



# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

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## Why poverty matters and what schools can do

A UCL-funded review for the Youth Endowment Fund highlights how poverty, in its various forms, can raise the risk of young people being involved in crime and violence.

- Low income is more linked with violent crime; neighbourhood deprivation leans toward non-violent crime.
- Protective effects often differ e.g. girls and children in single-parent families benefit more from higher income.
- How children feel about their economic status, compared to peers, also plays a role.
- Schools should be aware that poverty isn't just financial, it's also about perception and context.

The Youth Endowment Fund is now piloting direct financial support programs to see if they can improve mental health, wellbeing, and reduce risks of violence.

**Key takeaway:** Addressing both the material and emotional dimensions of poverty can help reduce young people's vulnerability to harmful behaviours.

### Why this matters for schools

- **Holistic understanding:** It's not enough to focus solely on attendance or behaviour, economic context matters.
- **Targeted support:** Recognise that children's experiences of poverty are diverse. Single-parent families or those feeling poorer than their peers may need more tailored support.
- **Preventative approach:** Addressing both actual hardship and perceptions of disadvantage may help reduce vulnerability to crime or violence.
- **Emerging evidence:** Initiatives involving direct financial aid could offer a promising new route, not just in classrooms but in the lives of pupils.

### Read:

<https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/evidence-review-on-poverty-and-youth-crime-and-violence/>

## Hidden dangers: Schools must be alert to anonymity tools fueling online abuse

The Guardian has revealed how the Tor network, a technology built to preserve online anonymity and privacy, is being exploited by perpetrators of child sexual abuse. While Tor offers vital protection for dissidents and whistleblowers, schools must now be even more vigilant to understand how such tools enable dangerous behaviour and what they can do to safeguard pupils.

### What the report found

- **Anonymity is being misused.** Tor's core feature, strong anonymity, makes it nearly impossible to track or remove child sexual abuse material (CSAM), allowing users to share abuses and groom children with minimal fear of detection.
- **Online communities on Tor normalise abuse.** Predators form closed networks where they encourage increasingly harmful behaviours, even escalating to real-world contact offenses.
- **Easy entry via mainstream platforms.** Predators are often directed to Tor from social media platforms like Reddit, Discord, and Telegram. These platforms frequently host guides and links that lead users into the dark web.
- **Enforcement efforts continue, but fall short.** Although law enforcement has dismantled major abuse networks on Tor, new ones quickly emerge. The Tor Project has resisted introducing content filters or safeguards, citing privacy principles.

### Why schools need to take notice

- **Digital footprint implications.** Although Tor is a specialised tool often requiring guidance to access, the path to it increasingly starts via platforms that pupils may use. Schools should therefore be alert to signs of whether pupils are being exposed to harmful dark-web content.
- **The risk of escalation.** As predators increasingly exchange tips on grooming and targeting children, schools may inadvertently become focal points, especially if perpetrators are local or know the school community.
- **Guidance and intervention gaps.** With deceptive anonymity shielding offenders, educators and safeguarding staff may face greater challenges in identifying, intervening, or collaborating with authorities in cases involving online-facilitated abuse.

### What schools can do now

1. **Strengthen digital literacy education.** Teach pupils and parents about the dangers of links or channels promising "hidden" or "exclusive" online content. Awareness is a powerful first line of defense.
2. **Engage proactively with parents.** Encourage open communication about online curiosity. Emphasise that questioning or reporting unsettling content, regardless of its source, is always the right move.
3. **Enhance staff training.** Ensure safeguarding, IT, and pastoral teams understand that harmful online behaviours may originate in hidden corners of the Internet and that early signs often surface in subtle ways (e.g. changes in mood, withdrawal, coding references).

- **Collaborate with authorities and experts.** Schools should continue to follow and contribute to emerging national guidance on child-on-child abuse and online safety. Staying informed on policy shifts, particularly regarding online anonymity and abuse, will be crucial.
- **Promote safer online pathways.** Encourage the use of reputable, moderated digital platforms for pupil collaboration, while limiting access to unvetted sources or anonymous forums that may lead to harmful behaviour.

### Read:

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/aug/25/tor-network-child-sexual-abuse>

## "Sex is kind of broken now": children and pornography - What schools need to know

A landmark report by the Children's Commissioner for England (Dame Rachel de Souza) reveals alarming trends in children's exposure to pornography and points to urgent actions schools can take in response.

### What the report reveals:

#### 1. Exposure is common and happens early

- 70% of young people surveyed had seen pornography before turning 18, up from 64% in 2023.
- The average age of first exposure is 13, while over 25% reported seeing it by age 11, and some even younger.
- Exposure via accidental encounters has soared from 38% in 2023 to 59% now.

#### 2. Social media is the main vector

- Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) now surpass dedicated pornography sites as the most common source of exposure.

#### 3. Content is often violent and degrading

- Troubling types of content encountered include strangulation (58%), incest-like scenarios (step-relations, 57%), and non-consensual or sexual content involving those asleep (44%)—which is effectively rape.

#### 4. Regulatory measures are now being enforced

- Under the Online Safety Act, robust age-verification systems are mandated for major sites from 25th July 2025, aiming to curb under-18 access
- Early signs suggest a drop in traffic to adult websites like Pornhub shortly after these rules went live.

### Why schools should care

- **Education gaps:** Many young people confront warped sexual norms and expectations—without adequate education or context.
- **Normalisation of violence:** Both violent content and non-consensual themes risk distorting young views on consent and healthy relationships.
- **Tailored risk:** Accidental exposure shows that strong digital controls alone aren't enough—awareness and guidance are essential.

### How schools can respond

#### 1. Embed healthy sexuality in the curriculum

- Expand Relationships, Health and Sex Education (RHSE) to explore consent, respect, and digital literacy, including how pornography misrepresents sex.

#### 2. Train staff thoroughly

- Equip educators and safeguarding leads with current knowledge about digital risks and how to engage youth on difficult topics safely.

#### 3. Foster open conversations

- Encourage pupils and families to discuss what online content they may see and explore emotional impact without shame or judgment.

#### 4. Work in partnership

- Stay updated with Ofcom guidance, Online Safety Act provisions, and collaborate with local safeguarding partners to align school policies.

#### 5. Support RHSE capacity

- Invest in specialist RHSE teacher recruitment and professional development to ensure sensitive delivery of this vital part of the curriculum

### Read:

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/sex-is-kind-of-broken-now-children-and-pornography/>

## Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2025

Online safety - Tuesday 9th September

Pupils mental health - Tuesday 16th September

Depression - Tuesday 23rd September

Anxiety - Tuesday 30th September

Self harm and suicidal ideation - Tuesday 7th October

Anti-bullying - Tuesday 14th October

Domestic abuse - Tuesday 21st October

Just a reminder that all resources will be available in our **Safeguarding CPD Library**, where new recordings will be uploaded each week throughout this term.

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