

Schools Safeguarding Forum

2nd July 2026

Safeguarding
in Schools

Southwark
Council

WSA Women's Safety Alliance

WSA, run by Bede, is Southwark's locally funded inclusive VAWG service; we support all genders.

Presented by Ahlam Laabori, WSA Head of Service



A New Vision

- Southwark's vision is to be a borough with zero tolerance of violence against women and girls, where it is not tolerated and where no resident, visitor or worker needs to fear violence, whether at home or on the streets of Southwark.
- What this means:
- A consistent response to all VAWG crimes
- Greater focus on public VAWG crimes and preventative work
- Frontline staff to work with all VAWG crimes

The Service

- Greater focus on first contact with the client — ensuring robust triage during the first call.
- Co-location strategy
- The team will be more visible in the community.
- The scope will cover all areas of VAWG.
- Trauma-informed IGVA support
- Greater focus on partnership working to allow us to focus on safety and advocacy.
- Emotional Wellbeing and Support
- Child therapy and adult counselling.
- Freedom Group

Core partnership

- Bede
- Southwark Law Centre
- Citizens Advice Southwark
- 1st Place
- Lives Not Knives



What happens when we get a referral

- Triage call with the client
- Conduct a risk assessment face-to-face
- We give clients options to help them leave or stay safe
- We help the client even if the abuse is historic
- Freedom Programme
- In-house counselling:
 - Child Art Therapy 5-17
 - Adult Art Therapy
 - Integrative counselling
- Liaise with other agencies, such as police and housing
- We work with all genders

- Once we have assessed the risk and have an action plan, we internally refer to our partners.
- **Empower our clients to find their voice again**

Note — our partners cannot accept direct referrals from other agencies

IGVA Role (Independent Gendered Violence Advocate)



Advocacy and risk management.



Anticipate and identify possible risk and escalation



Multi-agency coordination



Client voice central to our work



If the client does not want to leave the abuser, we can not work with the client.



We know that Children and young people are often impacted even if they are not the direct target

What is Child Therapy? (5–17 Years)

Therapy Key principles :

Therapy focuses on the concerns of the child. This form of therapy helps the child understand their emotions and unconscious patterns of behaviour.

Psychodynamic work also includes developmental psychology and attachment theory .The therapist can use various tools

Messy play

Paint/ sand work

Role Play

Talking therapy

Outcome of using this approach:

The child will connect with their emotions

identify patterns of behaviour

Improve interpersonal relationships

Improve and Address avoidance

Children can learn to identify triggers, develop positive self-talk, and build resilience.

Things to remember

What therapy isn't for- Not to replace IGVA/IDVA work.

The therapist cannot help the child safeguard themselves.

Sessions are not long term- 12 weeks and are after school .



VAWG Crimes

Violence Against Women and Girls

(VAWG) encompasses a range of gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women and girls. It is both a **human rights violation** and a **public health issue**, rooted in gender inequality and structural oppression.

WSA works with all genders.

It can generally be grouped into the following categories:

- Domestic Abuse
- Sexual Violence
- Stalking and Harassment
- Honour-Based Abuse
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Forced Marriage
- Sexual Exploitation
- Online Abuse
- Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

What is Domestic Abuse?

Legal Definition:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

- Since the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, children who have been exposed to domestic abuse are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse in their own right, rather than just witnesses. The Act defines a victim of domestic abuse as including a child who sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse, and is related to the abuser or the victim

Statistics

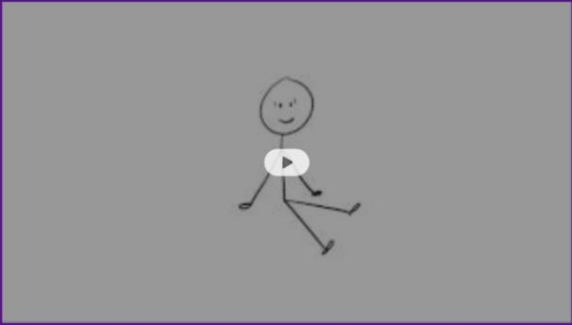
According to data from the Youth Endowment Fund, **37% of boys** in teenage relationships report experiencing relationship abuse, compared to 41% of girls.

