

Date: 24th May 2023

To:

- Education Sector Providers
- Residential Care Providers
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- Community Safety Partners
- Youth Offending Teams

Dear Colleague,

Effective preventative education and the use of ‘scare or shock tactics’

Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (DDSCP) has received requests for clarification of the efficacy of the use of preventative education programmes, specifically external programmes using ‘scare, shock, or shame tactics’. These programmes utilise the principle that learning experiences involving exposure to hard hitting materials, negative consequences or harsh real life learning experiences will help to prevent or reduce children’s risk-taking or offending behaviour.

Keeping Children Safe in Education outlines that schools and colleges play a crucial role in preventative education and have the responsibility to ensure children are taught about how to keep themselves and others safe, including online. To be effective it must be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individual children, including children who are victims of abuse, and children with special educational needs or disabilities.

Keeping Children Safe in Education also highlights that external organisations and speakers can help enrich children’s education, but that careful consideration should be given to the suitability of any external organisations. This should include assessment of education value, age appropriateness of what is going to be delivered, ability to meet the full range of learners’ needs and whether relevant checks are required.

The DDSCP has reviewed the preventative education research and guidance and found evidence¹ shows that shock, scare and shame tactics in preventative education doesn’t work and can undermine the desired learning:

- It can link a risky behaviour with the emotion of excitement and have an opposite effect to what was intended, such as increasing risk-taking behaviour or offending.
- Evoking emotions such as shock or fear can inhibit the intended learning and are not long-lasting motivators.

¹ See references in appendix 1

- Hard hitting or extreme examples are more difficult for children to relate too.
- Shocking imagery, stories or films can be harmful and risks re-traumatising children who are vulnerable.
- Extreme examples and images can delay help seeking.
- Scaring or shocking children is counter-productive to schools and colleges providing a safe environment for their learners.

It is critical that when a school or college is considering using an external provider that it forms part of a planned PSHE or relationships/relationships and sex and health education programme. This should be within the context of a whole school approach which keeps children safe and prepares learners for life in modern Britain and creates a culture of zero tolerance for sexism, misogyny/misandry, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and sexual violence/ harassment.

Making decisions as to commission a service or programme to provide preventative education for children should be informed by evidence as to whether a programme achieves the specific intended outcome and is consistent with the whole school approach. In all cases, programmes should be informed by best practice principles for teaching PSHE. A range of helpful resources to support schools and colleges to effectively deliver preventative education, including the use of external providers is located at the end of this letter. There are also some considerations for avoiding shock, scare or shame tactics.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Sobey', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Sobey
Partnership Manager
Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

Appendix 1: Effective Preventative Education Research and Guidance

- [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (2022) Department for Education
- [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#) (2019) Department for Education
- [Using External expertise to Enhance Online safety education; guidance for education settings](#) (2022) UK Council for Internet safety
- [Key Principles of Effective Education Prevention](#) (2016) CEOP and PHSE Association
- [Police in the Classroom; A handbook for the police and PSHE teachers](#) National Police Chiefs' Council and PHSE Association. Includes key principles poster
- [Safe classroom' and 'effective teaching' interactive posters](#) (2022) PSHE Association – interactive posters outlining best practice principles for teaching PSHE education and establishing a safe learning environment

TOP TIPS: Avoiding shock, fear and shame

- Teachers should check lesson plans and resources for stories, images or scenes that might be shocking, harrowing or scary for the age group — remember that learners will have a much lower threshold for what might worry them.
- Remember the session is about teaching learners, not entertaining them. Just because learners might watch 'scary' films in their own time, this does not mean using similar films in PSHE classes will promote learning.
- Teachers should make sure they include a range of examples, case studies and consequences, most of which do not focus on the most dramatic or extreme outcomes.
- Focus on making resources relatable so that learners think “that could be me” rather than “that would never happen to me”.
- Think about how positive choices and actions might be promoted rather than negative behaviours warned against

Adapted from Police in the classroom; a handbook for the police and PSHE teachers, PSHE Association and National Police Chiefs Council