



Safeguarding Bulletin - 23 September 2026

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Safeguarding bulletin



Hello

from Southwark's Safeguarding in Schools Team

Safeguarding
in Schools

>> Last chance to complete Annual Southwark SEND Survey – until Friday 25 September

Southwark launched the SEND Annual Survey to hear directly from children and young people, parents and carers, and professionals working in SEND. Your feedback is vital in helping us understand what is working well and where we need to improve. If you have not already done so, please take a few minutes to complete the SEND Annual Survey and share this with the children, young people and families you support. All questions are optional and your answers are anonymous. The survey will remain open until Friday 25 September. Please reach out to send@southwark.gov.uk if you have any questions about the survey.

Southwark news

>> Local Drug Information System (LDIS) alert: nitrous oxide use and resulting neuropathy among young people in Southwark

There are increasing concerns about the use of nitrous oxide (NO) in Southwark. Commonly known as "smart whip", "whippits" or "balloons", nitrous oxide is a gas that can produce short-term feelings of relaxation, dizziness and euphoria when inhaled.

Nitrous oxide is often perceived as a relatively harmless substance and has legitimate medical uses when administered by trained healthcare professionals. However, its recreational use can pose significant health risks, particularly when used regularly or in large quantities. The gas interferes with the body's ability to use vitamin B12, which is essential for maintaining healthy nerves and blood cells. A growing number of young people are presenting with nitrous oxide-induced neurological complications, particularly peripheral neuropathy (damage to the nerves which can cause numbness, tingling, weakness and problems with balance and coordination). Harmful effects can also include cognitive difficulties, including problems with memory and concentration; mental health difficulties, including anxiety and mood changes; serious neurological damage that may require hospital treatment and lengthy rehabilitation. Young people may not be aware of these risks, and parents, carers and professionals may not recognise the signs and symptoms of nitrous oxide-related harm until significant damage has occurred.

Action Needed: Southwark Council requests partners, schools and educational providers in the borough:

- be aware of the risks relating to and remain vigilant for signs of nitrous oxide use and resulting neuropathy;
- provide information and guidance regarding the health risks associated with nitrous oxide use;
- encourage anyone experiencing symptoms such as numbness, tingling, weakness or balance difficulties to seek medical advice promptly;
- report any relevant incidents to the Southwark Local Drug Information System (LDIS) by email to LDIS@southwark.gov.uk (the council will be in contact to source further information if needed);
- report information relating to drug supply to the Metropolitan Police Service via:
 - **Emergency: 999** where a crime is taking place at the time;
 - **Non-emergency: 101** for non-urgent concerns.

Support available in Southwark: Early recognition and intervention are important in reducing the risk of long-term neurological harm associated with nitrous oxide use. Those affected or concerned about substance use can access support from the **Southwark Drug and Alcohol Service (Change Grow Live)**:

- [Support for Young People up to 24 years](#)
- [Support for Adults 18+](#)

- [Support for Family and Carers](#)

For further information, please visit [Talk to Frank](#), or search for NHS information on nitrous oxide misuse and associated health risks.

>> [Fruit and veg vouchers for families with children under five in Southwark](#)

Pregnant women or those who have a child under five in Southwark may be eligible for Rose Vouchers, which can be used to buy free fruit and vegetables. The vouchers are available to families who receive Universal Credit or Healthy Start, are on a low income, or have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), for example refugees and asylum seekers. You may want to share this information with relevant families.

Southwark training opportunities

>> [London Bubble Theatre relaunching Young Touring Company - for 18 to 25s](#)

The [London Bubble Theatre](#) is relaunching their free 10-week drama project for young people aged 18 to 25, starting Tuesday 29 September. Young people will join the Young Touring Company and work alongside professional theatre-makers to devise, rehearse and tour an original play inspired by issues affecting people today. They will gain hands on experience creating a piece of forum theatre which will be toured to schools and youth settings, ending with a special showcase celebrating the cohorts' achievements and marking the programme's 15th anniversary.



Online safety

>> [New NSPCC data reveals top 5 platforms and apps linked to online child sexual abuse](#)

The NSPCC has published new Childline data on the top five platforms and apps children talked about in counselling sessions where they also spoke about online sexual abuse. Between April 2025 and March 2026, Snapchat came top with 324 mentions, up 19% on the year before. TikTok (234 mentions), Instagram (197

mentions), Discord (92 mentions) and WhatsApp (39 mentions) have been named as the other top platforms mentioned in counselling sessions where online sexual abuse was the main concern, during the same period.