Impact on Children: Local safeguarding audits show that **31% of Child Protection cases** and **40% of Child in Need cases** in Southwark contain a domestic abuse element.

National statistics:

- Around 1 in 10 women aged 16 to 24 experience sexual assault each year.
- On average, a woman is killed by a man every three days.
- 9 in 10 girls and half of boys said they or their peers had received unwanted sexual images.
- 92% of girls and 74% of boys reported frequent sexist name-calling.

By the end of this we want YOU to feel safe and open talking about relationships and be empowered to always put yourself first.



- WE WILL BE COVERING:
- CONSENT
 - SEXTING
 - HARRASMENT
 - RELATIONSHIPS
 - SELF LOVE

Bede
Believing in community.



• Healthy Relationships in Schools

LIVES
NOT
KNIVES

More Than Workshops: A Safeguarding Partnership

"How many of the safeguarding concerns you deal with today have a relationship element at their core?"

Examples may include:

Domestic abuse within the family home
Peer-on-peer abuse
Sexual harassment and violence
Harmful sexual behaviour
Child exploitation
Online abuse and coercion
Bullying and friendship issues
Mental health and wellbeing concerns
Attendance and disengagement from school
Gender-based violence and misogyny

Why This Matters:

- **Healthy relationships education is not just about learning; it is a safeguarding tool that helps children recognise harm, seek support, and build safer relationships.**

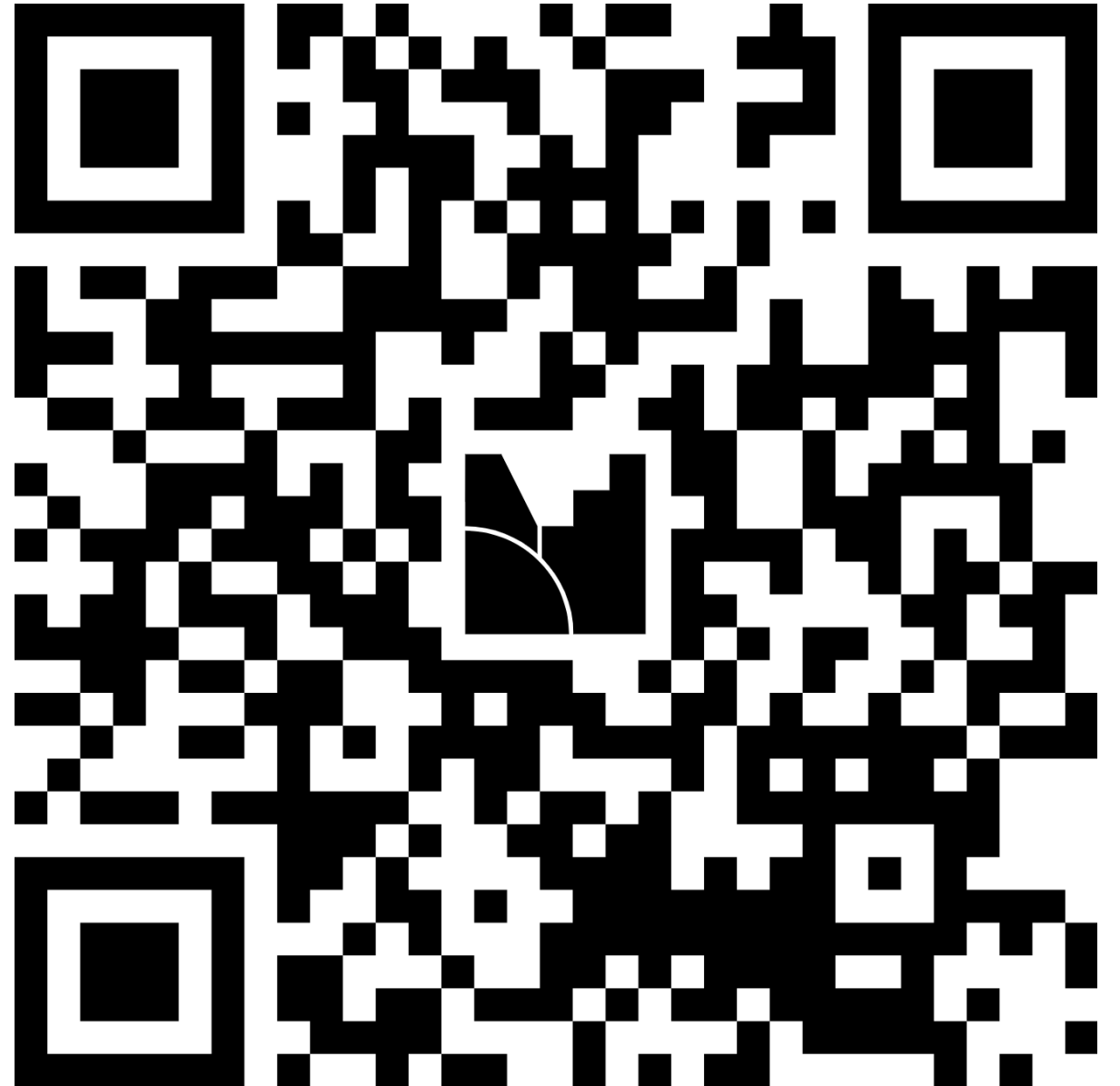
The Role of Our Healthy Relationships Coordinator

