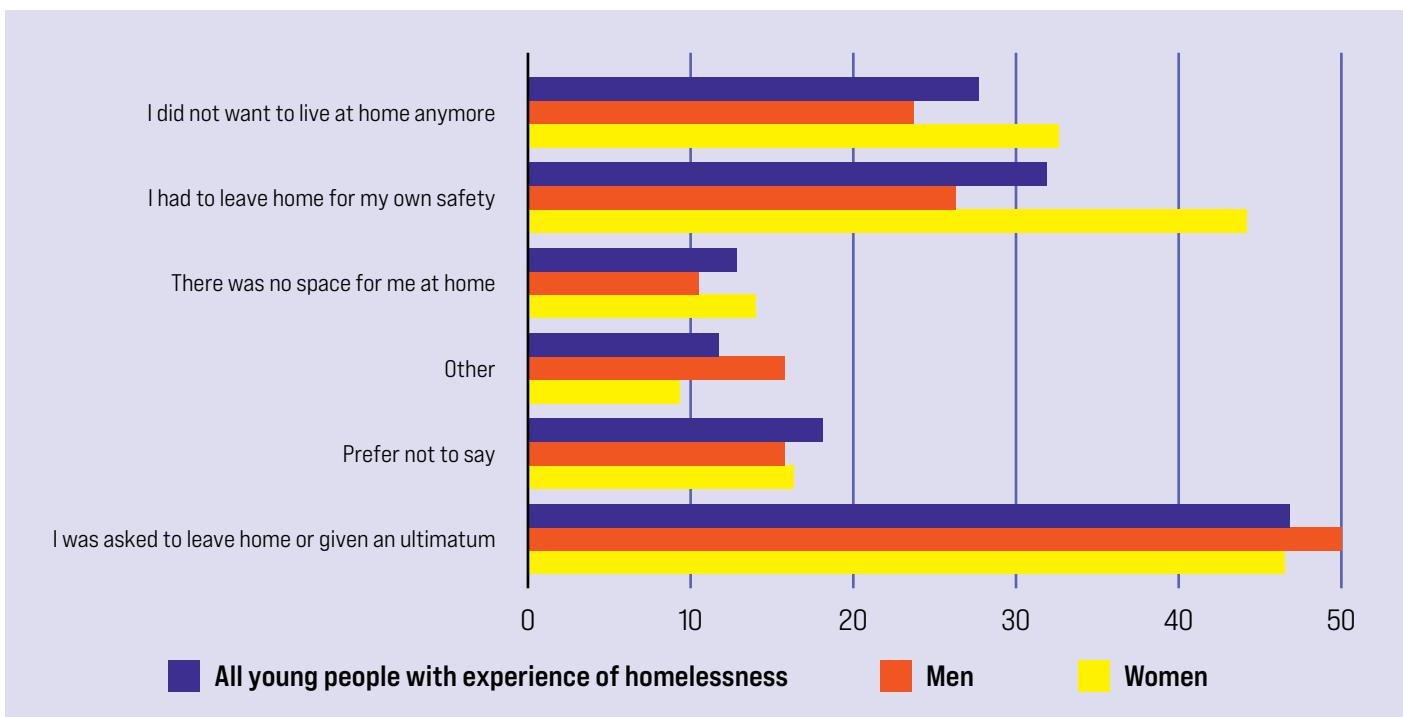
Over a quarter of young people with experience of homelessness (28 per cent) indicated that they left home because they did not want to live there anymore. Many of the young people who reported this also reported growing up with a parent that struggled with mental health and/or substance use challenges.

> **"Sometimes the parent's issues become too much for a young person to deal with."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

Although these scenarios involve different degrees of coercion and choice, in each of them the young person's departure from home is affected by factors far beyond their control.

Unsurprisingly, young people with experience of homelessness are far less likely to receive housing cost support from their parent or carer after leaving home than the general young population (27 per cent and 47 per cent respectively). Almost half (48 per cent) of young people who indicated they had been at risk of not having somewhere to spend the night because of circumstances in their family home said that they did not expect support, as compared to less than a third (32 per cent) of those who had not reported this risk. These figures highlight the relative disadvantage faced by young people with experience of family conflict and homelessness when it comes to securing a deposit on a tenancy and or paying rent consistently.

