
Young People's Safety & Violence Survey

Violence Reduction Partnership Research Report, written by BVSC Research

Survey Methodology and Demographic Profile

Survey Design

The survey was designed to capture responses directly related to the objectives of the project using standard practices for creating data collection tools (clear questions and instructions tailored to a specific audience, neutral wording, logical flow, accessible). The survey is specific to this project and research question.

Survey Dissemination

The survey was designed by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) Research team on the Survey Monkey online platform, and was disseminated through a wide range of networks, partners and online platforms to ensure a wide reach. It was also given to BVSC Research's community research champions, who are individuals experienced in community research who go out into physical spaces and engage with local residents on research opportunities available to them.

Online dissemination

- Flyer/QR code: Using a flyer with a link and QR code, the survey was sent out through trusted partners of the BVSC network, and the West Midlands VRP networks to reach as many young people as possible across the West Midlands region.
- Mailing lists/newsletters: BVSC and WMVRP used their existing mailing lists and newsletters to share information on the survey and increase response rates.
- Social media: primarily LinkedIn used by BVSC Research and individual staff members to share information.
- Birch Network: BVSC Research's Birch network meets quarterly and all members were informed and invited to respond.

In-person dissemination

- BVSC Research staff member attended the WMVRP conference with QR code and encouraged people there (mainly professionals working with young people) to share the survey.
- BVSC Research Community Research Champions went out into the community and shared the QR code, while engaging in person with people to encourage responses.

Participants

A total of 206 people responded to the survey. Following data cleaning, 23 respondents were removed as they exceeded the inclusion criteria for age (10 – 25) and a further 24 respondents were removed after providing consent but did not provide responses beyond demographic information (empty surveys). This left $N = 159$ responses available for analysis. The sample was predominantly aged 16–17 (61.0%), female (74.7%), and based in Birmingham (64.8%).

Age

A total of 159 participants provided their age. Most participants were aged 16–17, reflecting the core secondary school and college age group targeted by the survey. The mean age was 17.8 years, and the median was 17 years, with ages ranging from 10 to 25.

Age Group	N = 159	Participants (%)
11–15 years	9	5.7%
16–17 years	97	61.0%
18–19 years	20	12.6%
20–25 years	32	20.1%

Gender Identity

Participants were asked how they identify and only one participant abstained from responding. Most participants (74.7%) identified as a girl, woman, or used she/her/they pronouns, and 23.4% identified as a boy, man, or used he/him/they. A small number selected non-binary or chose to self-identify.

Gender Identity	n = 158	Participants (%)
Girl, woman, she/her/they	118	74.7%
Boy, man, he/him/they	37	23.4%
Non-binary, they/them	2	1.3%
Self-identify (please specify)	1	0.6%

Special Educational Needs and Neurodevelopmental Conditions

Participants were asked to select any characteristics that described them (participants could select all that apply). From the sample, 71.1% indicated none of the listed conditions applied to them. Among those who did identify a condition, autism (10.7%) was the most reported, followed by ADHD, another neurodevelopmental condition (8.2%), and a special educational need or learning difference (8.2%). A small number (5.7%) preferred not to say.

Characteristic	N = 159	Participants (%)
None of the above	113	71.1%
Prefer not to say	15	9.4%
I am autistic	17	10.7%
I have a special educational need (SEN) or learning difference	13	8.2%

Characteristic	N = 159	Participants (%)
I have ADHD or another neurodevelopmental condition	13	8.2%
I have a physical disability	9	5.7%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

Area of Residence

Participants were asked where they live within the West Midlands. Birmingham was by far the most represented area, accounting for 64.8% of responses. Sandwell (12.0%) and Walsall (8.2%) were the next most common areas represented.

Area	N = 159	Participants (%)
Birmingham	103	64.8%
Sandwell	19	11.9%
Walsall	13	8.2%
Dudley	7	4.4%
Wolverhampton	7	4.4%
Solihull	6	3.8%
Coventry	4	2.5%

Section X: Findings

1.1 Safety is Conditional, Context-Dependent and Often Absent

When participants were asked how safe they feel in their everyday lives, more than half of respondents described themselves as feeling safe or very safe. This is, on the surface, reassuring, but the fuller picture is more nuanced. The largest single block of responses fell was feeling neither safe nor unsafe. This kind of ambivalent safety suggests that many young people are navigating a daily environment where safety is something to be managed rather than simply assumed.

Safety, for many of these young people, is not a baseline condition — it is something that must be actively constructed.

