

Still we rise

A Guide for Parent & Carers
Supporting Young Women Around
the Issue of Gender-based Violence



A note on language

Throughout this guide we frequently use the term young women rather than young people. This is because young women experience disproportionate levels of gender-based violence compared to young men. As an organisation we specialise in working with young women, aged 11 to 18 years old, and so they are the focus of this guide. By young women we mean self-identifying young women, including transgender young women. We also want to acknowledge the high levels of violence that non-binary and gender non-conforming young people experience. With this in mind, we hope this guide is useful to anyone who needs it.

Throughout this guide we have underlined words that are described in the glossary on pages 45 – 47.



The title of this guide 'Still We Rise' was inspired by American poet, author, civil rights activist and feminist, Maya Angelou and her poem, 'Still I Rise'.

**“Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that’s wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise**

Excerpt from 'Still
I Rise' by Maya
Angelou



About this guide

We are the Young Women's Team at **Women & Girls Network**. Our service recognises and responds to the needs of young women who have experienced any form of gender-based violence.

We provide confidential 1:1 and group spaces where young women can find safety, access support and explore their options. We believe young women's voices must be heard to help create a safer, more equal world.

Young women often talk to us about needing their parents and carers to understand what they're going through and how they can help. We have created this guide to give you the tools you need to best support your daughters and the young women in your care.

I don't know
how I feel



Young woman

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She won't talk to me and I'm worried I'm saying the wrong thing



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When we talk about gender-based violence, what do we mean?

As a society we have made progress in terms of gender equality, however, as women and girls we still face inequality in many aspects of our lives.

One aspect of this inequality is that we are much more likely to experience particular forms of violence.

We use the terms gender-based violence and violence against women and girls because they describe how experiences of violence are linked to the broader inequality women and girls face because of their gender.

Sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence are examples of forms of violence that women and girls are much more likely to experience than men and boys.

Over two thirds

of cases of child sexual exploitation relate to girls.¹

A quarter

(24%) of young women at mixed-gender schools have been subjected to unwanted sexual touching while at school.²

1 in 5

young women have suffered physical violence from a boyfriend³

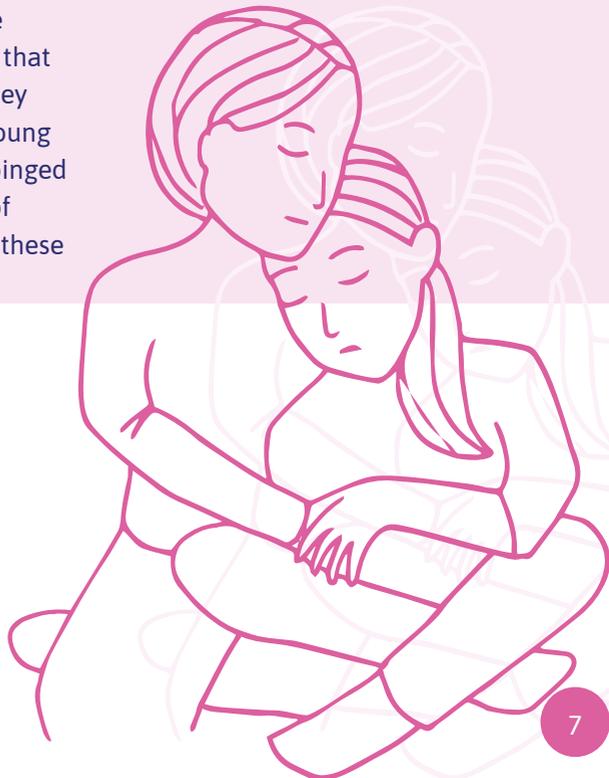
Sadly, gender-based violence (GBV) is present in every young woman's life. While the word 'violence' might make you think of physical forms of violence like hitting, it's important to understand that violence comes in many forms. It can also include things like verbal harassment, online bullying and sharing of unwanted sexual images. Some forms of violence are so common that often people don't even realise they are forms of violence, such as a young woman having her bra strapped pinged in the corridor at school (a form of sexual harassment). Just because these

behaviours are relatively common does not mean they are okay. That is part of the reason for making this guide — to raise awareness of what GBV is, and to ensure that young women and their parents and carers know that they are not alone in their experience.

1 Child sexual exploitation – Definition & guide for professionals: Extended text' University of Bedfordshire, 2017

2 "'It's just everywhere": A study on sexism in schools - and how we tackle it' National Education Union and UK Feminista, 2017

3 'STIR: Safeguarding teenage intimate relationships: connecting online and offline contexts and risks' Universities of Bristol & Central Lancashire, 2013-15



A day in the life

The young women we work with often describe experiencing multiple forms of gender-based violence, sometimes in a single day. This is in addition to the pressures they face socially, and from their peers.

This is a typical day in the life of a 14 year old young woman, Jas.

Jas



Jas is on her way to school when these men wolf whistle at her from a van. It's why she hates walking alone but she doesn't tell anyone because, 'What's the point?'

She loves her friends, they're always having a laugh together, but now they want to sneak out with all the older boys to the park. She's never bunked a lesson before but doesn't want to lose her friends.