Of young people who had experienced homelessness, 56 per cent had previously stayed away from their family home for an extended period of time. This was true for some of the young people who were interviewed, several of whom had spent some time with relatives or in care following moments of crises before leaving home or being made to leave home more permanently. For example, one young person said that her mother struggled with psychotic episodes that put the young person and her sibling in danger, and which caused the mother to section herself or be assessed as being unfit to parent. A Centrepoint psychologist explained that young people are often placed in and out of care depending on the parent's engagement with services and treatments. This underscores our finding that family breakdown is a process rather than an event and that young people's homelessness trajectories are more complex than often imagined.

Homelessness experiences

Over a quarter of young people (27 per cent) stayed with a sibling or relative after being made homeless. This relationship is vulnerable to breakdown itself: several young people described how a relationship with a relative deteriorated after moving in. Additionally, young people interviewed reported that they moved in with partners or ex-partners upon being made to leave home, with one person describing how her abusive partner took advantage of the fact she had nowhere else to go. Professionals pointed out that LGBTQ+ young people may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation and intimate partner violence upon being made homeless. If young people cannot access homelessness and housing support from their local authority, they might be forced to move in with romantic partners before they are ready or stay with partners who are abusive. Just under a third of young people got accommodation through the council or a charity, and over a quarter (27 per cent) slept rough or on transport.

Local authority support

Whether or not a young person is seen as having made the decision to leave home (rather than being forced out) can impact on the support offer they are given by local authorities.

> **"It makes it a lot more difficult for them if they have been the ones that have made that choice, because now they've made themselves intentionally homeless and that doesn't get them the same type of support."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

Local authority support workers often encourage young people to remain or return at home if there are no obvious safeguarding concerns, given the limited availability of affordable or social housing.

This might create an incentive to minimise safeguarding concerns amidst a scarcity of temporary accommodation and resources. One mediation professional said that her local authority had started calling parents to verify claims made by a young person presenting as homeless, which could put the young person at increased risk of domestic abuse. Centrepoint's Helpline staff described difficulties making safeguarding referrals to local authorities, such as requiring them to provide more details on a form than necessary under safeguarding guidance. They also described many instances of gatekeeping, including one involving a pregnant woman who was rough sleeping but was denied support.

Several interviewees who had experienced domestic abuse were told to go to spend the night at local shelters when they presented at their local authority following family breakdown because they were not assessed as having priority need.

These developments suggest that gatekeeping practices by local authorities sometimes results in serious safeguarding failures, particularly when it comes to recognising young people witnessing or experiencing domestic abuse as victims (in accordance with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021). Triage practices can be especially problematic for LGBTQ+ young people, as one LGBTQ+ homelessness professional explained. This professional questioned whether social workers who have no lived experience of, or training related to, familial homophobia or transphobia can make an informed decision as to whether it is safe for a young person to remain home. Furthermore, they pointed out that anti-LGBTQ comments or behaviours by family members are often not seen as abuse. For example, the young person who had been given a date by which he needed to break up with his partner or leave home was told by the council that he could not be supported as it would be another three days before he was homeless. The right to housing support of this young person, who was met the legal definition of being threatened with homelessness,[44] was only respected when a charity intervened.

> **"We hear stories of some social workers just telling young people to just like, go back in the closet until it's safe."**
>
> **- LGBTQ+ homelessness professional**

Preventing family breakdown

Given that the vast majority (68 per cent) of young people indicate that family breakdown was the main reason or one of several reasons they became homeless, preventing family breakdown is one of the most effective ways to contribute to ending youth homelessness. Professionals interviewed explained that this would require a combination of measures supporting families, upstream prevention to identify and reduce risk factors, and crisis intervention in the form of intergenerational mediation. Although resource limitations currently constrain the effective commissioning and delivery of such services, investment in young people and their families will reduce local authority spending on temporary accommodation and other costs associated with homelessness (including those associated with healthcare, law enforcement and loss of productivity), which amount to an estimated £8.5billion.[45] Reflecting the need for early prevention and crisis intervention, this support should take place at the societal, community and interpersonal level.

