

SSLP Safeguarding Newsletter



Dear Parents and Guardians

In this month's newsletter, we're focusing on healthy relationships—a cornerstone of emotional and social development. Building positive friendships and connections not only supports our children's well-being but also acts as a safeguard against harmful influences, such as County Lines exploitation. With your support, we aim to equip every child, from our youngest students to those on the cusp of adulthood, with the tools to recognise and build safe, respectful relationships.



What are Healthy Relationships?

At any age, healthy relationships are based on respect, trust, kindness, and understanding. For young children, this starts with friendships that encourage sharing, playing fairly, and treating each other kindly. For teens, it involves deeper values like honesty, compassion, and boundaries that allow for mutual respect and independence.

Why This Matters: Friendship and Trust as Safety Nets

When children learn to build healthy friendships, they're more likely to:

- Communicate openly about their feelings and any concerns.
- Seek advice when they encounter challenging situations.
- Develop resilience and confidence in saying "no" to uncomfortable or harmful behaviours.

These positive friendships can act as a support network, providing children with the encouragement and guidance they need to make good choices—even when peer pressure is involved.

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Understanding County Lines Exploitation & Its Connection to Friendships

County Lines refers to the illegal trafficking of drugs from urban to rural areas, often exploiting vulnerable young people. This exploitation typically begins with a recruiter posing as a "friend" — someone who shows interest, offers gifts, or gives a sense of belonging. These tactics can sometimes go unnoticed by the child, who may believe they are simply building a friendship or gaining a mentor. Children as young as primary school age are being groomed in subtle ways.

Let's look at some signs and tips to keep in mind as you guide your child towards healthy relationships...

Tips for Encouraging Positive Relationships at Different Ages

Ages 5–10: Early Friendships and Setting Boundaries

- **Model kindness and respect:** Young children observe how adults interact. Show them what respectful, empathetic behaviour looks like.
- **Teach about boundaries:** Help your child understand that saying "no" is okay and that real friends will respect their boundaries.
- **Discuss safe secrets vs. unsafe secrets:** Encourage them to always share with you if someone asks them to keep a secret, especially one that makes them uncomfortable.
- **Monitor technology use:** Though rare at this age, online platforms can still pose risks, and supervised use helps establish safe habits.



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Ages 11–14: Growing Independence and Peer Pressure

- **Talk about peer pressure:** As children enter middle school, they often face increased pressure to fit in. Remind them that a good friend will never ask them to do something they know is wrong or uncomfortable.
- **Encourage open dialogue:** Keep lines of communication open so your child feels safe discussing challenges or concerning behaviour they may encounter.
- **Identify warning signs of exploitation:** Discuss the risks of strangers or older teens offering gifts, money, or transportation. Emphasise that any real friend or mentor won't give gifts with strings attached.



Ages 15–18: Fostering Self-Respect and Identifying Harmful Behaviour

- **Define the qualities of a healthy relationship:** Encourage your teen to think critically about what they want in a friendship or romantic relationship—trust, respect, and honesty should be at the top.
- **Discuss manipulation and exploitation:** Teens need to know how to recognise when someone may be trying to control or exploit them, especially through emotional manipulation or by trying to isolate them from other friends or family.
- **Encourage independence with support:** While teens should be given space to make decisions, remind them that you are there to provide support and guidance if they ever feel unsafe.

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How We're Supporting Students at Our Schools

Our schools are committed to educating children and teens about healthy relationships through:

- Classroom discussions and activities that promote respect, empathy, and friendship skills.
- Workshops for older students to help them recognise harmful influences and understand the risks associated with County Lines and other forms of exploitation.
- Counselling support available to all students who may need guidance or a listening ear.

Safeguarding is
everyone's
responsibility

Resources for Parents

If you'd like more information on how to talk to your child about these topics, here are a few helpful resources:

- NSPCC: [Keeping children safe from exploitation](#)
- Childline: [Information on County Lines and Exploitation](#)
- Family Lives: [Building Healthy Friendships and Peer Relationships](#)

Thank you for your continued support in helping us build a safe, supportive community for every child. By working together, we can empower our children to form healthy, meaningful relationships and navigate their world safely and confidently.



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