Supporting children and young people from primary age upwards through:

- Delivery of age-appropriate Healthy Relationships workshops and group programmes.
 - Early identification of children and young people experiencing unhealthy or abusive relationships.
 - Targeted support for pupils affected by domestic abuse within the family home.
 - One-to-one support for young people requiring additional intervention following workshops or disclosures.
 - Building young people's confidence, self-esteem, resilience and understanding of healthy boundaries.
 - Supporting children to recognise coercive control, exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse and harmful relationship behaviours.
 - Providing a trusted adult for children who may not otherwise seek support.
- **Supporting DSLs and Schools**
 - Consultation and advice on safeguarding concerns relating to relationships and VAWG issues.
 - Support with safety planning and referrals into specialist services.
 - Joint working around children affected by domestic abuse and VAWG.
 - Input into safeguarding meetings where appropriate.
 - Support following disclosures made during workshops.
 - Helping schools meet their safeguarding and RSHE responsibilities.

Which relationship
issue are you most
concerned about in
your setting?

<https://www.menti.com/alx2yq6i1cc3>



National Safeguarding Context (Ofsted, 2021)

Ofsted's review into sexual harassment in schools found:

- Peer-on-peer sexual harassment was **“commonplace”** in schools
- Sexist language, behaviours and attitudes often **persisted unchallenged**
- **9 in 10 girls** and **around half of boys** reported exposure to unwanted explicit images or videos
- **92% of girls and 74% of boys** reported frequent sexist name-calling
- Many children **did not report incidents because it had become normalised**