In history class, Jas feels like people are talking about her. She's so worried she can't focus, even though it's her favourite subject. The teacher tells her off for not finishing the work.



Walking to her next lesson one of the boys smacks her bum whilst another films. Everyone is laughing. Jas feels humiliated and is scared they're gonna put it on Snapchat, like when Alisha's naked pics were sent round the whole school.



She knows what's happening isn't okay and has been wanting to speak to her favourite teacher all day. But she says she's too busy to talk right now. Jas doesn't want to talk to her mum because she'll say it's because she wears tight trousers.



She bumps into an old primary school friend, Nasra, who notices something is up and tells her about a service that supported her through this sort of stuff.



My experience is different

Within the Young Women's Service at Women & Girls Network, we take an intersectional approach to our work. This means we recognise that our identity, the things that make us who we are, affect how we experience the world. Therefore not all young women's experiences of abuse are the same. We must acknowledge this inequality if we want to address its impact and meet the needs of all the young women we support.

Girls are five times more likely to be sexually abused than boys⁴

"I love being a girl but sometimes I feel like I have to think about things boys don't"

Disabled children are at a significantly greater risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect than non-disabled children.⁵

⁴ Finkelhor, D. (1994). Current information on the scope and nature of child sexual abuse. *The Future of Children*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Sexual Abuse of Children, pp. 31-53 / ⁵ Miller, D. and Brown, J. (2014). 'We have the right to be safe': protecting disabled children from abuse by NSPCC. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/right-safe-disabled-children-abuse-report.pdf>

Nearly half (45%) of lesbian, gay and bi pupils – and 64% of trans pupils – are bullied for being **LGBTQ+** at school.⁶

“I don’t regret coming out, but when it happened people spread rumours about me and I didn’t want to go back to school”



“People make assumptions about what I can and can’t do, the only person who can do that is me!”

“In class teachers are always telling me I’m acting angry when really I’m just speaking my mind”

Black and ethnic minority children are often under-identified as victims and over-identified as perpetrators.⁷

“I love wearing my headscarf but I know it makes me stick out more”



⁶ Bradlow, J., Bartram, F., and Guasp, A. Jadvá, V. (2017) Stonewall School Report: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bi and trans young people in Britain’s schools in 2017, Stonewall. / ⁷ McAlinden, A. (2018). Children as ‘Risk’: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Children and Young People (Cambridge Studies in Law and Society, pp. V-Vii). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A day in the life

Leah



Leah is at her cousin's party, she's nervous but excited. There's a lot of guys here, her cousin told her to not tell her mum about the drinking.

Some older girls from school are there and are looking at Leah's instagram, they're laughing.



She feels really angry, like she might suddenly explode. Her cousin's friend gives her a drink, and she hopes this will make it better. She wants to have fun like everyone else.





Leah starts to feel a little sick and goes out for some air. Her cousin's friend follows her and offers her a joint saying it will help. She keeps saying no, he starts touching her telling her to relax.

Leah is too scared to push him away, she doesn't want to cause trouble in her cousin's gang.



She manages to get away and calls her mum to pick her up, she doesn't tell anyone what happened as she doesn't want to get in trouble.

At school they have an assembly on sexual harassment and peer pressure. She stays behind and mentions the party to the speaker, asking what she should do.