>> **Online harm groups: what professionals need to know**

CEOP Education has published guidance for professionals working with children and young people on the threat of online harm groups often referred to as Com groups, which are networks of individuals who use tactics such as grooming, coercion, manipulation and blackmail to exploit and harm others. The guidance can be used to build understanding of online harm groups and the risks they pose to children and young people, recognise potential indicators that a child or young person may be at risk, understand how to respond to concerns and support safeguarding and strengthen preventative conversations and education with children, young people and their families

Other news

>> **Healthy relationships: a toolkit for secondary schools (students aged 11 to 13)**

Friendships play an important role in secondary students' lives. This toolkit by [Anna Freud](#) includes assembly materials, a two-part lesson and guidance for education staff. It supports students aged 11 to 13 to develop the skills and understanding they need to build healthy friendships and manage conflict in ways that support their mental wellbeing.

>> **Teacher wellbeing toolkit: start the school year well**

This toolkit by [Education Support](#) brings together practical, evidence-informed resources to help staff protect their mental health, manage everyday pressures and thrive throughout the school year. It can be shared with your team to start a conversation about mental health in your school or college.

>> **New research: Bullying linked to later weapon carrying**

The [Youth Endowment Fund](#) has published new analysis showing that children who were bullied between the ages of 8 and 12 were **one and a half times more likely to carry a weapon at age 15** than those not involved in bullying — even after accounting for family and neighbourhood factors. Children who bully others showed stronger associations with later violence, especially those involved in repeated or

physical bullying. This reinforces the value of **evidence-based anti-bullying approaches** in schools and early identification of children who may need targeted support.

>> **The Youth Endowment Fund practice and system guidance for education**

The [Youth Endowment Fund](#) Toolkit brings together the best available research on approaches commonly used in education settings to reduce children's involvement in violence. It supports school leaders and practitioners to assess what works in keeping children safe and engaged, compare interventions (including school exclusion guidance), and make informed decisions grounded in evidence, rather than assumptions.

>> **Would you spot a teenager experiencing coercive control?**

[Community Care](#) has published a news article to help professionals recognising coercive control in teenage relationships. The article outlines: the scale of teenage relationship abuse; how language can act as a barrier to recognition; the merging of young people's online and offline worlds; and existing good practice.

Other training opportunities

>> **New Sickle cell and thalassaemia eLearning resource for schools**

To coincide with the start of the school year, **NHS England has developed new sickle cell and thalassaemia eLearning resources for schools** to raise awareness of the conditions and better support young people whilst in education. The resources include self-guided interactive learning, practical guidance, real-life scenarios developed by patients, a short explainer animation, and template care plans. They are applicable across primary, secondary and higher education settings. You can explore the following resources in full:

- [Sickle Cell: A guide for schools and educators](#)
- Sickle Cell YouTube animation: [Sickle Cell: A guide for schools and educators - YouTube](#)
- [Thalassaemia: A guide for schools and educators](#)
- Thalassaemia YouTube animation: [Thalassaemia: A guide for schools and educators - YouTube](#)

NHS England is hosting [Sickle cell webinar](#) on Tuesday 29 September (3.30pm to 5.00pm) to launch the resources and provide an opportunity to ask any questions.

>> **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) virtual annual conference – 6 and 7 October 2026**

Bringing together safeguarding professionals, employers, regulators, policymakers and sector leaders from across the UK, the conference will explore over two days the latest developments in safeguarding, legislation, barring, eligibility, information sharing and safer recruitment. Hear from expert speakers, government representatives, sector partners and DBS specialists through keynote sessions, panel discussions, live Q&As and interactive workshops.

>> **Through the Eyes of Survivors: AFRUCA's 25th Anniversary Celebration – Tuesday 20 October 2026**

Under the theme **Through the Eyes of Survivors: Exploring AFRUCA's 25 Years of Anti-Trafficking Work**, this special event will reflect on AFRUCA's journey since 2001 through the experiences and perspectives of survivors who have been part of their anti-trafficking work. This is a free event but donations on the day would be appreciated.

Organisations referenced in this bulletin are not necessarily commissioned or endorsed by Southwark council. Please apply your own due diligence.

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Find out more about support from [Southwark's Safeguarding in Schools Team](#).

For safeguarding resources and training information visit [Safeguarding in Education](#).