The data on avoidance confirms this. Most respondents said they regularly avoid specific places because of how unsafe those places make them feel. Public spaces such as town centres, parks, streets, and public transport, were the locations most avoided. These are, notably, the very spaces where young people should feel most free to move around. The fact that so many are restricting their own movements reflects an internalised geography of risk that shapes daily life in ways that are easy for adults to overlook.

After dark was the single most widely cited factor that makes young people feel less safe, affecting most respondents. Conflict between groups of young people was also cited by a clear

majority, reinforcing the idea that the threat of inter-group violence is a lived reality, not an abstract concern, for many in this cohort.

Where Young People Spend Time During the Week

Participants were asked where they spend most of their time during the week (select all that apply). School or college was the most selected location (78.5%), followed by at home (57.6%). Online was selected by nearly one in five Participants (19.6%).

Table 1.

Location	n = 158	Participants (%)
At school or college	124	78.5%
At home	91	57.6%
Online	31	19.6%
Somewhere else (please specify)	15	9.5%
In my local neighbourhood	13	8.2%
At a youth club or community space	4	2.5%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

Where Young People Spend Time During Weekends and Holidays

At home was the dominant location during weekends and holidays, selected by 86.8% of Participants. In my local neighbourhood (25.2%) and online (23.9%) were the next most common, with youth clubs and community spaces rarely selected (5.0%).

Table 2.

Location	N = 159	Participants (%)
At home	138	86.8%
In my local neighbourhood	40	25.2%
Online	38	23.9%
Somewhere else (please specify)	22	13.8%
At school or college	8	5.0%
At a youth club or community space	8	5.0%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

General Feelings of Safety

Participants were asked how safe they feel in their everyday life. Half (50.3%) reported feeling safe or very safe. However, 14.2% reported feeling unsafe and 5.8% very unsafe, indicating that a meaningful minority of young people experience significant safety concerns in their daily lives. A further 29.0% reported feeling neither safe nor unsafe.

Table 3.

Response	N = 155	% of Participants
Safe	77	49.7%
Neither safe nor unsafe	45	29.0%
Unsafe	13	8.4%
Very safe	11	7.1%
Very unsafe	9	5.8%

Places Young People Avoid

Participants were asked whether there are specific places they avoid because they feel unsafe (select all that apply). Only 30.3% indicated they do not avoid any places, with 69.7% identifying at least one location they avoid. Town or city centres (34.2%), streets or estates in their area (32.9%), and parks or open spaces (31.0%) were the most avoided locations. A substantial number of participants also avoided public transport (29.7%).

Table 4.

Place Avoided	n = 155	Participants (%)
Town or city centres	53	34.2%
Streets or estates in my area	51	32.9%
Parks or open spaces	48	31.0%
No — I don't avoid any places	47	30.3%
Public transport (buses, trams, trains)	46	29.7%
Online spaces (social media, gaming, messaging apps)	15	9.7%
School or college corridors / toilets	6	3.9%
Prefer not to say	1	0.6%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

1.2 Connection and Belonging are the Foundation of Felt Safety

The young people's sense of safety is anchored in people rather than places or systems. When asked what makes them feel safer, the most selected response was being with trusted friends or family. Knowing where to go for help and having things to do were also widely cited, but the primacy of social connection stands out clearly. This finding has important implications. It suggests that safety, for many of these young people, is not primarily about infrastructure, surveillance, or enforcement. It is about feeling known, cared for, and accompanied. Feeling unknown or not respected in one's neighbourhood, and feeling different or not fitting in, were

both cited as factors that made young people feel less safe, reinforcing the idea that social exclusion and belonging sit at the heart of this issue.

Young people do not primarily feel safe because of systems. They feel safe because of people.

This theme is echoed in what young people said would help reduce violence in their communities. Activities, community spaces, job and education opportunities, and mental health support all featured prominently. Responses that converged on the idea that boredom, isolation, and lack of prospects created the conditions in which violence becomes more likely. The message is consistent: young people want to be included, occupied, and seen as having something to look forward to.

What Makes Young People Feel Safer

Participants were asked which factors make them feel safer (select all that apply). Being with trusted friends or family was by far the most selected factor (87.7%), suggesting that social connectedness is central to young people's sense of safety. Knowing where to go for help (48.7%) and having activities or things to do (44.2%) were also frequently selected.

Table 5.

