

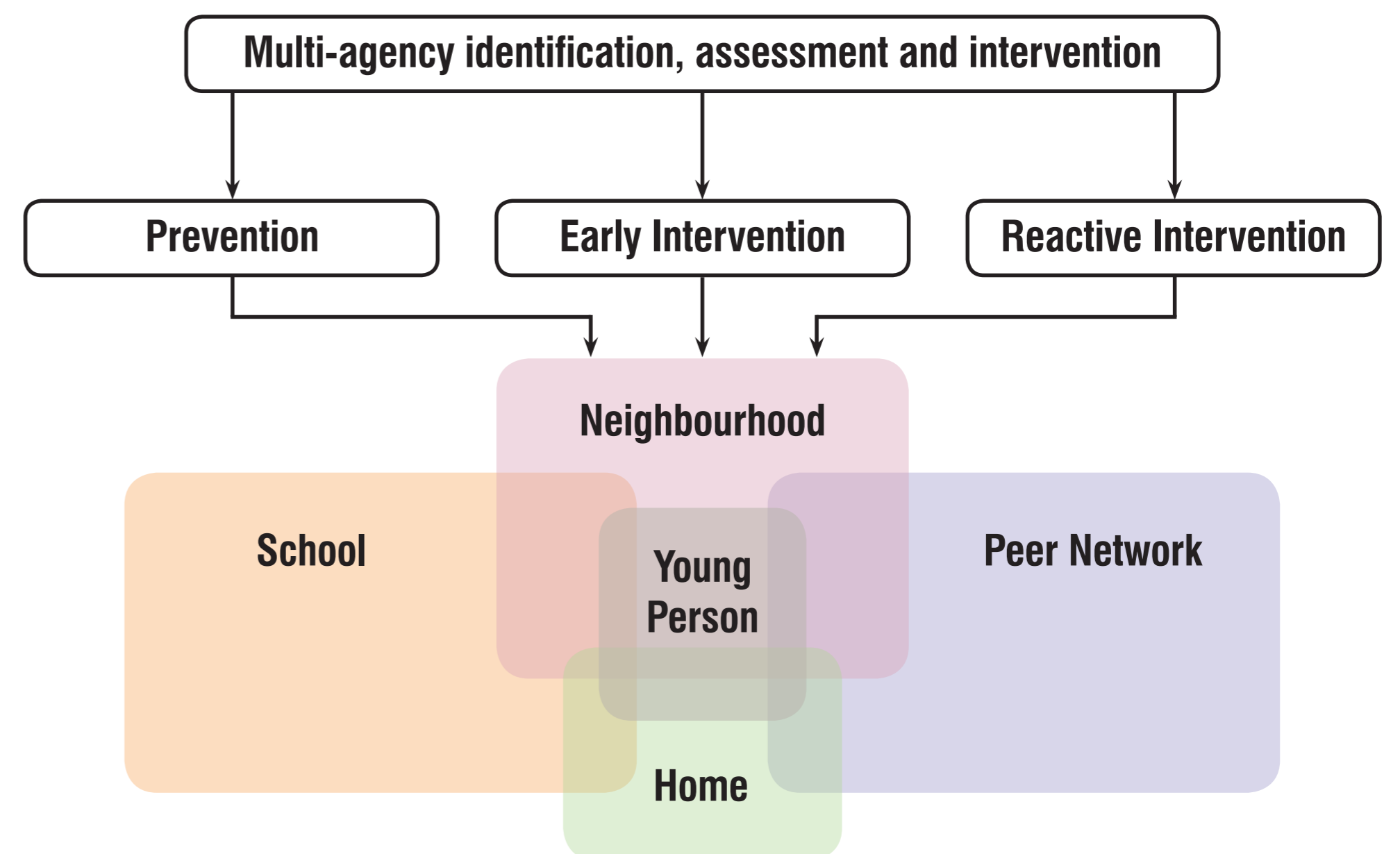
Can psychological models support schools in contextual safeguarding around youth violence?

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What is Contextual Safeguarding?

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.

Peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence, setting social norms which inform young people's experiences, behaviours and choices and determine peer status. These relationships are, in turn, shaped by, and shape, the school, neighbourhood and online contexts in which they develop. So if young people socialise in safe and protective schools and community settings they will be supported to form safe and protective peer relationships. However, if they form friendships in contexts characterised by violence and/or harmful attitudes these relationships too may be anti-social, unsafe or promote problematic social norms as a means of navigating, or surviving in, those spaces.