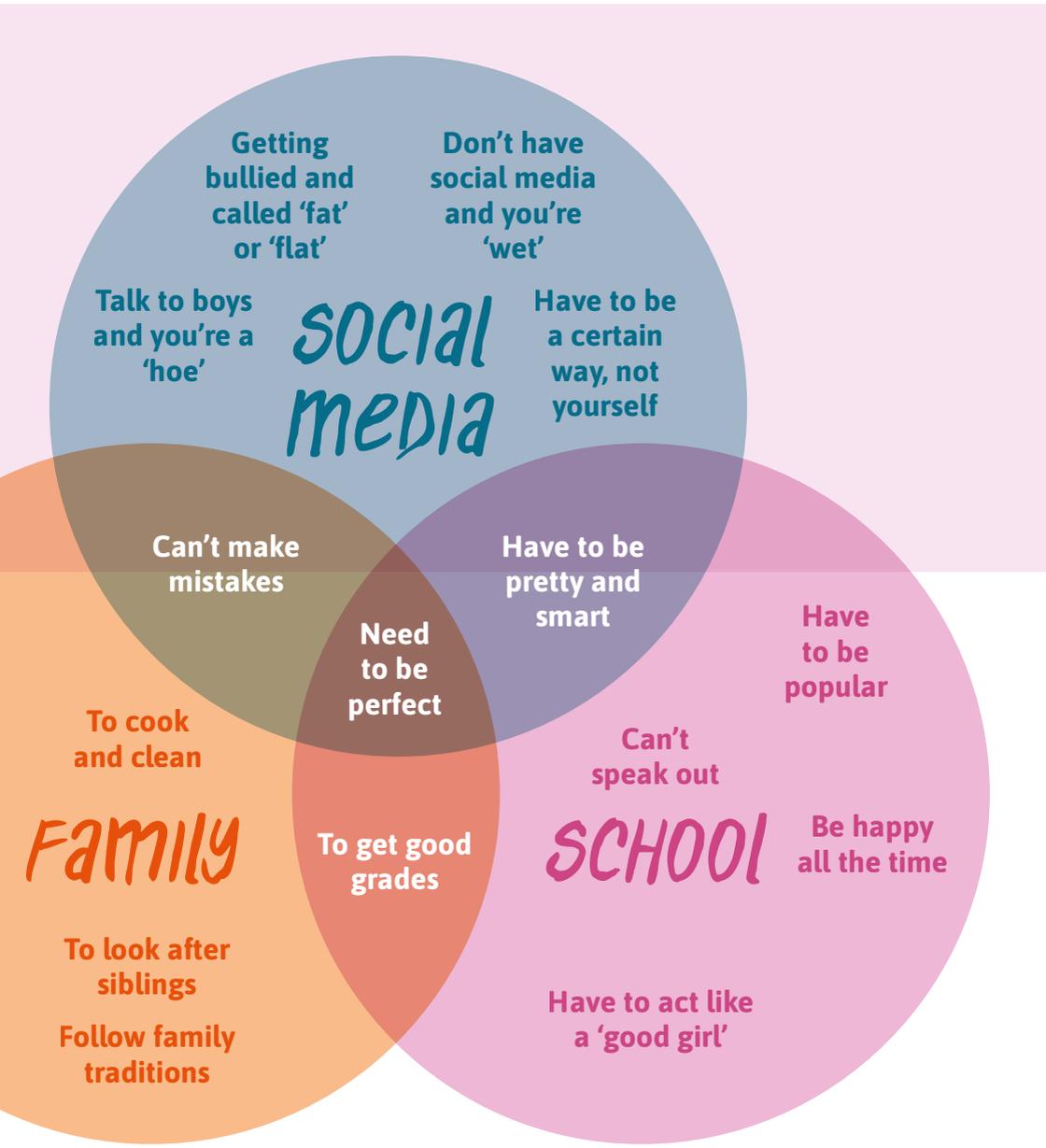


Pressures and expectations

As part of our group work we explore the pressures and expectations young women face as a consequence of their gender, as well as their ethnicity, sexuality, class and religion. We think about how these identities influence their experience of school life, family life and social media. Through this exploration young women find support and solidarity in their shared experiences and learn how their own life experiences make them unique. All of the pressures and expectations featured here are taken from work produced by young women in our groups.



Don't
feel
trusted



Understanding trauma

Traumatic experiences are anything that puts our safety at risk and causes us distress. Everyone responds to traumatic experiences differently and this is influenced by our past experiences, social support and coping styles. This section is designed to help you understand young women's responses to trauma and to support you to support her to feel safer in her mind and body.

Do you know your 5 Fs?

Fight

Resisting, intimidating, fighting, shouting back. Remember Leah? She felt so angry at being laughed at she thought she might explode.

As a carer, you could support a young person in 'fight' by acknowledging their feelings, giving them physical space and maintaining a calm voice.

Flight

Running away, excessive worrying and/or fidgeting, alcohol and drug use, obsessing over school work. Just like Jas when she was so anxious she couldn't focus in class.

When a young woman is in flight, try walking with her, getting fresh air and/or using grounding techniques (see p.42).



When we feel under threat our bodies respond physically to try and protect us from danger. You have probably heard of 'fight or flight' but there are three other ways that people react to traumatic events to protect themselves from harm. You might observe these behaviours in young women as either a response to ongoing traumatic events or as an impact of trauma. These behaviours can be challenging to live with and cause a lot of worry to carers, however, it is important to understand and honour these responses as coping strategies that she is using to protect and support herself. What might this look like?

Freeze & flop

Being rooted to the spot, dissociation, withdrawing from friends and family, excessive sleeping, depression, spending a lot of time alone. Remember Leah? She was so scared she couldn't tell the boy to stop touching her, nor could she run away. When young women freeze or flop in response to violence they can sometimes be met with questions like 'Why didn't you fight back?'

You can support a young woman by not questioning how she responded to the violence and instead by assuring her that what happened to her was not her fault. You can also talk about the concepts of freeze and flop as natural reactions. This will support her to understand her experience of abuse and reduce feelings of shame and self-blame.

Friend

Over-eagerness to please, lack of interpersonal boundaries, unable to identify their own needs. Just like Jas going to the park with her friends even though she feels uncomfortable, and like Leah at the party, she doesn't want to talk to the boy but she feels like the safest thing to do in the situation is to be friendly, as she is worried about what would happen if she is not.

When a young woman is trapped in friend mode you can support her by creating space and time to connect with her and explore her feelings. It is also very important to give her the opportunity to make choices, as it will support her to discover her own needs

Noticing the signs

Young women experience violence and abuse in many ways. They can witness violence, they may overhear it and they may also experience trauma directly in the form of physical, sexual, psychological and/or emotional abuse. Just as every young woman will experience abuse differently, they will also be affected differently.