Supporting families

The impact of the background factors discussed in the first section on household relationships can be minimised with timely and adequate support. However, professionals pointed out that this is often not available. "We now live in a society with ever-impoverished social services, health services, and public services in general, so there's no support available for families that run into difficulties," a Centrepoint psychologist explained, adding that this has resulted in increased demand for mediation services.

> "Some of what we encounter in our work might be headed off at the pass, but if that support is not there, the problems become too much for the family to contain."
>
> **- Centrepoint psychologist**

These observations were echoed by a mediation professional who said that clients are often referred to their organisation because waiting lists for other, more appropriate services are too long. She added that clients present with higher levels of need than they did a few years ago. Several mediation professionals related this to the absence of support for families with older children, with the previous government's £301.75 million investment in family hubs across 75 local authorities being seen as falling short of need.[46]

As part of a wider policy of austerity, Government grants to local authorities reduced by 40 per cent in real terms between 2009/10 and 2021/22 – resulting in many social care services being cut or underfunded.[47] Meanwhile, resources for mental health services have failed to keep up with rising demand.[48] If family breakdown-related homelessness is symptomatic of the resulting lack of support for struggling households, then reducing the risk of family breakdown requires long-term investment and strategic vision in adult and child social care. Additionally, the Government should take urgent action to reduce poverty and overcrowding by reviewing the benefits system and investing in affordable and social housing. The DWP should also provide under 25s living independently with the same Universal Credit rate received by over 25s and increase local housing allowance rates for young people to make it easier for young people to move out of their family homes when they are ready.

School-based prevention

Family breakdown-related youth homelessness can be prevented through on-going support and education around relationships and communication in schools. While schools are already required to deliver relationships education as part of a wider Relationships, Sex and Health Education programme, the quality of this varies widely, with many young people saying they learned nothing or very little about healthy relationships in school. "If we are not having that conversation, how are they [children and young people] to know that what they're experiencing at home isn't what they should be experiencing, that it isn't the norm?" asked one Centrepoint psychologist. This echoes concerns raised by the Sex Education Forum in response to new draft guidance[49] commissioned by the previous government, which introduced age limits on topics such as sexual harassment and sex that might prevent younger children from recognising abuse.[50]

Early intervention in schools is another key pillar of family breakdown and youth homelessness prevention. Centrepoint is one of several organisations who deliver the Upstream programme in schools. Pioneered by End Youth Homelessness Cymru, Upstream offers tailored 1:1 support to children who are identified as being at risk of family breakdown and homelessness. When children are flagged as "at risk" after completing a survey, they are offered structured, ongoing professional support around issues that matter to them. Referrals are made to partner organisations, including DePaul, which deliver intergenerational mediation when appropriate.

An external evaluation of the Upstream program found that school staff were largely supportive of the intervention.[51] One teacher described the program as a "brilliant" way of supporting pupils who do not meet criteria for referrals to most agencies "because they're not at crisis point."

> **"It is a great way to introduce mediation, family support and homelessness prevention within schools, and I think it should be the norm [across the UK] because we are really capturing young people when there are emerging issues."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

However, lack of capacity in schools is a major barrier to rolling out Upstream or similar early intervention programmes. "You need a school that has a specific capacity to support and implement the project, and then you need a member of staff who is able to embed in that school," one professional involved in the program explained. Moreover, because early intervention for homelessness prevention relates to and impacts on so many policy areas, it can be unclear where responsibility for resourcing it should lie as efforts move more upstream. Schools should be supported through a cross-departmental budget for improving children's outcomes that reflects the long-term savings in terms of housing costs, crime and law enforcement, health spending and productivity resulting from the prevention of youth homelessness. This should be coordinated jointly by the Department for Education and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Intergenerational mediation

Intergenerational or family mediation is a voluntary and confidential process during which young people and a parent or carer work with a trained professional to resolve conflict. Clients will be asked to identify goals themselves, but the general aims are to create mutual understanding, improve communication styles and ultimately to enable the young person to remain or return home if it safe to do so. If the parties do not feel ready to meet, the professionals ask for permission to share the feelings and views of the young person with their parent or carer and vice versa. The CEO of one homelessness charity explained that this can occur when families start mediation.