Factor	n = 154	Participants (%)
Being with trusted friends or family	135	87.7%
Knowing where to go for help if something happens	75	48.7%
Having activities or things to do	68	44.2%
Safe spaces in my community (e.g. youth clubs, libraries)	41	26.6%
Feeling known and respected in my neighbourhood	38	24.7%
Having a trusted adult at school or college I can talk to	35	22.7%
Other (please specify)	5	3.2%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

What Makes Young People Feel Less Safe

Participants were asked what makes them feel less safe or puts them at greater risk (select all that apply). Certain times of day was the most cited factor (74.7%), followed by conflict between groups of young people (61.7%) and certain places in their area (48.1%). Feeling different or not fitting in was also notable (29.2%), highlighting the role of social belonging in perceptions of risk.

Table 6.

Factor	n = 154	Participants (%)
Certain times of day (e.g. after dark)	115	74.7%

Factor	n = 154	Participants (%)
Conflict between groups of young people	95	61.7%
Certain places in my area	74	48.1%
Feeling different or not fitting in	45	29.2%
Not having enough trusted adults around	36	23.4%
Financial pressures at home	23	14.9%
Being excluded from school	16	10.4%
Being online	7	4.5%
Other (please specify)	2	1.3%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

1.3 Adults, Trust and Support

The data reveals a complex and somewhat troubling picture of how young people experience the adults in their lives. On the positive side, most respondents said they have a trusted adult they could turn to in a crisis. However, when asked whether adults (e.g., teachers, police, youth workers) understood their safety needs, the responses become more cautious. Fewer than one in eight felt this understanding was consistent. This tells us that while trusted adults exist in many young people's lives, professional adults in formal roles are perceived as inconsistent at best in their ability to respond to what young people need.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in who young people turn to if something made them feel unsafe. Parents and carers came first and friends were second. Teachers and school staff were rarely mentioned, and the police were cited by barely any respondents. Perhaps most concerning, a notable proportion said they would turn to no one and that they would deal with it themselves. This is a significant finding. Young people who feel they cannot or will not seek help from an adult in a dangerous situation are at far greater risk of harm.

When something goes wrong, young people look to their families and friends first — and increasingly, to no one at all.

The implication for practice suggests that formal systems (i.e., schools, youth services, policing) are not currently experienced as reliable or accessible sources of support by most young people in this cohort. Building the capacity of trusted adults within those systems and making routes to help feel more personal and less institutional, would appear to be a priority.

Whether Adults Understand Young People's Safety Needs

Participants were asked whether adults (teachers, police, youth workers) understand their needs when it comes to keeping them safe. Only 11.4% reported that adults always understand their needs, while a combined 20.8% said this happens rarely or never. The most common response was sometimes (41.6%), suggesting inconsistency in young people's experiences of being understood by adults.

Table 7.

Response	N = 149	Participants (%)
Sometimes	62	41.6%
Usually	39	26.2%
Rarely	21	14.1%
Always	17	11.4%
Never	10	6.7%

Who Young People Would Turn to First in an Unsafe Situation

When asked who they would turn to first if something happened that made them feel unsafe, a parent or carer was the most common first point of contact (40.0%). A friend was the second most frequent choice (28.9%). Concerningly, 18.5% stated they would deal with it by themselves and would not turn to anyone, while only 4.4% would turn to a teacher or school staff member, and fewer still would contact the police (0.7%) or a youth worker (1.5%).

Table 8.

Response	n = 135	Participants (%)
A parent or carer	54	40.0%
A friend	39	28.9%
No one — I would deal with it myself	25	18.5%
I don't know	6	4.4%
A teacher or school staff member	6	4.4%
A youth worker or mentor	2	1.5%
An online resource or helpline	2	1.5%
Police	1	0.7%

Having a Trusted Adult in Their Life

Most participants reported having a trusted adult they could turn to in a serious situation: 48.5% said 'definitely yes' and 37.5% 'probably yes'; a combined 86.0%. Only 7.4% reported probably not or definitely not having such a person in their life.

Table 9.

Response	N =	% of Participants
Definitely yes	66	48.5%
Probably yes	51	37.5%
Not sure	9	6.6%

Response	N =	% of Participants
Probably not	7	5.1%
Definitely not	3	2.2%

1.4 Peer Pressure is the Dominant Driver of Violence

Across multiple questions, peer influence emerged as the single most consistently cited factor in young people's understanding of violence. When asked what causes young people to get involved in violence, pressure from friends or groups was selected by the majority, but the picture is one of ambivalence. That is, resisting peer norms is possible for some, but for others it remains a significant challenge.

Peer pressure is not a background factor in youth violence. For young people, it is the main event.