Work in Schools

Understand healthy vs unhealthy relationships

Recognise early signs of abuse and control

Explore boundaries, consent, and respect

Build confidence and self-worth

Make safer relationship choices



The offer

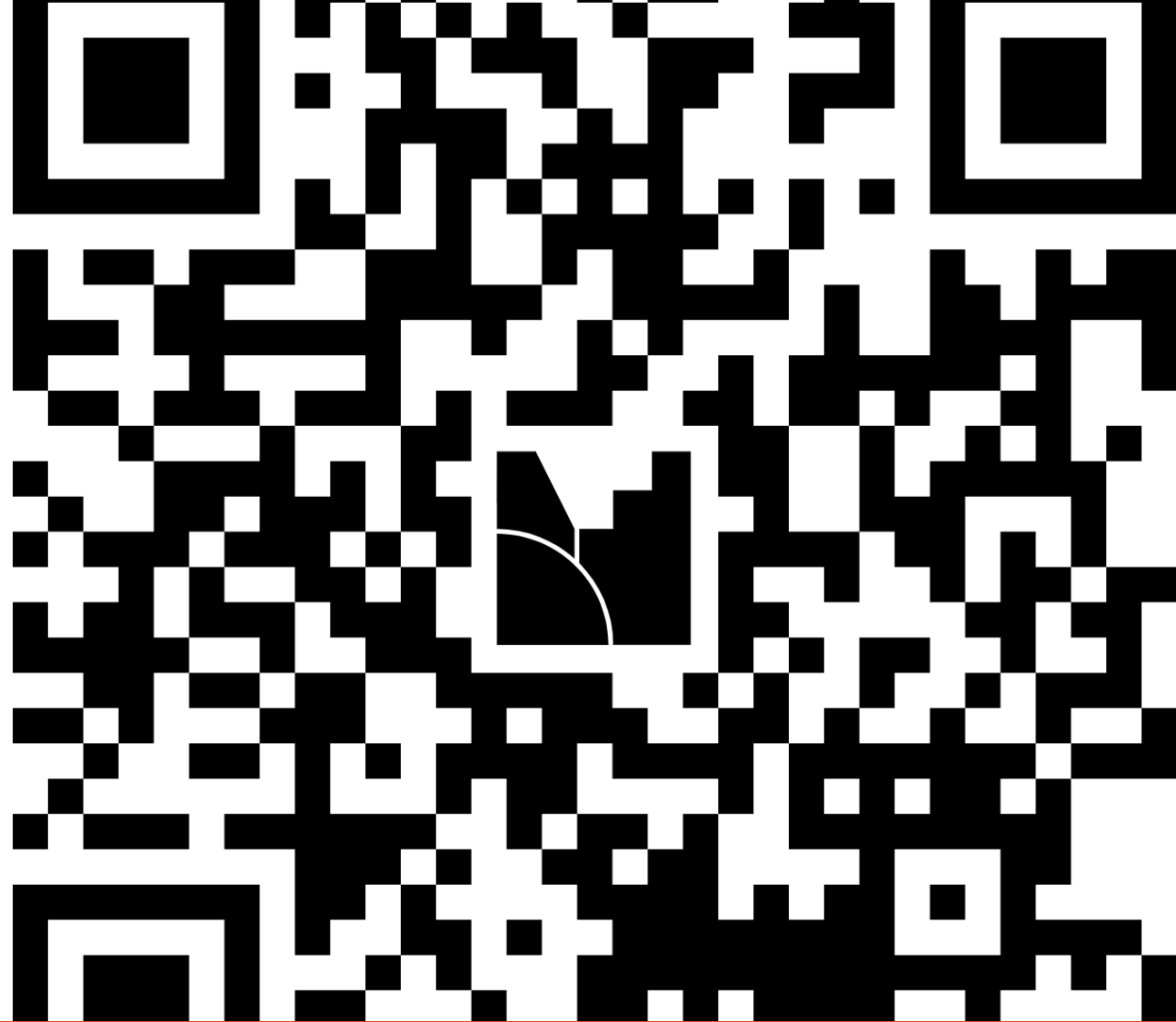
- Deliver workshops.
- Offer targeted support.
- Support pupils affected by domestic abuse.
- Referral into the IGVA service for parents
- Consult with DSLs.
- Support safeguarding concerns.
- Signpost into specialist services.
- Deliver assemblies and awareness sessions.
- Support transitions from primary to secondary.