Anger

Hopelessness

Fear

Depression

Self-blame

Hypersensitivity

Irritability

Panic attacks

Anxiety

Tearfulness

Shame

Unwanted pregnancy

Fatigue

Digestive problems

Physical injuries

Weakened immune system

Migraines

Sexually transmitted infections



In the image below you can see some of the **emotional, physical, cognitive** and **behavioural impacts** and indicators of abuse that young women may experience or display. We know that abuse has a big impact on young women's wellbeing and that they might show all of the symptoms below, some of them or different ones. This is why it is important to pay close attention to her wellbeing and create space for open conversations about thoughts and feelings.

It is important to hold in mind that young women are resilient and strong, and recover everyday from violence and abuse and the associated trauma. For tips and ideas on ways of exploring the strength and resilience of the young women in your care see our at home resource, 'See her, celebrate her: developing resilience' on p.39.

See the glossary for descriptions of: [Hypersensitivity](#), [Flashbacks](#) and [Gaps in memory](#)

Sleep problems

Withdrawing herself

Aggressive behaviour

Self-harming

Isolating herself

Poor attendance

Flashbacks

Overachieving and underachieving

Nightmares

Difficulty concentrating

Suicidal thoughts

Gaps in memory

Making space

In this section we're going to explore how to support a young woman to talk to you about difficult things. We often encourage young people to identify their 'trusted adult' to speak to if they are struggling with something, and we know this person is more likely to be a relative than a professional. If this person is you it's important you feel able to respond in a way that honours the trust they have shown in you, and makes space for them to talk openly.

What is a disclosure?

A disclosure is when a young woman tells another person that she has been abused. It can be a scary and difficult process for someone to go through, and there are many reasons why a young woman might be reluctant to tell. She might be fearful or anxious of being judged or not believed. She might feel a sense of shame or guilt about what has happened, or be concerned about the consequences of speaking up. She may have been waiting for someone to notice things are not right. Young women often tell us that they worry about telling parents as they don't want to upset them.

Whatever the barriers, there are steps you can take to support a young woman to open up.



Supporting young women to tell

Supporting someone who has experienced any form of gender-based violence can be daunting, especially if you are the first person they have told. This is likely to be felt even more if you are their parent or carer. Young women rarely say everything at once and it may take them several attempts to disclose. How we respond will be an important part of their road to recovery. This can be a very difficult and challenging time for parents and carers, with an overload of emotions and a sense of responsibility for

The most important thing you can do is to **listen**, even if what she is saying is difficult to hear.

Listening in a safe space without asking questions, without interrupting and without judgement is sometimes the best support you can give.

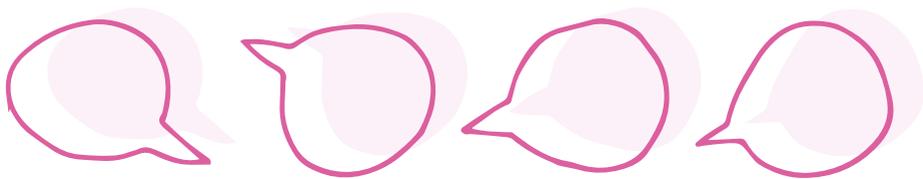
Take a moment to consider what she has shared and reflect back to her what you have heard, using her words.

Empathise, seek to understand how she is feeling and assure her that her feelings are natural and welcome.

Let her tell you what she needs, rather than offering too much advice. It's important to **respect** her choices and let her be in control, even if you think you would do things differently. This includes who else she wants or doesn't want to involve.

You may feel upset and angry but it is important to **remain calm**. Seek support for yourself to ensure you can be there for her (see p.36 for information of support services)

Be patient — comfort her and do not push for more information than she is comfortable sharing.



what has happened, and maybe even disbelief that this could have happened — these are all natural responses. We recognise that every young woman and every disclosure needs a unique response.

The following suggestions are intended to increase your confidence in supporting the young woman, providing key messages to ensure she has a positive experience when she chooses to confide in you

Believe her and make sure she knows you believe her. Saying 'I believe you, you have done a brave thing telling me' shows her it is safe for her to open up.

Reassure her that whatever has happened is **not her fault**. For example, asking her 'what has happened?' rather than 'what have you done?' will reduce feelings of blame and shame.

Take what she is saying seriously to show that she can **trust** you. Provide reassurance that you will support her through this, and that no one will make her do something that she does not want to do. However, it is also important to be clear that the abuse cannot continue, and she must be protected.

Focus on the strength and resilience she has shown and assure her there is **hope** for the future.

Young women's top tips for carers

In the process of making this guide we consulted our incredible Consultation Group, made up of young women with lived experience of violence and abuse, about what they need to thrive and flourish in difficult times. Here's what they told us, plus our key messages.

Show genuine care. You love and care about your daughter, and this is the most important thing for them to experience and that you have to offer.