This has important implications for intervention design. Approaches that focus solely on individual decision-making, such as encouraging young people to make better choices, may be insufficient if the intervention doesn't also address the social dynamics and group norms that shape those choices in the first place. Effective work with young people at risk may need to engage with peer groups, not just individuals, and build environments where different choices feel socially possible.

The data also highlights the role of grooming and manipulation, which was selected by many respondents as a cause of violence. Combined with the prominence of poverty, lack of opportunity, and family difficulties, this paints a picture of young people being pulled into violence from multiple directions simultaneously.

Main Reasons Young People Get Involved in Violence

All participants were asked to select up to three reasons they believe young people get involved in violence. Pressure from friends or groups was identified most frequently (73.6%), underscoring the centrality of peer influence. Family problems or difficult home life (53.5%), wanting respect or status (45.8%), being groomed or manipulated (46.5%), poverty or lack of money (45.1%), and online influences (45.1%) were all identified by approximately four in ten Participants.

Table 10.

Reason	n = 144	Participants (%)
Pressure from friends or groups	106	73.6%
Family problems or difficult home life	77	53.5%
Being groomed or manipulated by others	67	46.5%
Wanting respect or status	66	45.8%
Poverty or lack of money	65	45.1%
Online influences (e.g. social media, videos)	65	45.1%

Reason	n = 144	Participants (%)
Lack of things to do / opportunities	49	34.0%
To protect themselves or others	55	38.2%
Mental health difficulties	35	24.3%
Other (please specify)	4	2.8%

Note: Participants could select up to 3 options; percentages may exceed 100%.

What Would Most Help to Reduce Violence

Participants were asked what would most help to reduce violence among young people in their area (select up to 3 options). More activities and things to do was the most selected response (55.6%), closely followed by more job or education opportunities (54.9%) and community spaces where young people feel welcome (54.2%). Better support for mental health was chosen by 47.9% of Participants, and better relationships with police by 43.1%.

Table 11.

Strategy	N = 144	Participants (%)
More activities and things to do	80	55.6%
More job or education opportunities	79	54.9%
Community spaces where young people feel welcome	78	54.2%
Better support for mental health	69	47.9%
Better relationships with police	62	43.1%
Support for families	50	34.7%
Better awareness of where to go for help	48	33.3%
More trusted adults and mentors	46	31.9%
Other (please specify)	2	1.4%

Note: Participants could select up to 3 options; percentages may exceed 100%.

Influence of Peer Pressure on Violence

When asked how much pressure from friends or groups influences young people getting involved in violence, 75.7% of Participants said 'a lot' or 'greatly', further underscoring the role of peer dynamics in driving or preventing violence.

Table 12.

Response	n = 136	Participants (%)
A lot	75	55.1%

Response	n = 136	Participants (%)
Greatly	28	20.6%
Somewhat	25	18.4%
A little	4	2.9%
Not at all	4	2.9%

Personal Experience of Being Pressured

Participants were asked whether they had personally felt pressured by friends, a group, or someone older to do something unsafe or wrong. Most Participants (63.7%) reported having never felt such pressure. However, 28.9% had occasionally experienced this, and 3.7% had experienced it often, suggesting that peer coercion into risky behaviour is a meaningful concern for a minority of young people.

Table 13.

Response	n = 135	Participants (%)
No	86	63.7%
Yes, occasionally	39	28.9%
Prefer not to say	5	3.7%
Yes, often	5	3.7%

Ease of Making Different Choices from Peers

Participants were asked how easy or hard it is to make different choices from their friends or group in risky or violent situations. Responses were broadly spread: 42.5% described it as easy or very easy, 29.9% as hard or very hard, and 27.6% as neither easy nor hard. This highlights that for a significant proportion of young people, resisting peer pressure in high-risk moments remains genuinely difficult.

Table 14.

Response	n = 134	Participants (%)
Neither easy nor hard	37	27.6%
Easy	36	26.9%
Hard	32	23.9%
Very easy	21	15.7%
Very hard	8	6.0%

1.5 School Exclusion is Widely Recognised as a Risk Factor

Participants reported some personal connection to school exclusion, whether their own or that of someone they know. Very few had no experience of exclusion in their social world. When asked how much they think school exclusion increases the risk of violence, the overwhelming majority believed it does, with most saying it increases risk substantially. Young people understand the link between educational disengagement and vulnerability to violence. This alignment between young people's perceptions and the research evidence on school exclusion is striking and lends weight to the case for exclusion reform.