- Schools we have delivered at:
- Bellenden Primary School (Year 5 and Year 6)
- Goose Green Primary School (Year 5)
- Surrey Square Primary School – (Year 6)
- Cavendish Pupil Referral Unit (small group sessions)
- Grange Primary School.
- Harris Academy Dulwich Girls 6 Form and Boys year 11-13
- City of London Academy Year 11

How many of the safeguarding concerns you deal with have a relationship element at their core?

- The real question is:

How many safeguarding concerns would be prevented, identified earlier, or better understood if children had stronger knowledge of healthy relationships, boundaries, consent, power and control?



Examples:

- Peer-on-peer abuse
- Sexual harassment and violence
- Domestic abuse (home context)
- Harmful sexual behaviour
- Online harm and coercion
- Bullying & friendship breakdowns
- Misogyny and gender-based violence
- Mental health linked to relationships

SOUTHWARK DELIVERY TRENDS

- Young people:
- Recognise terms like *misogyny* but struggle to apply them in real life
- Confuse **banter, culture, and harmful behaviour**
- Struggle to identify **coercive control and unhealthy dynamics**
- Often show **emotional discomfort when linking learning to real experiences**
- Need support with **applied understanding, not just awareness**

What young people are disclosing:

- **Themes from 1:1 and group work**
- Peer behaviour causing **fear, discomfort or anxiety**
- Experiences of **sexual harassment and gendered comments**
- Confusion about **controlling or toxic relationships**
- Uncertainty about **how to leave or seek help**
- Lack of clarity on **safe adults and reporting pathways**

What is misogyny?

Dislike, contempt, or prejudice against women.

- **Everyday examples:**

- Objectifying women, such as rating a woman based on her body parts.
- Belittling women or girls in conversation, such as using sexist nicknames or using derogatory remarks.
- Seeking to control women's behaviour, such as telling her who she can speak to.
- Using intimidating or humiliating behaviour to destroy a woman's self-confidence and undermine her.

- **Common phrase:**

- **"Boys will be boys."** - Saying that it's okay for boys and men to act in sexist ways is wrong. It hurts everyone – boys, girls, men and women. We shouldn't make excuses or act like it's normal. Boys and men can do better. We must stop this harmful behaviour and treat girls and women with respect.

"BOYS

WILL BE

BOYS"

School staff feedback (Southwark schools)

- Staff would benefit from:
 - Confidence in **language to use with pupils around relationships**
 - Support in **responding to disclosures safely and consistently**
 - Training on **challenging misogynistic or harmful language in real time**
 - Strategies to embed **healthy relationship language across school culture**
 - Increased confidence in **relationship-based safeguarding conversations**
- In response, Southwark commissioned us to provide training for in-house delivery.

Through our partnership work:

Bede and Lives Not Knives (LNK) deliver webinar training for schools

Sessions are available via the **Southwark safeguarding / education platforms**

Training focuses on:

- Healthy relationships
- Gender-based violence and misogyny
- Responding to disclosures
- Whole-school preventative approaches

- You can contact us directly for bespoke training at healthyrelationships@bedehouse.org
- We are here to support
- Training supports confidence and consistency
- We work in a whole-family and community approach

When to Refer and Barriers

If you are unsure, please call our duty line for a consultation.