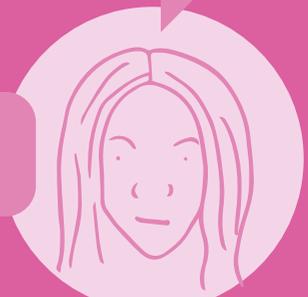
“Make saying ‘I love you’ and other loving affirmations part of every day – even when we don’t say it back!”

Recognise the adult and the child in a young person.



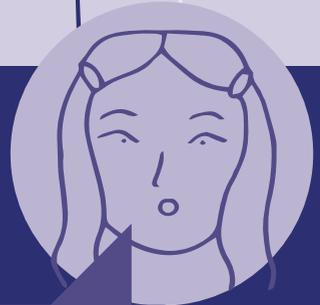
“Don’t smother me, give me space and I will come to you when I’m ready”

‘Share your difficult experiences with me so that I know I am not alone and that you understand me’





“Leave a note on my desk asking how I am - I’ll feel wanted and thought about”



“Show us that your love is unconditional - ‘I will love you whether you get As or Es’”



Listen, believe, validate - make sure she knows you are on her side.



“Be there for me just by being around, you don’t have to talk or give advice, just listen and understand”

“Give me the benefit of the doubt - it’s hard when I feel like I am in trouble at school **and** at home”



Consider your tone of voice and body language. When you are calm and relaxed this helps young people to regulate their emotions.

“Please stay calm! When you are stressed or angry we feel like we can’t talk to you and when you are calm we know that we can”



Be supportive and make time. Staying present when they speak to you will show you're worthy of the trust they have placed in you.

“Take me out dinner and make space for me to get stuff off my chest”



And finally, **get support for you.** These issues are emotionally challenging. Take care of yourself and use the support available.

You can explore 'Where to go for support' for options and find an introduction to self-care on the following page.

“The idea of something like this happening to my child is completely overwhelming. What can I do to cope with my own feelings?”

Remember the survivor is the expert in her experience and with the right support and information she can find the answer.

“Offer me practical support like revision help as a way to connect and relieve stress”



“Say supportive phrases to us like ‘Take your time’, ‘You’ll get there’ and ‘Don’t give up, you got this’”



“Ask me creative questions like ‘What made you smile/laugh today?’, ‘What makes you angry?’, ‘What would you change about the world?’”



Hearing disclosures of abuse may be profoundly upsetting to you as a parent or carer, especially if the abuser is someone you know and thought you could trust. Your feelings may range from denial, anger, and sadness, to frustration and helplessness. If you yourself are a survivor of abuse, the discovery that your child has been abused may also bring up your own painful and unresolved feelings and memories. Getting help for yourself is an important part of being able to get help and support for your child.

See p.36 for a list of specialist organisations who will be able to offer you further advice and support

Taking care of me taking care of you

Self-care means different things to different people. Whether you have experienced abuse yourself, or are supporting someone who has, it's important to take care of you, all of you. This includes tending to your emotional, social, physical & spiritual needs.

Caring for yourself will help to keep you internally resourced and will enable you to offer continuous support. These are some of the suggestions made by the young women we work with —

things they do to make themselves feel better when times are hard. We have left a couple of blank ones for you to fill in yourself, or alongside your young woman.



Practical support

In this section we are going to explore some of the practical support available for young women and their supporters following experiences of violence and abuse. We know that it can often be quite difficult and challenging times, both for the young woman you are supporting and for yourself, and it's important to know you do not have to do it on your own, and there is support available. In the next few pages you will find information about specialist support services, as well as information on what additional support can be offered to young women in the day to day spaces they access, like school. You will also find some information and tips on how to support young women to stay safe online.

At school

After experiencing trauma, it can be difficult for young women to continue engaging with school and meeting the school's expectations. This can often lead to young women feeling overwhelmed by the pressures they face. However, there are many things that a school can do to support young women through their experiences, while making it possible for them to continue their education in a way that feels comfortable.

Below are some suggestions of what you can ask for and discuss with the school:

- Flexible or reduced timetable. Young women can also leave the school 5-10 minutes early so that they can avoid the rush as all other students leave.
- Agreement to leave class or take a break without having to explain in front of the class.
- Regular meetings with a school pastoral lead, mentor, SENCo, head of year or trusted adult.
- Application for mitigating circumstances for exams or coursework, providing extra time or the opportunity to sit an exam in a different room.
- Development of a safety plan for the school environment which is shared with key teachers. This is particularly important if the perpetrator attends her school or a school locally.

Who's who at school?

Pastoral Lead – leads on student wellbeing and ensures young people attend school. They are also often one of the designated safeguarding leads



Safeguarding Lead/Officer – ensures that the school safeguarding policy is known and used appropriately.

They are also the main point of contact for any information that is shared regarding abuse or neglect.



Head of Year – lead contact for a specific year group. This person oversees student attendance, behaviour and support.



Learning and behaviour mentor – enables students to overcome personal barriers to learning, and helps to provide a structure to support the safety, mental health and wellbeing of students.

Not all schools have this role.



Special Educational Needs Coordinator – identifies children with special educational needs and develops appropriate intervention and additional support.



Children's Services

There are Children's Services in every borough.

