

Child exploitation and violence awareness events

Avon and Somerset Police have organised conferences to raise awareness of exploitation, violence and drugs for young girls and boys.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence against women and girls Violence (other) Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
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Region	South West
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Education Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	March 2022
Completion date	October 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Communities General public Victims

Aim

Child exploitation and violence awareness conference for girls

The primary aim of the conferences are to raise awareness and prevent child exploitation and violence against girls. By organizing dedicated conferences, the force have sought to empower girls with knowledge, promote safety, and encourage early intervention through education and engagement. The events also aim to foster stronger connections between young people and safeguarding professionals, creating a supportive network for ongoing prevention work.

Child exploitation awareness day for boys

The aim of the awareness day for young boys was to help raise awareness of child exploitation, drugs and to enable young people to recognise the warning signs and discuss how a child can protect themselves and their friends.

As of May 2026, four events have been held; three for girls and one for boys, all of which have been held at the police headquarters.

Intended outcome

Increased awareness of:

- exploitation
- violence against girls
- how to stay safe online
- grooming
- cyber safety skills
- weapon and gang risks
- dangers associated with drugs and alcohol
- how to spot warning signs of exploitation
- how to seek help

Description

Child exploitation and violence awareness conference for girls

The force organised a full-day event to raise awareness about exploitation, violence against girls, and online safety. The aim was to help young girls recognise risks, know how to stay safe, and understand where to get help.

Activities included:

- talks on online safety, grooming, and support services (including Safe Link)
- a drama about exploitation and gang grooming
- a discussion with police on how to build better relationships with young people
- a talk from an assistant chief constable
- an engaging police dog show to help break down barriers
- opportunities for girls to speak openly in a safe space

Resources provided

Each girl received a “Street Safe” tote bag with information leaflets and a small card with support contacts, created by a prevention officer at Avon and Somerset Police.

The day was organised by police, school staff, youth workers, and guest speakers. The event cost approximately £2,000, including refreshments and a meal. Other costs were covered by partner organisations and schools through in-kind support.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion were central to the planning and delivery of the conference. The force ensured representation across different areas of the community by involving volunteers from various departments within Avon and Somerset, including police officers, police staff, and outreach workers from diverse professional and cultural backgrounds. This helped create a more relatable and approachable environment for the young attendees.

In terms of inclusion, the force invited a broad range of schools, including those that enrol students who had been excluded from other institutions, special educational needs (SEN) schools, and mainstream schools. This approach ensured that the conference was accessible to girls from a variety of educational and social backgrounds, especially those who are often more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. By creating an inclusive space, the force were able to engage a wide range of participants and ensure that the messages of prevention and support reached those who needed them most.

Since the first child exploitation and violence awareness conference for girls, two further events have taken place. The most recent event took place in March 2026, which was attended by 100 girls aged 13-16 years from 17 schools. .

This conference consisted of a talk on Crimestoppers' 'Fearless' campaign, a tour of the communications department, and four interactive workshops covering:

- BASE – Sexual exploitation and grooming (CSE)
- The Bridge – Sexual violence and referral route
- Fly Girl Foundation – understanding violence against girls
- 'Empty shirts programme' – expressing thoughts and feelings in relation to forms of violence through art

The conference was attended by a National Youth Voice worker from The Children's Society and a senior lecturer in Education and Early Childhood from the University of West England, who observed the event.

Child exploitation awareness day for boys

The force have also held a child exploitation awareness day for boys to raise awareness of grooming, drugs, weapons, and online safety. The day included:

- a powerful talk from a male survivor of exploitation, helping boys understand grooming and how to seek help
- an engaging and educational CYBER Escape Room, teaching online safety
- a visit from the Police Dog Unit and firearms team, who spoke about the dangers of weapons and gang involvement
- a session with Somerset drug and alcohol service (SDAS) on drugs and alcohol awareness

Each boy received a bag with information and support resources. The total cost was approximately £2,000, covering food, refreshments, and resource packs, which was funded by the force.

