Welcome to our Safeguarding Newsletter

A list of local outreach support services in Reading. This can be found on the school website here.

Knife Crime

Knife crime is any crime that involves a knife or sharp instrument. Carrying a knife, even if it isn't used, is also considered a crime.

Young people may feel that they have to carry a knife because of the places they go, or people they hang around with. Young people may also think that there are "safe" areas to be stabbed in—this is not the case, any stab can be fatal.

If you are worried that your child may be carrying a knife, or involved in knife crime, there are a variety of places you can seek support and guidance from. The websites listed below offer further information around knife crime, and support for parents and young people.

Live Safe

Ben Kinsella Trust

Action for Children

Violence Reduction Alliance

Childline—support and guidance for young people

Reading Borough Council—details locations of amnesty bins

Vaping

Vapes, also known as e-liquids or puff bards, are battery powered devices that heat a liquid to create a vapour to be inhaled. These often contain nicotine which is addictive, along with other flavourings and chemicals. It is against the law for anyone under the age of 18 to buy a vape or to be sold a vape.

There are many reasons why a young person may vape. This could include a desire to "fit in" and feeling like "everyone is doing it", to relieve stress, or curiosity.

There are a number of risks associated with vaping for young people. These include

•The vapes could be laced with illegal substances such as THC or other synthetic drugs which pose a serious health risk

•Many vapes contain nicotine which is highly addictive and can impact brain development in children and teenagers.

•Unknown longer term effects—research suggest that it may cause respiratory issues however a lot of the longer term impacts are still being discovered.

The following sites have further information and guidance for parents around vaping:

Action for Children   NHS   Talk to Frank   NSPCC

Information for young people: Childline

How can parents support their children?

01	02	03	04	05
Start the conversation	**Know the signs**	**Set clear expectations**	**Encourage healthy choices**	**Stay informed**
Talk to your child about the risks of vaping in a non-judgemental way.	You may notice sweet or fruity smells, an increased thirst or changes in their behaviour.	Let them know your stance on vaping and explain why you are concerned.	Promote hobbies, sports and activities that support a healthy lifestyle.	Check out reliable sources like NHS and government websites for up-to-date information.

The rise of "deepfake" content

The use of deepfakes is on the rise. A deepfake is an image, video, sound, voice, or GIF which has been manipulated by a computer to superimpose someone's face, body or voice onto something else. This could be done with or without the subject's consent.

Deepfakes have become popular due to the accessibility of mobile and computer-based apps. This means users without sophisticated technological skills can easily access, create, and distribute deepfakes. Deepfakes can be produced using computer and mobile apps to upload images from a user's camera roll. The quality of deepfakes can vary depending on the sophistication of the tech used and the skills of the creator. However, the standard of the deepfake produced will rarely matter compared to the potential harm it may cause when used to harass, bully, or abuse a victim.

INEQE has created a short video explaining deepfakes which can be accessed here.

There are a number of websites available offering further information for parents and young people around deepfakes and how to have open conversations around the dangers of these.

INEQE   Safer Schools

Internet Matters   National College—A one page poster

Brook

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

VIOLENT CONTENT ONLINE

Around 70% of teenagers say they've seen real-life violence on social media in the past year – often from as young as primary school age. Just 6% actively seek it out; most encounter it through group chats or social media algorithms. From fights and pranks to hate speech and graphic media, exposure to violent content online is more widespread – and more harmful – than many adults realise.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

MENTAL HEALTH AND TRAUMA

Children and young people report feelings of anxiety, guilt, shame or fear after seeing violent content. For some, these effects may be short term, but for those with existing vulnerabilities or past trauma, the impact can be more severe. Many also feel pressured to 'laugh off' violent content to fit in with friends, even when they find it distressing.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

Exposure to online violence can lead to fear and avoidance behaviours – such as skipping school or staying indoors. When children see weapons used in videos, it can heighten their perception that the world is unsafe and, in rare cases, increase the likelihood they'll consider carrying a weapon themselves, such as a knife for protection.

ESCALATION AND PARTICIPATION

Violent videos often go viral quickly. What begins as an online argument can spill into real-world fights – which are sometimes filmed and shared to gain views or status. Some children even admit to sharing or creating violent content themselves to gain attention or boost their reputation.

DESENSITISATION

Older teens may become numb to violent content after years of exposure, admitting they're unlikely to report it. Younger children also tend not to report it – usually because they don't believe anything will be done or because they're afraid of being labelled a 'snitch' by their peers.

HARMFUL IDEOLOGIES

Violent content online may overlap with racist, misogynistic or otherwise extremist ideas. These messages can dehumanise others or glorify violence as a way to gain power, popularity or notoriety. Over time, this can normalise dangerous behaviours and attitudes among impressionable viewers.

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT

Not all children are affected equally. Those who are excluded from school, marginalised, disabled or neurodivergent are often more vulnerable to the effects of online violence. It's essential to consider wider context – including home life and access to safe spaces – when thinking about potential harm.

Advice for Parents & Educators

CREATE SUPPORTIVE SPACES

Many children feel adults are too busy or won't understand their experiences online. Take time to build trust through non-judgemental conversations about what they're seeing. If they don't want to speak to you directly, gently signpost towards trusted services they can turn to for support.

KNOW WHAT'S ILLEGAL

Some violent content is simply upsetting, while other examples may be criminal or a safeguarding matter that needs reporting. Help children understand the difference by staying informed about online laws and social media reporting procedures. A useful resource is reportharmfulcontent.com.

AVOID HARSH RESTRICTIONS

Fear of punishment is a major reason young people stay silent about violent content. Try not to overreact or threaten to take away devices. Instead, reassure children that they can speak openly and that asking for help won't get them into trouble.

UNDERSTAND TECH AND TRAUMA

Older children may already know how to block accounts or avoid triggering content. Help younger or more vulnerable children learn these tools and encourage habits that reduce exposure. Just as importantly, teach techniques that help them process distress – building resilience and emotional literacy for both online and offline life.

Meet Our Expert

Dr. Holly Powell-Jones is the founder of Online Media Law UK and a leading UK expert in digital safety, media law, and young people. Her PhD investigates children's understandings of risk online. She works with schools, businesses, and universities to provide award-winning education on the criminal, legal, and ethical considerations for the digital age. Visit onlinemedialawuk.com for more.

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10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators
FOSTERING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Feeling a genuine sense of belonging is essential for the emotional and social development of children and young people. Belonging significantly boosts self-esteem, resilience, and mental wellbeing, reducing feelings of isolation and anxiety. This guide provides practical strategies to help parents and educators cultivate inclusive environments, enhancing both academic outcomes and overall happiness among young people.

1 CELEBRATE INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Acknowledge and celebrate the uniqueness of every child. Promoting diversity and inclusion creates an environment where differences are valued rather than stigmatised. This acceptance empowers children to confidently express their identities and feel genuinely included, fostering a robust sense of belonging within both school and home settings.

2 CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

Regularly communicate and actively listen to children, showing genuine interest in their thoughts and experiences. Creating open communication channels helps young people feel heard and valued. This approach not only builds trust but also reinforces children's perception of themselves as a vital part of their family, school and community.

3 MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

Give children opportunities to actively participate and contribute, whether in classrooms, at home, or in community activities. Meaningful participation helps children feel their input matters, reinforcing a sense of purpose and value. Including them in decisions and responsibilities enhances their self-worth, promoting a deeper sense of belonging and inclusion.

4 FOSTER STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Support and encourage positive relationships between peers, educators, and families. Strong, healthy relationships significantly impact a child's sense of belonging, providing emotional support and reducing feelings of loneliness. Facilitate social interactions through group activities, teamwork, and collaborative learning to strengthen these vital connections.

5 CREATE INCLUSIVE SPACES

Design environments that reflect diversity and are welcoming for everyone. Inclusive spaces where all children see themselves represented can dramatically improve their feelings of safety and acceptance. Consider classroom displays, books, and resources that celebrate various cultures, abilities, and backgrounds to visibly reinforce inclusivity and belonging.

6 MODEL POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Adults play a crucial role by demonstrating inclusive, empathetic, and respectful behaviours. Modelling positive interactions and attitudes sets a clear standard for children to follow. Children are likely to replicate inclusive behaviour, creating a supportive community atmosphere where everyone feels accepted and valued for who they are.

7 BUILD EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Teach and encourage emotional expression and understanding among children. Developing emotional literacy enables young people to articulate their feelings and empathise with others. An emotionally intelligent environment cultivates mutual respect and compassion, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and interpersonal connection within groups.

8 SUPPORT PEER MENTORSHIP

Encourage peer mentorship or buddy systems within educational settings. Peer support enhances feelings of connectedness and security, reducing feelings of isolation. When children support one another, they naturally build community bonds, nurturing a supportive culture where belonging and friendship thrive.

9 RECOGNISE EFFORTS REGULARLY

Consistently acknowledge children's contributions and achievements, however small. Recognition reinforces a child's understanding that their presence and efforts are important. Celebrating individual and collective successes helps cultivate a positive environment where children feel acknowledged, motivated, and deeply connected to peers and adults around them.

10 ADDRESS BULLYING PROMPTLY

Quickly address any incidents of bullying. Promptly intervening demonstrates a clear commitment to an inclusive and safe environment. Creating a culture where incidents are swiftly and effectively addressed reinforces trust, security, and a sense of belonging for everyone involved.

Meet Our Expert

Anna Bateman is Director of Halcyon Education Ltd and Director for Wellbeing and Family Services at Leigh Trust. With extensive experience in systemic mental health in schools, she supports educational leaders across the UK to develop inclusive, resilient, and supportive learning environments. Anna is also the lead expert for mental health at The National College.

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