



SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

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What schools need to know: Insights from the “Voice of the Boys” report

A recent research project by Male Allies UK asked over 1,000 boys aged 11-16 across Great Britain what they really think about themselves, school, masculinity and the future. The findings provide important guidance for schools looking to support boys more effectively.

Key findings

- **81%** of boys say there aren't enough “spaces to be a boy” today.
- **72%** of boys don't have more than one person who knows them ‘really well’.
- **79%** aren't clear what masculinity means.
- **65%** believe school does not adequately prepare them for the future.
- **54%** feel that boys have it harder than girls today.
- **82%** don't trust UK politicians.

What this means for schools

1. **Create safe, meaningful spaces for boys** - Boys are signalling a need for environments where they feel they “belong” and can express themselves beyond stereotypes. Schools should consider dedicated time and space (pastoral, peer-group or mentoring) where boys feel they can “just be”.
2. **Strengthen adult-boy relationships** - With many boys reporting they don't have more than one person who truly knows them, it's critical that schools foster strong relationships between staff and pupils. It's not just academic support, it's relational support.
3. **Clarify what healthy masculinity looks like** - With nearly 80% unclear about masculinity, schools should include guided discussions, role models and inclusive work on gender and identity that help boys articulate who they are and how they want to be.
4. **Ensure curriculum and guidance connect to future readiness** - If 65% believe school isn't prepping them for the future, schools need to review how their careers education, mentoring and life skills provision are framed. Are boys seeing where their learning leads and how it connects to the world beyond school?
5. **Be alert to perceptions of unfairness** - Over half of the boys feel that boys have it harder than girls. Even if that perception is not borne out in every context, the feeling matters. An inclusive approach will address boys' concerns, ensuring they feel seen and supported alongside other groups.
6. **Engage in genuine listening and voice-giving** - The whole premise of the report is that boys want to be heard. Schools should embed boys' voices in school improvement, ask them directly: what support do you need? What gets in your way? What helps you feel you belong?

Practical next steps for your school

- **Run a “Voice of the Boys” survey** internally: What do our boys feel? What do they believe?
- **Introduce or refresh mentoring/pastoral groups specifically for boys**, focusing on wellbeing, identity and future pathways.
- **Develop staff CPD** on gender-inclusive practice and healthy masculinities (ensuring all staff, male and female, are engaged).
- **Review careers, PSHE and bursary work:** Are we making clear to boys how their skills link to futures?
- **Build in “boy-voice” forums:** regular listening sessions or focus groups where boys can speak frankly and propose solutions.
- **Monitor outcomes and perceptions by gender:** attendance, behaviour, wellbeing referrals, sense of belonging.

Read:

<https://www.maleallies.co.uk/voice-of-the-boys-report/>

Supporting Online Safety: What schools need to know

Key insights

- Many parents report concern about their children's online lives: for example, around **75%** of UK parents say they are worried about what children are doing or seeing online.
- A significant number of parents are not confident they fully know what their children are seeing or hearing online: for instance, around **13%** of parents say they are not confident about this.
- Conversations about online safety do happen, but often less frequently than might be ideal: for example, one study found only a third of parents had spoken about online safety topics in the recent past.
- Parents report difficulty discussing certain topics (eg sexting, grooming, body image) and some feel out of their depth.
- Young people want to be involved in the conversation: many feel they could help their parents understand the online world better, but lack the structured support.

Implications for schools

- **Reinforce partnerships with parents** - Schools should recognise that parents want help and may feel less confident than they appear. Offering regular, accessible guidance sessions (digital safety workshops, drop-in clinics, newsletters with practical tips) can strengthen the home-school link.
- **Facilitate meaningful conversations** - Rather than just providing lists of rules, schools can support parents (and pupils) to have open conversations: how to talk about what their child sees, how it makes them feel, and what choices they might make. Encourage family discussion as part of homework, assemblies, or parent-workshops.

- **Tackle the difficult topics** - Some areas (sexting, grooming, body image, online identity) are harder for parents to address. The school's PSHE/RSE/online-safety curriculum should ensure these are covered explicitly and schools should provide parent-friendly materials so families can continue the conversation at home.
- **Empower pupils to be digital ambassadors** - As research shows, many young people believe they could help their parents. Schools can formalise this by training pupil “online-safety champions” or peer mentors, who help raise awareness, and assist families in understanding online risks and controls.
- **Embed ongoing communication, not one-off events** - Online safety isn't a one-time assembly it's a continuous conversation. Schools should embed regular updates (eg termly newsletters, parent-tech guides, staff-training refreshers) so that online-safety remains a live, evolving topic.
- **Make it inclusive and understandable** - Recognise that families may vary in digital literacy, language, confidence. Provide materials in multiple formats (visual guides, videos, translated versions) and ensure parents feel welcome and not judged.

Read:

<https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/research/parents-talk-online-safety/>

What schools need to know: Growing up online

A recent data commentary from the Nuffield Foundation and Ada Lovelace Institute explores how digital technologies are interwoven with young people's journeys to adulthood, covering access, time use, relationships, identity and wellbeing.

Key findings

- **There is no single experience of growing up online:** young people's interactions with technology vary widely.
- **Access and time-use matter:** most young people have smartphones, but device access and how they spend time online differ substantially across socio-economic lines.
- **Relationships:** Many young people use digital tools to maintain friendships and build connections. Building relationships online (including with people not met in person) is more common as young people get older, with associated safety implications.
- **Identity formation:** Digital spaces can help young people explore, express and affirm their identities (including LGBTQ+ identity). At the same time, social media and online use can trigger social comparison, body-image issues and exposure to identity-based harms.
- **Wellbeing and online harms:** While many young people say social media and technology are positive, a considerable number still report exposure to harmful content (violence, misinformation, sexual content). Evidence does not strongly support the idea that social media causes mental health problems but context, individual factors and offline environments matter.
- **Equity/disadvantage:** Young people from marginalised or minoritised groups may experience both greater benefits (through connection) and greater risks.

Read:

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/research/our-programmes/grown-up/growing-up-online>

County Lines: The evolving threat schools need to understand

Based on the annual review covering April 2024 to March 2025:

- There are over 6,500 County Lines operations active across England, Scotland and Wales.
- The threat remains stable (numbers of lines and the drug types involved held broadly constant) but the business model is evolving.
- Violence and weapons offences remain strongly associated: **73.5%** of offenders known for violence/weapons.
- Exploitation of children remains a major concern: **at least 2,659** children recorded as being exploited, although actual numbers likely much higher (some estimates **11,600 children** missing and at-risk).
- There is a rise in use of social-media and encrypted apps for drug supply (especially cannabis and “party drugs”) and a shift in models (not only traditional urban-to-rural lines).
- Efforts to disrupt these networks are making progress: **over 6,000 arrests and 2,300 lines** closed since July 2024.

What schools need to know: County Lines exploitation is evolving, and schools play a vital role in early identification and prevention. Young people may be targeted or coerced into criminal activity through grooming, debt, or intimidation, often via social media or local networks rather than large-scale movement. Warning signs include sudden changes in behaviour, new friendships, unexplained money or gifts, secrecy, or anxiety. Schools should work closely with safeguarding partners, police and social care, ensuring policies, training and reporting procedures remain current. Embedding prevention through PSHE, mentoring and resilience-building helps pupils recognise grooming and exploitation, promoting safety and informed decision-making.

Read:

<https://policeprofessional.com/news/county-lines-threat-remains-significant-and-continues-to-evolve-report-finds/>

Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2 2025

Radicalisation - Tuesday 11th November

Child-on-child sexual abuse - Tuesday 18th November

Sexism and sexual harassment - Tuesday 25th November

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) - Tuesday 2nd December

County lines - Tuesday 9th December

Trauma - Tuesday 16th December

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