Psychological Theories that may inform contextual safeguarding in schools:

1. Ecological Systems Theory and Community Psychology

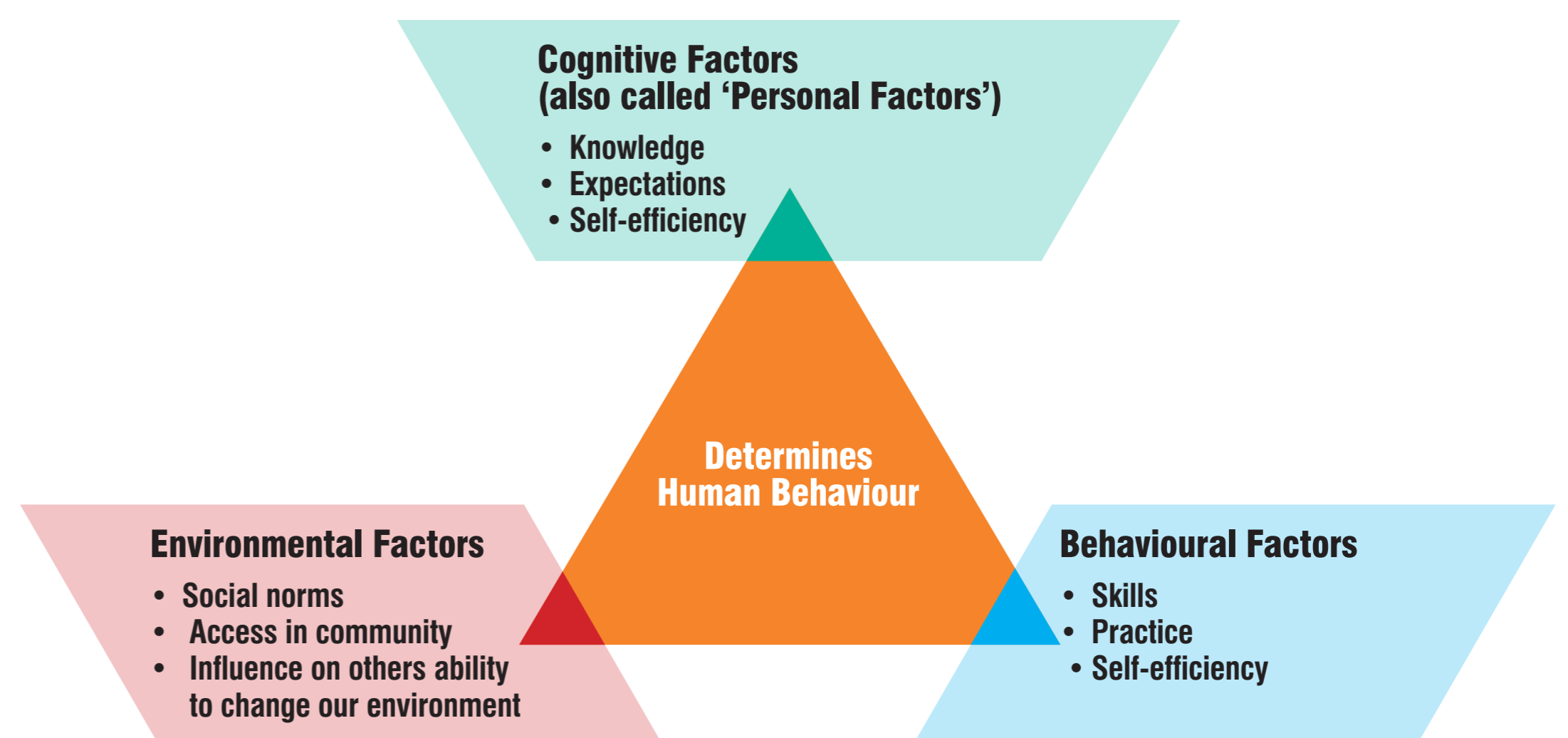
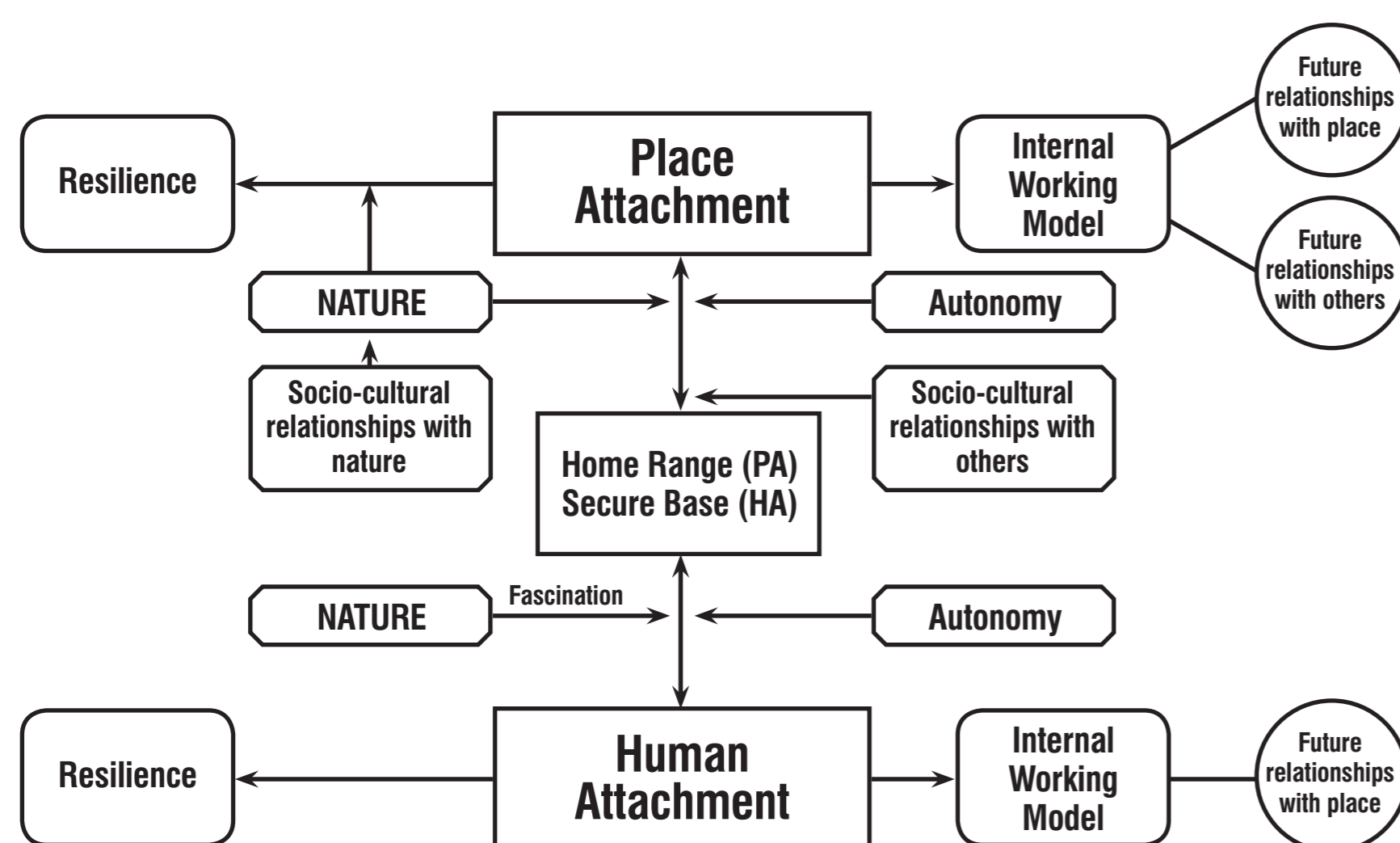
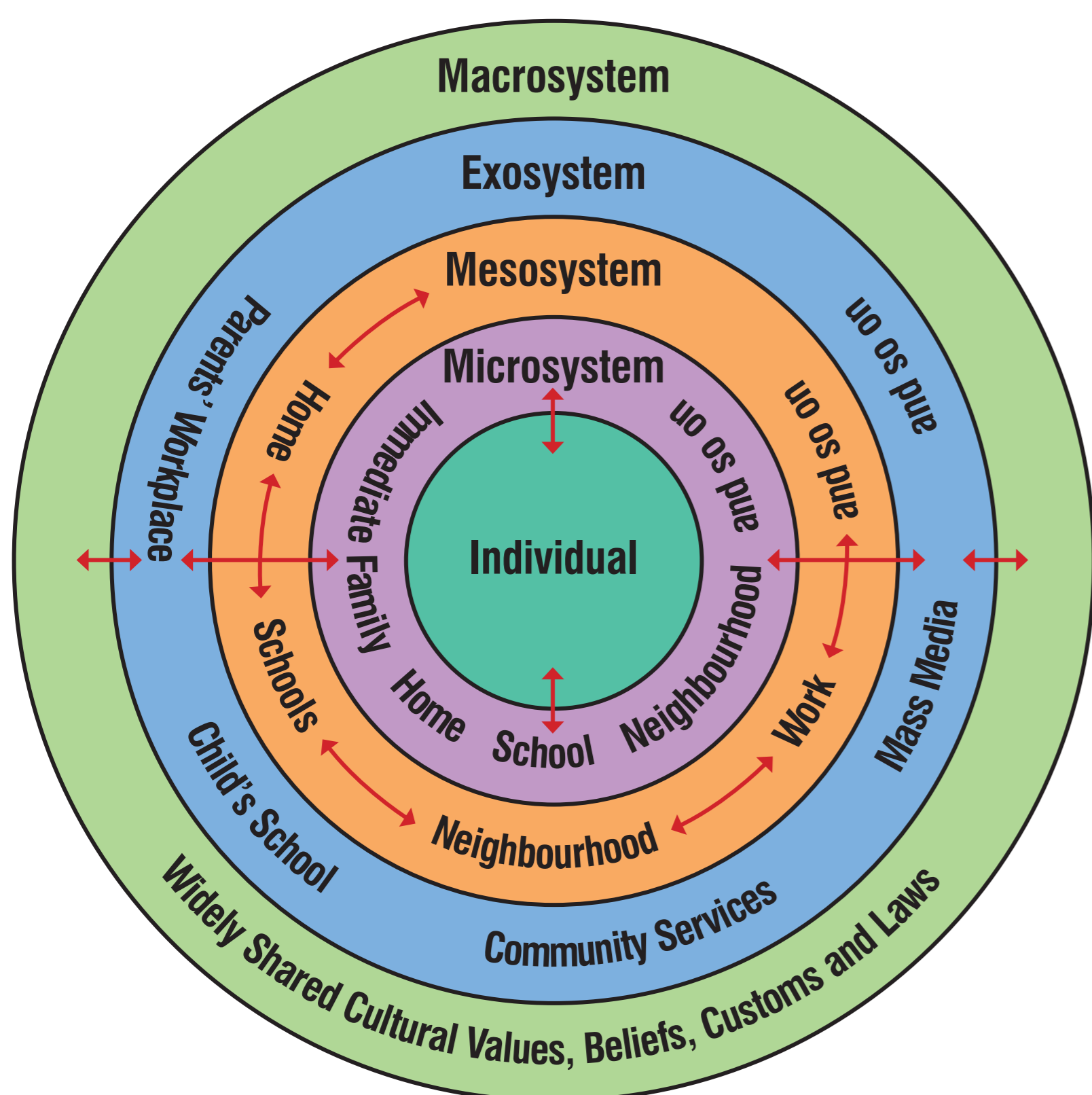
- Child/young person develops in systems that extends from close personal relationships to encompass the shared cultural values, beliefs and laws of the community
- Effective intervention must occur at different system levels
- Schools as sites of community intervention

2. Social Cognitive Theory

- Impact of role models and observational learning
- Children /young people learn from identifying with and imitating role models. This behaviour is reinforced by model
- Intervention occurs by providing new models and opportunities for observing models. Prosocial behaviours are reinforced by the new model

3. Attachment Theory and the Internal Working Model

- Children/young people can form attachments to inappropriate peers/adults outside of their family. They can develop distorted internal working models whereby violence, exploitation and coercion come to normalized as essential characteristics of the relationship, by the young person: "He beat me up to make me tougher, so I could survive on the streets".
- Intervention is focussed on changing the internal working model by supporting the development of new attachment relationships



Lets discuss! In order to mitigate the risk of gang exploitation and youth violence:

1. How do schools develop as sites for community intervention?
2. How can we use the principles of SCT to develop preventative systems of appropriate relationships and inform safeguarding around peers, in school settings?
3. How can schools use the principles of attachment theory to disrupt the development of distorted IWM and thereby break the cycle of youth violence and gang exploitation?