They have a statutory responsibility to safeguard the wellbeing of children. Each local authority has many services available to support children, parents and carers to be safe and well looked after.

Some parents understandably feel apprehensive about contact with Children's Services and often worry that their parenting will be judged. It is the role of Children's Services and social workers to support you to support your child. Here we address some of the common concerns of parents:

“Reporting a concern to Children's Services means my child will be taken away”

Children's Services have a duty to support you and your child and this does not automatically mean that the child will be placed in care, in fact this should only ever be a last resort.

“It's not my place to report a child to Children's Services - that's for professionals, teachers and the police”

It's everyone's responsibility to safeguard and look after children and vulnerable people in our community. If everyone is committed to this we will be able protect many more children from violence and abuse.





**“It’s not
abuse unless
it’s physical or
sexual”**

Violence and abuse comes in many forms including neglect, emotional, financial, coercive control and/or harassment. Some forms are harder to notice so if you have questions about abuse you can seek support from Women & Girls Network or Children’s Services.



**“Children’s
Services are too
busy to listen to my
concerns”**

There are staff members who are specially trained and whose role it is to listen to you and deal with your concerns of abuse or violence, whether you feel this is a historic issue or if you think that someone is at risk now. Children’s Services should be committed to taking all concerns seriously, however big or small.



How Children’s Services can help

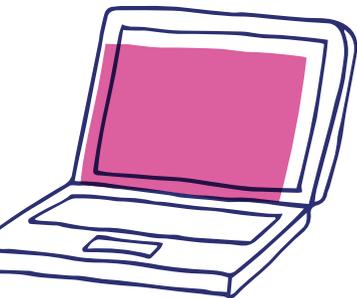
- Coordination of support between different services your child needs, such as health, education, and police.
- Allocation of a Lead Practitioner who can do assessments and be an advocate for your child and family to other services.
- Support through criminal justice processes, including advocacy services.
- Access to specialist youth services, such as mental health or substance use.
- Access to parenting support and advice.

Staying safe online

It can be hard to know how to talk to young people about online safety, but it's important we are able to have these conversations supportively. Social media can be a platform for the young women we work with to connect with friends, to express themselves and to be inspired. It's important to recognise the benefit being online brings to young people's lives in order to understand their usage.

Educate yourself

The better informed you are the better you can support your child. You can learn more about sexting, social networks, apps and games on the 'Online safety' section of the NSPCC website (see p.37 for more details).



Start a conversation

Ask them if there's anything they're worried about and let them know they can always come to you, or speak to another trusted adult. Talk to them about how to treat other young people online and explore what is and isn't okay.



Be understanding

Sometimes things go wrong. Reassure them and try not to make them feel it's their fault — they probably already feel very worried and have been brave speaking up.



We know that without guidance and support the internet can become unsafe, with real consequences for young people’s emotional well-being, mental health and physical safety. So, what can you do to help?

Encourage your children to follow safety guidelines

Remind them to create complex passwords and not to share them; to make all accounts private and check what’s public; and to avoid posting any personal information including their address, email or phone number.



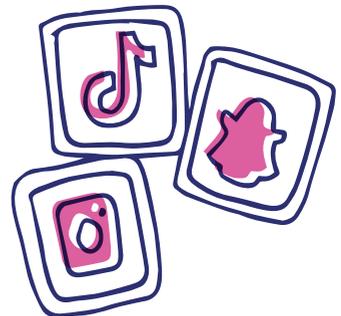
Be curious

Open up a discussion with your child about meeting friends online and ask them how they know they are who they say they are. Show interest in what they’re up to online and involve your child in any decision-making about usage.



Encourage your child to think about the content they are posting

Once it is made public it is out of their hands and can be shared or saved by others. If this does happen there is support and things that can be done to help.



Where to go for support



[Women and Girls Network Young Women's Service](#) provides free and confidential specialist support for young women and girls (age 11+), across West and South London, who have been affected by Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). We offer 1-2-1 advocacy and casework support, group work and 1-2-1 therapeutic support. Our services are young women-led, and we ensure young women's voice are being heard by the people around them, and are at the heart of any support we offer.

Our [Advice Service](#) provides parents, carers and professionals with specialist advice, information and support, enabling them to better support young women in their care.

We also provide ongoing advocacy, casework and therapeutic support

services for adult women who have been affected by Violence Against Women and Girls.

Our [Sexual Violence Helpline](#) provides confidential emotional support and a safe space to explore your feelings. The helpline can be accessed anonymously.

For more information call our Freephone Advice Line on 0808 801 0660, email us on advice@wgn.org.uk or chat to us via our web chat on our [website](#) (just click on the 'chat' button). Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm and Wednesday evenings 6 – 9pm.

Freephone Sexual Violence helpline 0808 801 0770. Monday to Friday 10am – 12.30pm and 2.30 – 4pm and Wednesday evenings 6 – 9pm



A specialist sexual health service for young people across the UK providing both online and face-to-face services.

brook.org.uk



A free, private and confidential service for children and young people to talk about anything.

childline.org.uk



A specialist support service for LGBT+ people.

galop.org.uk



For women and children.
Against domestic violence.

