

SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

TUESDAY 2ND JUNE 2026 • ISSUE 177



Domestic abuse and suicide: What schools need to know

A new report from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has highlighted a deeply concerning trend: increasing numbers of deaths are now being recognised as suspected suicides following domestic abuse. The findings reinforce the devastating long-term impact domestic abuse can have on victims and the importance of early identification, intervention and support.

The key findings

The NPCC Domestic Homicide Project recorded 347 domestic abuse-related deaths in the year ending March 2025, an increase of 85 deaths compared with the previous year. Much of this rise is linked to improved recognition and recording of suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse (SVSDA).

Across the five-year reporting period:

- **1,452 domestic abuse-related deaths were recorded**
- **553 were identified as suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse**
- **641 were domestic homicides**
- **86 involved child deaths**

For the third consecutive year, suspected victim suicides linked to domestic abuse have exceeded intimate partner homicides, highlighting what police describe as a significant and often hidden consequence of abuse.

Why this matters for schools

Although many of these cases involve adults, the implications for safeguarding professionals working with children and young people are significant.

Children living with domestic abuse are not only affected by the immediate harm they witness or experience. They may also be living within households where a parent or caregiver is experiencing extreme emotional distress, coercive control, fear, isolation, mental health difficulties or suicidal thoughts.

Schools may be one of the few places where changes in a child's presentation become visible.

Potential indicators schools may notice

Staff should remain professionally curious when children present with:

- **Increased anxiety or emotional distress**
- **Sudden behavioural changes**
- **Withdrawal from peers or activities**
- **Low mood or persistent sadness**
- **Attendance concerns**
- **Sleepiness, tiredness or poor concentration**
- **Increased safeguarding disclosures**
- **Expressions of hopelessness or worries about a parent's wellbeing**
- **Heightened caring responsibilities at home**

Whilst these indicators do not necessarily mean domestic abuse is occurring, they may form part of a wider safeguarding picture that requires exploration and support.

The importance of understanding coercive control

Many domestic abuse-related suicides are linked not solely to physical violence but to patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour. Police have highlighted that these forms of abuse can have devastating psychological consequences and may be missed if professionals focus only on physical indicators.

Schools should ensure staff understand that domestic abuse can include:

- **Emotional abuse**
- **Psychological manipulation**
- **Isolation from family and friends**
- **Threats and intimidation**
- **Financial control**
- **Coercive and controlling behaviour**

Information sharing remains critical

The report found that many victims or perpetrators were already known to agencies before the deaths occurred. Police are continuing to stress the importance of multi-agency working and information sharing to identify risk earlier and prevent future tragedies.

For schools, this reinforces the importance of:

- **Recording concerns promptly and accurately**
- **Sharing information with safeguarding leads without delay**
- **Engaging fully with multi-agency meetings and plans**
- **Maintaining professional curiosity when concerns persist**
- **Recognising cumulative risk rather than viewing incidents in isolation**

An emerging concern for young people

Particularly concerning is the recent identification of the first recorded teenage suicide linked to domestic abuse in England and Wales. Police leaders have warned about the growing impact of unhealthy relationship behaviours, coercive control and harmful online influences affecting young people.

This highlights the importance of:

- **Effective Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)**
- **Teaching children about healthy relationships and consent**
- **Challenging harmful online content and misogyny**

Providing safe opportunities for pupils to seek help and talk about concerns

Domestic abuse is not only a criminal justice issue, it is a safeguarding issue that affects entire families. The growing recognition of suicides following domestic abuse reminds all professionals that the impact of abuse can extend far beyond visible injuries.

Schools play a vital role in identifying concerns, listening to children, supporting families and working alongside other agencies. Early intervention, professional curiosity and effective information sharing remain some of the most powerful tools we have to help protect vulnerable children and prevent harm.

Read:

<https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/growing-awareness-of-suicides-following-domestic-abuse-leads-to-rise-in-recorded-deaths>

AI in education: What schools need to know

The Department for Education has published a comprehensive collection of support materials to help schools and colleges use artificial intelligence (AI) safely, effectively and responsibly. The guidance recognises that AI is already becoming part of education and focuses on helping leaders and staff understand both the opportunities and the risks.

Why this matters

Many schools are already seeing staff and pupils using generative AI tools for lesson planning, research, homework support, content creation and administrative tasks. The DfE's message is clear: AI is not something schools can ignore, but it must be implemented with appropriate safeguards, professional oversight and clear policies.

The support materials have been developed by the Department for Education in partnership with the Children Learning Trust and the Chartered College of Teaching. They are designed to help schools build staff confidence, improve understanding and develop safe practice.

Key safeguarding considerations

From a safeguarding perspective, schools should ensure that AI use is considered within their wider safeguarding, online safety and data protection arrangements.

Areas schools should consider include:

- **Ensuring staff understand what information should never be entered into AI systems, particularly personal, safeguarding or confidential pupil information**
- **Reviewing data protection and GDPR implications before introducing AI tools**
- **Considering the reliability and accuracy of AI-generated content**
- **Understanding that AI can produce biased, misleading or factually incorrect information**
- **Ensuring appropriate filtering, monitoring and supervision where pupils have access to AI tools**
- **Maintaining professional curiosity and human oversight rather than relying on AI-generated decisions**
- **Updating acceptable use agreements and online safety policies to reflect AI use**

The DfE continues to emphasise that safety must remain the priority when considering the use of generative AI in educational settings.

What leaders should be doing now

School leaders should consider:

- **Developing a clear position on staff and pupil use of AI**
- **Providing staff training and awareness**
- **Reviewing existing safeguarding, online safety and data protection policies**
- **Establishing expectations around acceptable and ethical use**
- **Ensuring governors understand both the opportunities and risks**
- **Monitoring emerging guidance and developments in this rapidly changing area**

The DfE materials include modules covering understanding AI, interacting with generative AI, safe use of AI and practical educational use cases. Separate leadership resources are also available to support strategic decision-making.

An emerging safeguarding risk

Schools should also remain alert to emerging AI-related safeguarding concerns. Recent reports have highlighted the increasing misuse of AI to manipulate publicly available images of children, creating safeguarding and online safety risks for schools and families. This reinforces the importance of reviewing how pupil images are used on websites and social media, alongside wider online safety measures.

AI has the potential to reduce workload, support planning and enhance learning opportunities. However, like any technology, it must be used thoughtfully, safely and with appropriate safeguards in place. Schools that invest now in staff awareness, policy development and clear governance will be better placed to maximise the benefits of AI while protecting children, staff and sensitive information. For safeguarding leaders, the key message remains simple: AI should support professional judgement, never replace it.

Support materials:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/using-ai-in-education-settings-support-materials>

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

FGM - Tuesday 9th June

CCE and serious violence - Tuesday 16th June

CSE - Tuesday 23rd June

Domestic abuse - Tuesday 30th June

Radicalisation and extremism - Tuesday 7th July

Child abduction and community safety incidents - Tuesday 14th July

KCSIE 2026 - Date to be confirmed

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