> **"Nobody would have actually had a conversation where everybody feels that they've been heard and having that has been really powerful."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

Only a quarter of young people with experience of homelessness indicated that they or their family received support related to family conflict, indicating a high level of unmet need. When asked during interviews whether they think they could have benefited from intergenerational mediation, young people almost unanimously replied affirmatively. Several young people had received an offer for mediation support but could not take it up or see it through because their parent was unwilling to participate meaningfully. Although parental uptake can be a challenge, professionals stressed that parents are more likely to engage if the independence and voluntary nature of mediation service is emphasised.

Mediation professionals recognised that by the time most families are offered mediation service (if they are offered it at all), most of the damage to the relationship has already been done. As one mediation professional pointed out, parents have often been "dealing with the issues for two or three years" before making a child leave home when they are perceived as being adult enough, e.g. at the age of 16, 17 or 18 – which is also when they start losing eligibility for many services. "Really [the issues] started at age 8, 9, or 10, and that's when I think the intervention should happen," the mediation professional added. This is why a combination of early, upstream prevention and crisis intervention is required.

The available evidence, though limited, suggests that intergenerational mediation is effective in reducing youth homelessness. "I think family mediation is an amazing model that works," said one professional who has been managing a mediation service for three years.

> **"The results are incredible. It's unusual if we conduct family mediation that it doesn't progress to an improvement in communication, which can lead to either a young person going back home or the family reconnecting."**
>
> **- Mediation professional**

One mediation professional recalled that his local authority commissioner said that as a result of his work, the number of young people going into care is at a ten-year low. Another mediation professional said that crisis intervention with young people who have been made homeless is successful nine times out ten, meaning the young person can return home. Sometimes success can be hard to quantify, but improvement is evident. As the CEO of a mediation charity explained, "we can't always say we've prevented six people from becoming homeless, but we can say we've had a really positive impact on those factors that we know are going to reduce the risk, like emotional resilience and managing relationships."

An evaluation commissioned by the charity and shared with Centrepoint suggested that there are cost savings to the local authority because of reduced homelessness and crime, but acknowledges issues in defining impact. The desire for more systemic evaluation and cost-benefit analysis was voiced by many mediation professionals, one of whom pointed out that her annual salary is likely much smaller than local authority costs on emergency housing for young homeless people (the estimated overall cost of youth homelessness, including loss of productivity, averages £27,347 for each young homeless person).[52] Mediation professionals also pointed out that there is currently no training requirement for being a mediator, with some people simply taking a short online course. They suggested that certification should be standardised to ensure quality of the services being delivered.

As discussed, family help programmes have mainly focused on improving parental relationships and keeping families together. Mediation professionals suggested that this emphasis is misguided. "There are a lot of couples where it's actually detrimental for the children for them to remain together," one mediation professional said. "So it's not about that, it's about them being able to co-parent their children effectively. It's not all about parents staying together and keeping the family unit. Family units can look however you want them to look and work." Family help programming should reflect the diversity of family units among the UK population, and among the population most at risk of family breakdown, by supporting kinship carers and single parents and moving beyond an exclusive focus on the parental relationship.

Conclusion

Conflict happens in all families. However, our research shows it is far more likely to escalate in households that are already facing multiple challenges, such as domestic abuse, parental mental health or substance use problems, financial pressures, and overcrowding. A young person's personal characteristics can also put them at greater risk of family conflict, with young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and/or neurodiverse reporting that they are more likely to experience frequent arguments and higher rates of abuse. The topics that trigger arguments between young people and their parent(s)/carer(s) are similar for young people with experience of homelessness and the general population of young people, but young people with experience of homelessness report more frequent and intense conflict. The vast majority (68 per cent) of young people with experience of homelessness say family breakdown was the main or one of several reasons they became homeless, which means reducing the risk of family breakdown is an effective way of preventing youth homelessness. This requires a multi-level approach combining increased support for families that are struggling,

upstream prevention to identify and reduce risk factors in children, and intergenerational mediation for young people and their parent(s)/carer(s). Investing in early prevention and crisis intervention will reduce local authority spending on temporary accommodation and costs to public services more generally, in addition to improving economic productivity and outcomes for young people.