Runs the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse.

0800 2000 247

refuge.org.uk



Support for perpetrators, male victims and young people.

respect.uk.net



Support for male, trans and non-binary victims of sexual abuse.

0808 800 5008

survivorsuk.org



Offers victims and survivors of rape and sexual abuse help to access specialist services in London.

survivorsgateway.london



Support for non-abusing parents and carers of children who have been sexually abused.

0800 980 1958

mosac.org.uk



Support to help children at risk of abuse.

nspcc.org.uk

At home resources

In this section, you will find double-sided 'cut out and keep' creative resources exploring self-care, grounding techniques and inner strengths. We use these activities with young women in our service to develop rapport, create safety and build their confidence and self-esteem. We hope that doing these activities with the young women in your care will make space for safety and connection and support you both on the road to healing. You can find further self care resources on [our website](#).

See her, celebrate her: **developing resilience**

Resilience refers to the interaction of personal qualities, social supports and genetics that influence how we are able to deal with daily struggles and how we recover from trauma. Supporting your child after abuse can be overwhelming, focusing on resilience can provide a helpful framework for supporting yourself and young women to recover from trauma.

Our 'strengths' can be personal qualities, skills, or beliefs that allow us to thrive. Trauma can interrupt a young woman's confidence in her strengths. At Women and Girls Network we take a strengths-based approach, which means we create opportunities for young women

to identify and celebrate their strengths. You can do the same with your young women using our 'Signature strengths' activity. Try spending some time reflecting on your own strengths so that you can lead by example.



Grounding techniques

When we are reminded of traumatic incidents or when we just feel overwhelmed, our nervous system can become activated and we can get hot and sweaty and sometimes anxious, fidgety, panicked and distressed. When this happens there are things we can do to calm and soothe our systems and help us to feel relaxed and safe. These are called 'grounding techniques' as they help us to manage our feelings, bring us back to the present moment and get our feet firmly on the ground. We recognise the emotional challenges you face as carers and encourage you to use these techniques for yourself, and to support the young women in your care to use them as well.

On the next page you will find some grounding techniques to explore.

*TELL YOURSELF YOU ARE
SAFE, LOVED AND STRONG*

Stand strong

Place your feet firmly on the ground and remind yourself of who you are. Say your name, your age and where you are right now. Say it out loud if you can.

Engage the senses

Look around and name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can taste, 2 things you can hear and 1 thing you can smell.

Get your whole body breathing.

Breath in for three and exhale out for four. Focus on the breath as it comes in and goes out. Do this ten times.

Wake up

Splash cold water on your face and notice how it feels. Notice how it feels to dry your face with the towel. Use words in your head to describe the sensations like 'cold' 'smooth' 'warm'.

Take a sip

Hold a can of drink, feel the coldness and the wetness. Notice the bubbles and the sensation as you swallow. You can also do this with a hot mug of tea.

Go outside!

If you can, get some air. Notice the smells and the feel of the air on your skin. If you have plants, tend to them or better yet if you have a pet, give them a stroke and focus on touch.

Comfort kits

As these grounding techniques demonstrate, the key to soothing and calming the nervous system is to stimulate the 5 senses. They are Taste, Touch, Sight, Sound and Smell. We often invite the young women we work with to create 'comfort kits' to carry with them in their daily lives — the kit holds different objects which help to positively stimulate the senses, creating a way back to the safety of the space we've created together, whenever difficult feelings arise. They can be used when someone is feeling nervous, annoyed, angry, sad, frustrated or lonely, for example.