Overall impact

Child exploitation and violence awareness conference for girls

The conferences have been well received with positive feedback gathered from attendees, parents/guardians and schools.

The girls gained important knowledge about exploitation, online safety, and support services. Feedback from attendees showed they found the day informative, engaging, and empowering:

- “Really insightful... learned a lot and feel more confident.”
- “Enjoyed the day, learned new things, and will share with friends.”

Impact on the target problem

By addressing key issues like grooming, violence, and online risks, the event gave girls practical tools to protect themselves and others. Teachers and partners also noted how valuable the content was, especially for vulnerable groups,

Impact on partnerships and community

The day built positive connections between young people, schools, police, and support services. Police officers felt the event was well planned and impactful, and community partners like Safe Link have received new requests for ongoing support.

Child exploitation awareness day for boys

Feedback from the child exploitation awareness day for boys was overwhelmingly positive.

A highlight was the engagement of several high-risk boys, who attended all sessions and remained focused throughout the day. Their participation alone marked a success. One pupil approached staff at the end to request mentoring support, and three stayed behind after the event to have an open and honest conversation, an outcome that exceeded expectations.

The event not only increased awareness and understanding (assessed by attendee feedback) but also created a safe space where boys felt empowered to open up and seek support. It showed clear progress toward the intended outcomes of recognising risks, building trust, and encouraging help-seeking behaviour.

Overall, the day had a strong impact on both the pupils and staff involved, reinforcing the importance of targeted, relatable interventions, and lived-experience voices in safeguarding work.

Learning

Child exploitation and violence awareness conference for girls

What worked well

- strong partnerships – collaboration between police, schools, youth workers, and support services was key. This helped provide a variety of activities and ensured the day was engaging
- safe, supportive environment – creating a space where girls felt comfortable to discuss difficult topics openly was essential. Feedback showed that participants valued the respectful and pressure-free atmosphere
- varied and interactive activities – including talks, drama, discussions, and the police dog show kept the day engaging and helped cater to different learning styles. Girls appreciated the mix of serious and lighter moments

- resources and takeaways – providing each girl with a “Street Safe” bag and support cards gives them practical information they can refer to after the event

Challenges and areas for improvement

- managing sitting time – some girls found the sessions too long and would have preferred more movement and interaction between rooms. Initially planned, this was not possible for the first events due to location constraints
- need for more volunteers – running the event smoothly requires plenty of volunteers to help manage groups, support discussions, and respond to any issues
- planning for disclosures – as sensitive topics were discussed, having a clear risk assessment and protocols in place was vital. Staff needed to be prepared for possible disclosures of abuse or exploitation, with support systems ready
- inclusion – inviting schools with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) pupils was very positive, but extra care and preparation is required to ensure all attendees can fully participate and feel supported

Practical advice for future organisers

- conduct a thorough risk assessment before the event, including safeguarding and welfare considerations
- plan enough volunteers and staff to support participants throughout the day
- prepare for disclosures or emotional reactions with clear referral routes and trained staff
- design a flexible timetable to allow for breaks, movement, and varied activities to keep participants engaged
- involve a range of partners early to secure diverse speakers and resources
- ensure materials and sessions are accessible and relevant to all young people, including those with additional needs

Summary

The event’s success lay in strong collaboration, thoughtful planning, and creating a safe space to tackle difficult issues. While some logistical challenges limited interaction time, the overall impact was positive. These learnings provide useful guidance for anyone planning a similar initiative, highlighting the importance of preparation, support, and participant wellbeing.

Child exploitation awareness day for boys

- the conference engaged some of the most vulnerable boys in the force area, each with different risks and support needs. To ensure safety and appropriate support, the force created detailed individual risk assessments in collaboration with the relevant schools
- a trauma-informed approach was key to the day's success. All volunteers understood the focus was on education and awareness, and the boys could take breaks at any time without pressure. This respectful environment helped build trust and kept the boys engaged
- one of the biggest successes was seeing high-risk pupils not only stay for the full day but also ask for mentoring, something the force had not expected but were ready to support

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