Experience of School Exclusion

Participants were asked whether they or someone they know has been affected by school exclusion. Almost half (45.5%) reported that someone they know has been excluded. A small number (4.2%) reported that they had been excluded themselves, and 4.9% reported both. Only 42.0% reported no experience of exclusion.

Table 15.

Response	N = 143	Participants (%)
Yes — someone I know has been excluded	65	45.5%
No	60	42.0%
Both	7	4.9%
Yes — I have been excluded from school	6	4.2%
Prefer not to say	5	3.5%

Whether School Exclusion Increases the Risk of Violence

Many participants believed school exclusion increases the risk of young people becoming involved in violence, with 52.1% selecting 'a lot' or 'greatly'. Only one respondent believed exclusion has no effect at all on this risk.

Table 16.

Response	n = 144	Participants (%)
A lot	46	31.9%
Somewhat	42	29.2%
Greatly	30	20.8%
A little	25	17.4%
Not at all	1	0.7%

1.6 Online Harm and Its Real-World Impact

Online harm was a near-universal experience for this group of participants. The overwhelming majority of respondents had experienced or witnessed some form of online harm, with bullying,

threats, and abusive behaviour the most common. Seeing violent or distressing content and witnessing online arguments escalate into real-world conflict were also very widely reported.

TikTok and Snapchat were identified as the platforms most associated with harmful behaviour, followed by Instagram and online gaming platforms. Whether these platforms are more dangerous than others, or whether this experience comes from more frequent use, is unknown. However, the ubiquity of these platforms in young people's lives means that online environments are, functionally, part of the social landscape in which young people navigate risk.

Online harm is not a separate problem from real-world violence. For young people, the two are already connected.

Arguments that begin online and continue in person, the viral spread of humiliating content, and organised group confrontations coordinated through social media were widely recognised. Participants believed online conflict escalates to physical harm, and their preferred solutions focused on platform accountability and better reporting mechanisms, as well as peer accountability. The desire for better moderation and easier reporting reflects a frustration with the current situation: harm happens, and the routes to address it feel inadequate.

Types of Online Harm Experienced or Witnessed

Participants were asked which types of online harm they had experienced or witnessed (select all that apply). Only 12.7% reported no experience of online harm. The most reported experience was bullying, threats or abuse online (60.3%), followed by arguments or conflicts online that then happened in person (53.2%), and seeing violent or distressing content (50.8%). Being pressured or manipulated online was reported by 31.7%.

Table 17.

Type of Online Harm	N = 126	Participants (%)
Bullying, threats or abuse online	76	60.3%
Arguments or conflicts online that then happened in person	67	53.2%
Seeing violent or distressing content	64	50.8%
Being pressured or manipulated online	40	31.7%
Being encouraged to do something dangerous	23	18.3%
I have not experienced or witnessed online harm	16	12.7%
Prefer not to say	8	6.3%
I have experienced something else (please specify)	2	1.6%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

Platforms Where Harmful Behaviour Occurs

Participants were asked on which platforms they had most often seen or experienced harmful behaviour (select all that apply). TikTok and Snapchat were jointly the most frequently cited platforms (60.5% each), followed by Instagram (38.6%) and online gaming

platforms such as Roblox and Discord (35.1%). X (Twitter) was mentioned by 21.1% and WhatsApp or group chats by 24.6%.

Table 18.

Platform	n = 114	Participants (%)
TikTok	69	60.5%
Snapchat	69	60.5%
Instagram	44	38.6%
Online gaming platforms (e.g. Roblox, Discord)	40	35.1%
WhatsApp or group chats	28	24.6%
X (Twitter)	24	21.1%
YouTube	15	13.2%
AI chat bots	13	11.4%
Facebook	4	3.5%
Other (please specify)	2	1.8%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

How Often Online Conflict Leads to Real-World Violence

Participants were asked how often they felt online conflict or abuse leads to real-world violence or retaliation. Almost four in ten (39.5%) reported this happens 'often' or 'very often', and a further 39.5% said 'sometimes'. Only 6.2% said it never happens, suggesting strong awareness among young people of the connection between online and offline harm.

Table 19.

Response	n = 129	Participants (%)
Sometimes	51	39.5%
Often	37	28.7%
Rarely	21	16.3%
Very often	12	9.3%
Never	8	6.2%

How Online Conflict Turns into Real-World Harm

Among the 96 Participants who answered this question, arguments starting online and continuing in person was by far the most identified mechanism (79.2%). Videos or posts that embarrass or humiliate someone, leading to retaliation, was cited by 63.5%, and groups being organised online to confront someone in person by 42.7%.