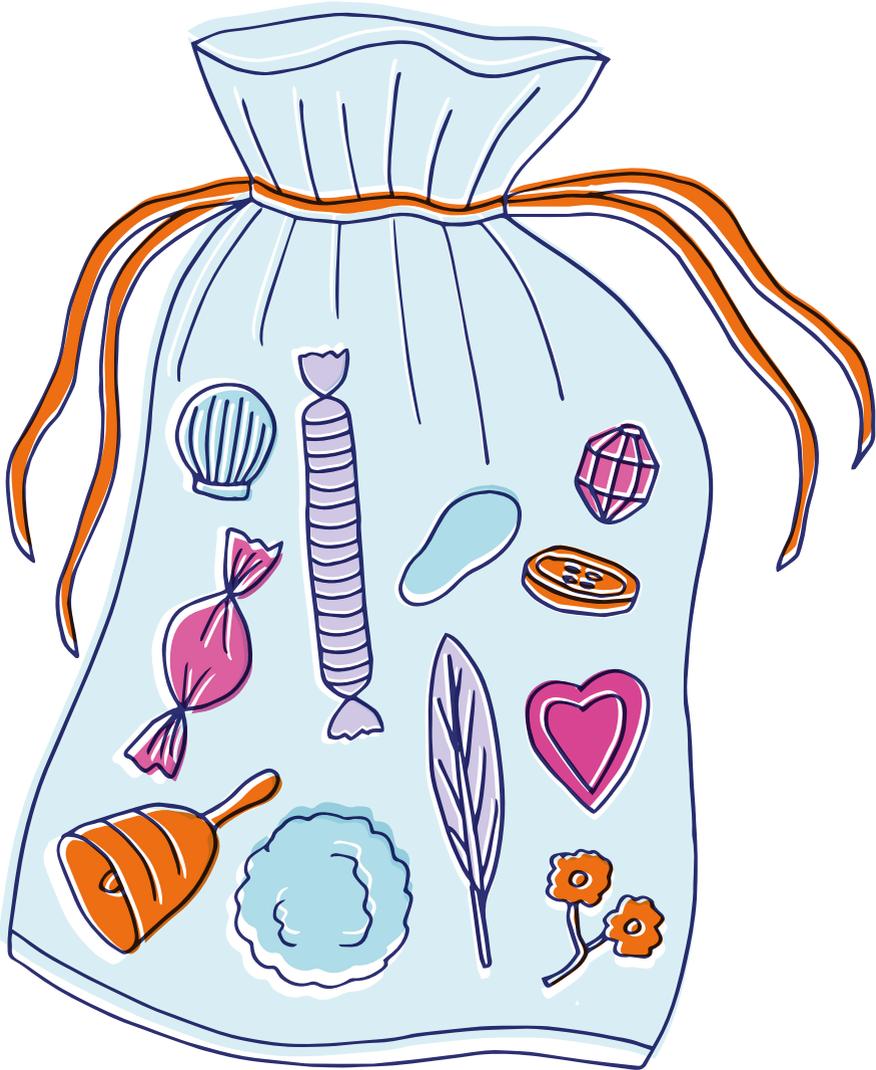
This should be a creative and bonding activity to do together.

What you'll need:

- Small organza bag
- Taste: Individually wrapped chocolates or sweets
- Touch: Felt, feathers, pebbles
- Sight: Glitter, beads, gems, stickers, or dried flower petals
- Sound: Small bell
- Smell: Essential oil (e.g. lavender) or Florida water, or anything else with a smell you like - these can be spritzed or dropped onto a cotton ball.

Take an organza bag each and create your own comfort kit, making sure each kit contains something for every sense (for example, a sweet chocolate for taste, a smooth pebble

for touch, calming lavender for smell, a colourful feather for sight and a tinkling bell for sound). Each comfort kit is unique, just like you and the young woman in your care.



Glossary

A summary of useful words and phrases

- **Cognitive** or **cognition** refers to mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and understanding. These include thinking, knowing, remembering, judging and problem-solving.
- **Dissociation** Dissociation is separating or disconnecting from oneself and the world around you.
- **Domestic violence** is an incident or pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner, but also by a family member.
- **Emotional abuse** refers to the continual emotional mistreatment of a child and can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child.
- **Flashbacks** are when survivors remember part of a traumatic incident. The difference to 'normal' remembering is that the flashback can feel as though it is happening right now and so the emotions associated with it (i.e fear, terror, powerlessness) are all experienced in the present, as though the violence is happening all over again.
- **Gaps in memory** are common in those who have experienced abuse, particularly sexual violence. Sometimes young women will remember details in a different order, or not at all. This can be very confusing and upsetting for survivors, particularly when they are asked to recall an incident, i.e. for court.
- **Hypersensitivity** means becoming suddenly angry, scared or tearful at things that might not seem upsetting and scary to others. Like when Jas (see 'A Day in the Life' p.9) thought she might burst with anger when people laughed at her Instagram account.
- **A Lead Practitioner** will work with children and young people who are vulnerable. They will make sure families get the right help at the right time. They work in partnership with the family and take the lead in coordinating services that are involved.
- **LGBTQ+** stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Questioning or Queer, and 'Plus', which represents other sexual identities including pansexual, asexual and omnisexual.

Glossary (continued)

- **Physical violence** Any act which causes physical harm as a result of unlawful physical force. Includes punching, slapping, hitting, pinching, kicking, pushing, shoving and strangling.
- **Non-binary** and **Gender non-conforming** are umbrella terms referring to people who identify outside of the male-female gender binary.
- **Neglect** is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs, including their physical, medical, emotional and educational needs.
- **Rape** is when someone's mouth, vagina or anus is penetrated by a penis without them agreeing to it.
- **Sexual abuse** is when a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into sexual activities. They might not understand that what's happening is abuse or that it's wrong. It can happen in person or online.
- **Sexual assault** is any physical, psychological and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act, inflicted on someone without their consent (e.g. unwanted sexual touching).
- **Sexual harassment** is any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that makes you feel distressed, intimidated or humiliated.
- **Statutory responsibility** refers to the legal obligation statutory services, such as Children's Services, have to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need.
- **Transgender young woman** is a term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a young woman. (Can be shortened to trans young woman).
- **Trauma** An event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening, and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's sense of self and safety, their functioning and their mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

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“It’s time and patience that leads to recovery. I think the joint collaboration between Women & Girls Network and parents in giving the child time to recover is crucial...Just keep persevering and show you are listening and do not give up”

Quote from a parent of a young woman supported by Women and Girls Network

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