Recommendations

Supporting families and young people

- **The Government should** allocate long-term funding for family hubs, to give clarity to service providers about the funding in future financial years. The Department for Education should require local authorities to make sure the support offer for families with teenage and young people is in place, adequately resourced and advertised, in addition to Start for Life services.

- **The Government should** implement the recommendations put forward by the 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care for increasing investment in family help and improved service delivery. Family help programmes should include a focus on young person-parent/carer relationship and incorporate intergenerational mediation services.

- As part of the Government's reform of the care system, **Department for Health & Social Care should** increase support for foster families and provide them with access to intergenerational mediation and invest in Supervising Social Workers recruitment and retention. DHSC should also implement the recommendations put forward by 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care, including the introduction of allowances for kinship carers, the introduction of universal care standards, and increased investment in foster care recruitment and retention.

- **The Department of Health and Social Care** should enable and encourage local authority commissioning of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) to reduce the number of children and young people being placed into care as a result of parental substance use.

- As part of its review of Universal Credit, **the Government should** introduce an Essentials Guarantee into Universal Credit to ensure that the basic rate at least covers people's essentials and support can never fall below that level.[53] We also urge the government to ensure the Local Housing Allowance rates are always linked to the lowest 30% local rents, so that rent increases do not outpace actual housing costs. Additionally, the Government should scrap the Two Child limit to benefit payments as a matter of urgency to reduce the financial pressure families are under. The DWP should also bring the Universal Credit rate for under 25s living independently in line with the rate applied to over 25s.

- As part of its Get Britain Building strategy, **the Government should** commit to building more one bedroom and studio social housing to increase move-on options for vulnerable young people.

- **The Homelessness Code of Guidance should** be amended to clarify the obligations of local authorities to young people at the presentation, initial interview, and assessment stage. This should cover what forms of evidence or burden of proof is acceptable to require at this early stage of the HRA. The guidance should remind local authorities that young people who witness domestic abuse should be recognised as victims in their own right.

- **Local authorities should** commission training around LGBTQ+ homelessness to ensure housing officers are aware of the increased risks of abuse and poor mental health outcomes faced by LGBTQ+ young people living in hostile households.

Upstream prevention

- As part of the Government's strategy to end child poverty and improve outcomes for children and young people, **the Department for Education** should encourage schools across England to screen pupils for homelessness risk and embed upstream prevention initiatives. It can do this as part of regular guidance or via the introduction of provisions about school-based upstream prevention in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

- **The Government should** set up a cross-departmental budget, coordinated by Department for Education and the Department of Social Care and Health, for improving children's outcomes, including through school-based family breakdown and homelessness prevention. Funding from the different departments should reflect the long-term savings in terms of housing costs, crime and law enforcement, and health spending and loss of productivity resulting from the prevention of youth homelessness. The Cabinet Office should monitor these outcomes and any savings to public expenditure associated with it.

- **The Department for Education** should implement the recommendations of the 2022 SEND review for setting nationally consistent standards for how needs are identified in health, care and educational settings. Parents and carers should be actively engaged in these processes and supported to understand the child or young person's needs.

Intergenerational mediation

- **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should** mandate all local authorities to commission independent family mediation services. MHCLG should also develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for existing intergenerational family mediation services and commission a cost-benefit analysis to assess the impact of services on demand for other services, including housing support, law enforcement, in areas where it is available.

Appendix

National poll: general young population

Age	% of 2000 respondents
16	4
17	4
18	21
19	9
20	10
21	10
22	11
23	8
24	16
25	6

Region	% of 2000 respondents
Scotland	8
Northern Ireland	3
North East	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	8
East Midlands	7
West Midlands	9
Wales	5
East of England	9
London	14
South East	13
South West	8

Occupation of main household earner at age 14	% of 2000 respondents
ABC1	58
C2DE	26

Ethnicity	% of 2000 respondents
White	78
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	4
Asian or Asian British	9
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	8
Other	1

Religious household	% of 2000 respondents
No	59
Yes	39
Prefer not to say	2

Immigration history

Did you or one or both of your parents come to the UK from somewhere else?	% of 2000 respondents
No	65
Yes, one or both of my parent(s)/carer(s) did but I was born in the UK	21
Yes, my parent(s) and I moved to the UK	9
Yes, I moved to the UK by myself or with a sibling	3
Prefer not to say	2

Gender	% of 2000 respondents
Man	49
Woman	48
Non-binary or another gender	3
Prefer not to say	0

Gender identity

Do you identify as transgender?	% of 2000 respondents
Yes	4
No	93
Not sure	1
Prefer not to say	1

Neurodivergence

Do you have autism, ADHD, and/or a learning disability or difficulty?	% of 2000 respondents
No	57
Yes, and I received a diagnosis	12
I think so, but I have not received a diagnosis / am in the process of receiving one	23
Not sure	7
Prefer not to say	1

Sexual orientation	% of 2000 respondents
Straight or heterosexual	77
Gay or lesbian	5
Bisexual	13
Other sexual orientation	3
Prefer not to say	3

Household composition. Who did you mainly live with when growing up between the ages of 0-18?	% of 2000 respondents
Both my biological parents (in the same household)	65
I lived with both my biological parents for an equal amount of time but in separate households	7
One of my biological parents	17
One of my biological parents and their partner	5
Adoptive parents	1
Foster family or in care	1
Someone else (for example, another relative)	1
N/A	2

Survey: Young people with experience of homelessness (n107)

Age	% of 107 respondents
16	0
17	6
18	17
19	12
20	20
21	11
22	9
23	10
24	8
25	7

Region Where did you spend most of your childhood?	% of 107 respondents
Scotland	0
Northern Ireland	2
North East	7
Yorkshire and Humberside	22
East Midlands	1
West Midlands	2
Wales	9
East of England	2
London	35
South East	6
South West	2

Ethnicity	% of 107 respondents
Asian or Asian British	6
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	22
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	15
White British or other White group	47
Latin American or British Latinx	1
Arab or Arab British	5
Other ethnicity	4
Prefer not to say	1

Religious household	% of 107 respondents
No	54
Yes	40
Prefer not to say	7

Immigration history Did you or one or both of your parents come to the UK from somewhere else?	% of 107 respondents
No	59
Yes, one or both of my parent(s)/carer(s) did but I was born in the UK	17
Yes, my parent(s) and I moved to the UK	8
Yes, I moved to the UK by myself or with a sibling	7
Prefer not to say	9

Gender	% of 107 respondents
Man	39
Woman	50
Non-binary or genderfluid	8
Prefer not to say	4

Gender identity Do you identify as transgender?	% of 107 respondents
Yes	6
No	92
Not sure	2
Prefer not to say	1

Neurodivergence Do you have autism, ADHD, and/or a learning disability or difficulty?	% of 107 respondents
No	25
Yes, and I received a diagnosis	21
I think so, but I have not received a diagnosis / am in the process of receiving one	35
Not sure	17
Prefer not to say	3

Sexual orientation	% of 107 respondents
Straight or heterosexual	69
Gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer	23
Other sexual orientation	4
Prefer not to say	5

Household composition Who did you mainly live with when growing up between the ages of 0-18?	% of 107 respondents
Both my biological parents (in the same household)	22
I lived with both my biological parents for an equal amount of time but in separate households	9
One of my biological parents	30
One of my biological parents and their partner	14
Adoptive parents	1
Foster family or in care	9
Someone else (for example, another relative)	9
Prefer not to say	8

Endnotes

1   Centrepoint. 2024. Failure to act: the scale of youth homelessness in the UK. Available at: https://centrepoint.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-11/Failure%20to%20Act%20-%20The%20scale%20of%20youth%20homelessness%20in%20the%20UK%20-%20Databank%20Report.pdf

2   Centre for Social Justice. 2013. Fractured Families: Why stability matters. Available at: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CSJ_Fractured_Families_Report_WEB_13.06.13-1.pdf

3   Centre for Social Justice. 2019. Why family matters: A comprehensive analysis of the consequences of family breakdown. Available at: https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/why-family-matters-comprehensive-analysis-of-the-consequences-of-family-breakdown#:~:text=This%20paper%20makes%20the%20case,your%20chances%20of%20becoming%20homeless.