Risk and Safety Concerns

Ongoing domestic abuse or coercive control

Perpetrator monitoring, intimidation, or stalking

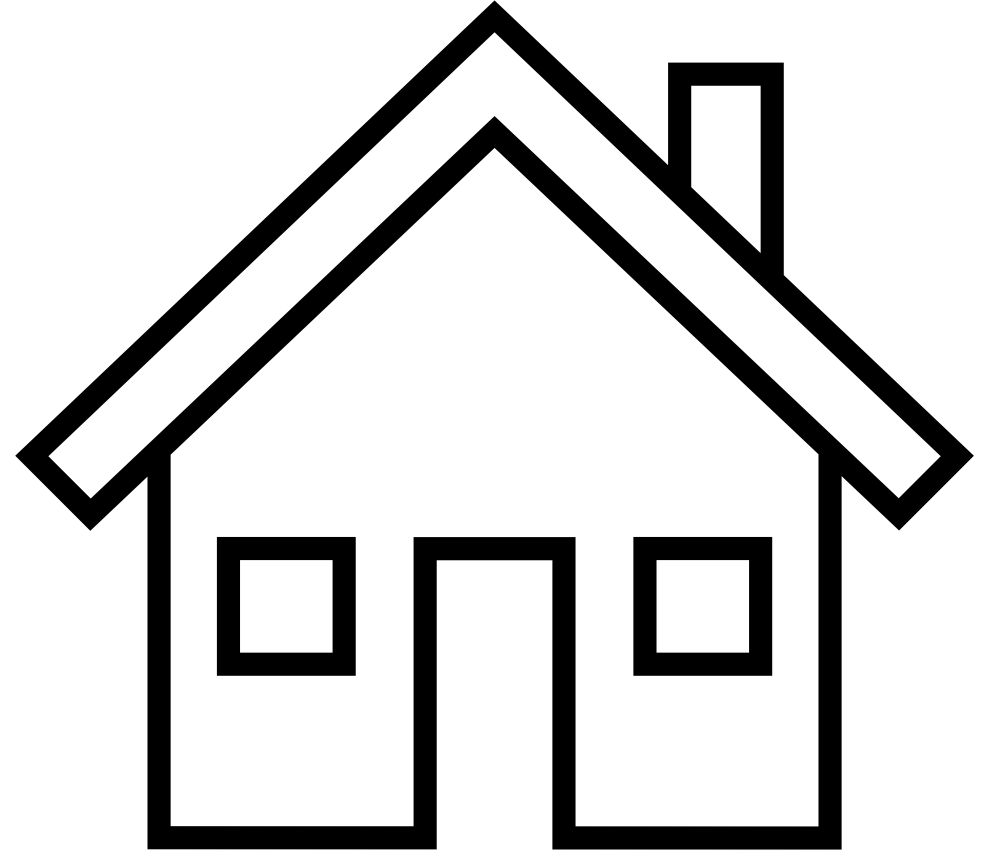
Fear of consequences if engagement is discovered

Recent escalation or high-risk incidents (e.g. MARAC level risk)

- We never advise couples' counselling or mediation for domestic abuse
- **Practical Barriers**
- Housing instability or homelessness
- Financial pressure or dependency on perpetrator
- Lack of safe/private space to engage in support
- Transport, childcare, or digital access issues

The House

- **Front door: immediate safety — is it secure from external influences?**
- **Inside the home: mindset within the home, support system, school, groups, etc.**
- **Furnishings: external and internal home safety; able to think about the extras, such as therapy**
- **There is no point clearing up the front of the home if the internal home is not secure.**



There's a phrase...

"the elephant in the living room", which purports to describe what it's like to live with a drug addict, an alcoholic, an abuser. People outside such relationships will sometimes ask, "How could you let such a business go on for so many years? Didn't you see the elephant in the living room?" And it's so hard for anyone living in a more normal situation to understand the answer that comes closest to the truth; "I'm sorry, but it was there when I moved in. I didn't know it was an elephant; I thought it was part of the furniture." There comes an aha-moment for some folks - the lucky ones - when they suddenly recognize the difference.

[Stephen King](#)



How to refer

Monday–Friday

Duty phone line: 020 7232 0860

Email: WSA@bedehouse.org

Online referral link:

<https://bedehouse.beaconforms.com/form/7c89f033>

For Healthy Relationships work

healthyrelationships@bedehouse.org

WSA, run by Bede, is Southwark's locally funded inclusive VAWG service; we support all genders.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC