SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

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What every school should know about Youth Violence Prevention – Lessons from the Youth Endowment Fund

A major new guidance report from the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) highlights the critical role of structured youth support and positive relationships in preventing children and young people from becoming involved in violence and offers important insights for schools aiming to shape safer environments for pupils.

Violence remains a significant issue for young people in England and Wales. YEF's broader research shows that around one in five teenagers aged 13–17 reported being a victim of violence in the past year, and one in eight reported engaging in violence themselves. While schools are often the first line of safeguarding, understanding how wider youth work and community support can complement in-school efforts is vital for meaningful prevention.

1. Youth Work isn't optional....It's preventative

YEF's Youth Work and Violence Prevention guidance emphasises youth work as a core approach to keep children safe. This includes structured activities, mentoring, community engagement and regular contact with trusted adults, all of which support young people's social, emotional and behavioural development and reduce risk factors associated with violence.

For schools, this reinforces the importance of:

- Providing access to positive extracurricular activities.
- Supporting mentoring programmes and pastoral systems that build trusting relationships.
- Collaborating with local youth services to fill gaps in pupils' broader support networks.

2. Positive activities and trusted adults are protective

Data collected by YEF show that youth clubs and structured activities reach children most vulnerable to violence, including those excluded from school, involved with social services or at higher risk of offending. These settings offer safe spaces and connections that can reduce isolation and exposure to harm.

Schools can translate this by investing in:

- Enrichment programmes that build confidence and belonging.
- Opportunities for pupils to connect with safe adults beyond their usual teachers.
- Creative, sporting or community service options that extend learning and wellbeing.

3. Understanding risk and targeting support

YEF highlights that prevention is most effective when targeted at pupils with elevated risks for example, those with known trauma, exclusion histories, or social vulnerabilities. Schools' safeguarding systems should align with this by ensuring that risk assessments and interventions reflect evidence on violence risk factors (e.g. exposure to violence, social deprivation, or lack of trusted support).

4. Build long-term support, not one-off programmes

Short-term or isolated activities are less likely to yield long-lasting change. YEF recommends multi-year funding, consistent engagement and sustained relationships to make a real impact.

For schools, this translates to:

- Avoiding one-off assemblies on violence without follow-up.
- Developing long-running PSHE, mentoring, and wellbeing curricula.
- Embedding violence prevention into whole school culture, not just discrete lessons.

5. Evidence matters.....Know what works

Schools should draw on high-quality evidence when choosing approaches. YEF's YEF Toolkit offers accessible summaries of violence prevention strategies backed by research, helping educators choose interventions more likely to be effective.

Read:
https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/youth-work-and-violence-prevention/

Practice insights: Harmful masculinity and its impact on children – what schools need to know

Understanding how harmful and unhealthy expressions of masculinity can affect children is an important part of safeguarding practice. Men can be both survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse, and each presents distinct and often complex safeguarding challenges for schools.

Drawing on frontline practice from the NSPCC Helpline and Childline, this podcast episode focuses on male experiences of domestic abuse. It explores the realities of working with male perpetrators, the barriers male survivors may face when disclosing abuse, and the impact domestic abuse can have on parent-child relationships.

Key messages for schools include:

- **Harmful and unhealthy expressions of masculinity can normalise control,** silence emotional expression, and increase risk for children living with domestic abuse.
- **Language matters** – how masculinity is talked about by adults and peers can shape behaviours, expectations, and relationships.
- **The online world plays a growing role in influencing young people's views of masculinity**, power, and gender roles, sometimes reinforcing harmful narratives.
- **Services and trusted professionals are crucial** in helping individuals make sense of their experiences of abuse and access appropriate, timely support.
- **Positive role modelling** and emotional literacy are protective factors, helping children and young people develop healthier ways to express emotions and manage conflict.

For schools, this reinforces the importance of professional curiosity, sensitive language, and creating safe spaces where children and families feel able to talk. Safeguarding responses should recognise that domestic abuse can affect all genders and that challenging harmful masculinity is a key part of early intervention and prevention.

Podcast:
https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2026/february/podcast-domestic-abuse-male-experience?utm_campaign=20260209_KIS_CASPAR_February09&utm_content=Podcast%26A%20Male%20experiences%20of%20domestic%20abuse&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Adestra

Supporting autistic wellbeing in schools: What you need to know about the Autistic and OK programme and toolkit

Schools play a vital role in safeguarding the wellbeing of autistic pupils and a new free, evidence-informed resource from Ambitious about Autism can help embed that support in your everyday practice. The Autistic and OK programme and toolkit is designed to improve autistic young people's understanding of their mental health and equip schools to foster a more inclusive, supportive environment for their pupils.

Why this matters

Many autistic young people experience mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive behaviours and difficulties with social interaction and these can impact attendance, engagement and school safety if not addressed early and appropriately. The Autistic and OK toolkit was developed in collaboration with autistic young people themselves to respond to these needs in a way that is accessible, empowering and school-centred.

What Autistic and OK offers

The programme is a peer-led, secondary school-focused wellbeing initiative that includes:

- **Peer-led session resources:** Step-by-step session plans, worksheets and guidance for older autistic pupils to support younger peers on topics such as anxiety, depression, bullying and OCD.
- **Teacher's guide and training module:** Clear instructions, strategies and training to help staff support autistic pupils' wellbeing and understand mental health signals.
- **Parent/carer information pack:** Guidance to help families understand the programme and access appropriate support.
- **Assembly session pack:** Resources to help the whole school community increase understanding and acceptance of autism.

All resources are freely downloadable and designed to work flexibly alongside your existing school systems.

Peer-led and autism-affirming

A core strength of the programme is that autistic young people lead many of the sessions. This peer-led model not only supports the wellbeing of participants, it helps build confidence and leadership skills in older autistic pupils and fosters understanding and acceptance among their peers. Early evaluation from schools that have implemented Autistic and OK shows improved social connection, increased understanding among classmates and teachers, and better pupil confidence in managing their own wellbeing.

Resources:
https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/what-we-do/services/i-am-an-autistic-young-person/wellbeing-toolkits/autistic-and-ok

Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Spring term 1 2026

Children with a family member in prison (Bitesize webinar and audio version) - Tuesday 10th February

Spring term 2 - 5-minute 'bitesize' and audio version safeguarding refresher videos

Child modern slavery - Tuesday 3rd March
Children missing from home or care -Tuesday 10th March
Child abduction and community safety incidents - Tuesday 17th March
Faith based abuse - Tuesday 24th March

To make the most of your brief all-staff safeguarding slot, you may wish to use one of my short 'bite-size' safeguarding videos or audio recordings, alongside a discussion-prompt slide. This approach helps keep safeguarding firmly in focus during those valuable five minutes at the start of your staff briefing.

I will share these pre-recorded videos and audio versions with you so they can be watched or listened to at a time that suits you. They will also feature in my weekly newsletters throughout the Spring term.

Please note that the S4S Safeguarding Office will be closed from **Friday 13th February** and will reopen on **Monday 23rd February 2026**. If you have an urgent safeguarding query during this period, please contact **Lauren.Jones@services4schools.org.uk** or telephone Lauren on **07464 490961**.

The safeguarding update will resume on **Tuesday 24th February 2026**. Wishing you a very happy and well-deserved half-term break.

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