4   Oluseye, A & Mvula, A F. 2022. Fractured families: causes and consequences of family breakdown. In Contemporary social problems in the UK, ed. S Stanly. London: Routledge

5   Barker, J. 2015. A habitus of instability: youth homelessness and instability: Journal of Youth Studies (19: 5). Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676261.2015.1098772

6   Mayock, P. 2021. Family 'turning point' experiences and the process of youth becoming homeless. Child & Family Social Work. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cfs.12823

7   Mallett, S; Rosenthal, D & Keys, D. 2005. Young people, drug use and family conflict: pathways into homelessness. Journal of Adolescence. Available at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15878042/

8   Centrepoint. 2016. Families under pressure: Preventing family breakdown and youth homelessness. Available at: https://centrepoint.org.uk/research-reports/families-under-pressure-preventing-family-breakdown-and-youth-homelessness

9   Ajai-Thomas, C. 2024. Young Black People's Experiences of Homelessness in London. In Homelessness and Black and Minoritised Ethnic Communities in the UK: a knowledge and capacity building programme. Edinburgh: Heriot-Watt University.

10 Albert Kennedy Trust. 2021. The lgbtq+ youth homelessness report. Available at: akt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/akt-thelgbtqyouthhomelessnessreport2021.pdf

11 Stewart, K. 2023 The two-child limit: a growing hole in the UK's safety net. Available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/research-assets/article-PDFs/two-child-limit.pdf

12 Scottish Parliament. 2021. Scottish Affairs Committee: Welfare in Scotland Inquiry. Available at: committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/18413/html/committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/18413/html/

13 Local Government Association. 2024. Scrap the two-child benefit cap. Available at: https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-libdem-group/motions/scrap-two-child-benefit-cap#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20strong%20correlation,further%20850%2C000%20children%20live%20in.

14 Intergenerational Foundation. 2017. 18-21 year olds to lose entitlement to automatic housing support. Available at: https://www.if.org.uk/2017/04/18/18-21-year-olds-to-lose-entitlement-to-housing-support/

15 Local Government Association. 2024. Scrap the two-child benefit cap. Available at: https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-libdem-group/motions/scrap-two-child-benefit-cap#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20strong%20correlation,further%20850%2C000%20children%20live%20in.

16 UK Government. 2022. Supporting Families Programme Guidance 2022 to 2025. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-programme-guidance-2022-to-2025

17 Haringey Council. About Family Hubs. Available at: https://haringey.gov.uk/children-young-people-families/family-hubs#:~:text=Our%20Family%20Hubs%20offer%20a,special%20educational%20needs%20and%20disabilities).

18 Community Practitioner. 2024. Family Hubs: the best start? Available at: https://www.communitypractitioner.co.uk/family-hubs-the-best-start/#:~:text=Former%20Children%27s%20Commissioner%20Anne%20says,%27

19 Nursery World. 2024. All about... family hubs. Available at: https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/content/features/all-about-family-hubs/

20 Children's Commissioner. 2022. Family Review Part II: Why are we revisiting the Family Test. Available at: https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/family-review-part-ii-why-we-are-revisiting-the-family-test/

21 Department for Education. Children's social care: stable homes, built on love. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love

22 UK Government. 2022. Independent review of children's social care. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care

23 Community Care. Government confirms backing for family help model initiated by Conservatives. Available at: https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/14/government-confirms-backing-for-family-help-model-initiated-by-conservatives/

24 UK Government. 2024. Families first for children (FFC) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot (FNP). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-for-children-ffc-pathfinder-programme/families-first-for-children-ffc-pathfinder-programme-and-family-networks-pilot-fnp

25   Centrepoint. 2024. Stats and facts. https://centrepoint.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/what-youth-homelessness/stats-and-facts

26   Home Office. Statutory definition of domestic abuse factsheet. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/statutory-definition-of-domestic-abuse-factsheet

27   Women's Aid. 2024. The Domestic Abuse Report 2024: The Annual Audit. Available at: https://www.womensaid.org.uk/annual-audit-2024/

28   ibid

29   The Guardian. 2024. Family drug and alcohol courts are still running and are a success. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/law/2024/dec/26/family-drug-and-alcohol-courts-are-still-running-and-are-a-success

30   FDAC. National Website for Family Drug & Alcohol Courts. Available at: https://fdac.org.uk/

31   Nuffield Trust. 2024. The rapidly growing waiting lists for autism and ADHD assessments. Available at: https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/the-rapidly-growing-waiting-lists-for-autism-and-adhd-assessments

32   Butler, P & Duncan, P. 2024. Spiralling demand and shrinking budgets: why England's Send system is buckling. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/22/spiralling-demand-and-shrinking-budgets-why-englands-send-system-is-buckling

33   Shelter. Overcrowding. Available at: https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/housing_conditions/overcrowding

34   Citizens Advice. 2023. Cost-of-living data trends. Available at: https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/policy/publications/cost-of-living-trends/

35   Mary, G & Keizer, R. 2024. Families of austerity: benefit cutbacks and family stress in the UK. Social Forces. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/sf/article/103/3/970/7748658

36   Gingerbread. 2023. Single Parents in 2023. Available at: https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Single-Parents-in-2023-Single-Parents-Day-report.pdf

37   Children & Young People Now. 2023. Homelessness among care leavers rises by a third over last five years. Available at: https://www.cypnow.co.uk/content/news/homelessness-among-care-leavers-rises-by-a-third-over-last-five-years/

38   Weale, S. 2024. Overhaul of children's social care in England will crack down on firms' profiteering. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/nov/18/overhaul-of-childrens-social-care-in-england-will-crack-down-on-firms-profiteering

39   The Mirror. 2025. New law protects care leavers from homelessness - how the big change will work. Available at: https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/new-law-change-protects-care-34506454

40   House of Commons. 2025. Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Available at: https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3909

41   The Guardian. 2021. Exclusion rates five times higher for black Caribbean pupils in parts of England | Race in education. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/24/exclusion-rates-black-caribbean-pupils-england

42   Albert Kennedy Trust. 2021. The lgbtq+ youth homelessness report. Available at: akt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/akt-thelgbtqyouthhomelessnessreport2021.pdf

43   "Unsure" or "Prefer not to say" account for the remaining proportion.

44   Shelter. Legal definition of homelessness and threatened homelessness. Available at: https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/homelessness_applications/homelessness_and_threatened_homelessness/legal_definition_of_homelessness_and_threatened_homelessness

45   Centrepoint. 2023. The Cost of Youth Homelessness. Available at: https://centrepoint.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/take-action/cost-youth-homelessness#:~:text=Overall%2C%20we%20estimated%20that%20the,salary%20of%20a%20police%20officer

46   National Centre for Family Hubs. Family hub funding explained. Available at: https://www.nationalcentreforfamilyhubs.org.uk/toolkits/family-hubs-funding/

47   House of Lords Library. 2024. Local government finances: Impact on communities. Available at: https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/local-government-finances-impact-on-communities/#:~:text=Government%20grants%20reduced%20by%2040,the%20pressures%20of%20the%20pandemic.

48   British Medical Association. "It's broken": Doctors' experiences on the frontline of a failing mental healthcare system. Available at: https://www.bma.org.uk/what-we-do/population-health/supporting-peoples-mental-health/failing-mental-healthcare-system

49   Department for Education. 2024. New RSHE guidance: What it means for sex education lessons in schools. Available at: https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/new-rshe-guidance-what-it-means-for-sex-education-lessons-in-schools/

50   Sex Education Forum. 2024. Guide to the RSHE consultation. Available at: https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/guide-rshe-consultation

51   Ayed, N; Fitzpatrick, S; Mackie, P and Thomas, I. 2025. Centrepoint: Upstream England Pilot Evaluation Interim Report

52   Centrepoint. 2023. The Cost of Youth Homelessness. Available at: https://centrepoint.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/take-action/cost-youth-homelessness#:~:text=Overall%2C%20we%20estimated%20that%20the,salary%20of%20a%20police%20officer

53   Joseph Rowntree Foundation. 2024. Guarantee our Essentials: reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times. Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the