Table 20.

Mechanism	n = 96	Participants (%)
Arguments start online and continue in person	76	79.2%
Videos or posts embarrass someone, leading to retaliation	61	63.5%
Groups are organised online to confront someone in person	41	42.7%
Someone is threatened online and then attacked	40	41.7%
People find out where someone lives/goes to school via social media	39	40.6%
Other (please specify)	1	1.0%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.

What Would Reduce Online Harm Turning into Real-World Harm

Participants were asked what would most help to reduce online harm turning into real-world harm (select up to 3 options). Better moderation of social media platforms was the most frequently selected option (64.3%), followed by easier ways to report online abuse (61.2%) and young people holding each other accountable online (48.1%). Support from trusted adults when things happen online was chosen by 35.7%.

Table 21.

Strategy	N = 129	Participants (%)
Better moderation of social media platforms	83	64.3%
Easier ways to report online abuse	79	61.2%
Young people holding each other accountable online	62	48.1%
Support from trusted adults when things happen online	46	35.7%
Education in schools about online safety	40	31.0%
Cooling-off periods before responding online	37	28.7%
Other (please specify)	5	3.9%

Note: Participants could select up to 3 options; percentages may exceed 100%.

1.7 Young People Feel Negatively Portrayed: Current Campaigns Are Not Landing

Most participants reported that the messages they most often see about young people are negative or somewhat negative. Very few reported encountering predominantly positive

portrayals of young people. This matters because it shapes how young people understand their own place in society: as a problem to be managed, rather than a resource to be invested in.

Young people consistently experience themselves as the subject of concern or suspicion — rarely as the subject of hope.

This backdrop is important when considering the reach and impact of violence reduction campaigns, including the West Midlands VRP's own 'My Tomorrow' campaign. Awareness of the campaign among respondents was extremely low, with the vast majority reporting they had never heard of it. This is a significant finding, not as a critique, but as a clear signal that current reach is limited and that new approaches to distribution and engagement are needed.

When asked about the kinds of messages they find most convincing, young people were unambiguous. Real stories from people with lived experience like their own were by far the most compelling format. Positive examples of people who chose a different path, and facts about the impact of violence, were also valued. Broadcast messages, social media posts from organisations, and celebrity-style endorsements were much less likely to resonate.

Importantly, just under half of respondents were ambivalent about whether the messages and campaigns they had seen made them more likely to make safer choices. Only a minority actively disagreed, but the size of the neutral middle ground is telling. It suggests that young people are not unreachable or hostile to this kind of communication, but that the current approach is not yet connecting in a way that feels personally relevant or motivating.

Perceptions of How Young People Are Portrayed

Participants were asked what kind of messages they most often see about young people in news stories, adult conversations, reports, and online. The majority reported encountering predominantly negative portrayals of young people. A combined 66.6% reported either outright negative messaging (30.2%) and others reported somewhat negative messaging (36.4%). Only 7.8% reported seeing predominantly positive messages portraying young people.

Table 22.

Response	n = 129	Participants (%)
Somewhat Negative	47	36.4%
Negative	39	30.2%
Neutral	33	25.6%
Somewhat Positive	6	4.7%
Positive	4	3.1%

Awareness of the 'My Tomorrow' Campaign

Participants were asked whether they had seen or heard of the 'My Tomorrow' campaign from the West Midlands VRP. Awareness was very low: 93.4% had not heard of the campaign, 3.3% had heard of it but not seen it, and only 3.3% reported having seen it. This suggests the campaign had not reached most of this cohort at the time of the survey.

Table 23.

Response	n = 122	Participants (%)
No, I haven't heard of it	114	93.4%
I've heard of it but haven't seen it	4	3.3%
Yes, I've seen it	4	3.3%

Most Convincing Types of Messages

Whether they had seen the campaign or not, participants were asked what types of messages they find most convincing when it comes to making safer choices (select up to 3 options). Real stories from young people with similar experiences was the most compelling format by a considerable margin (78.9%), followed by positive examples of people who chose a different path (50.9%) and statistics or facts about the impact of violence (38.6%). In-person conversations with peers or mentors (37.7%) and messages from respected community figures (28.9%) were also valued.

Table 24.

Message Type	n = 114	Participants (%)
Real stories from young people with similar experiences	90	78.9%
Positive examples of people who chose a different path	58	50.9%
Statistics or facts about the impact of violence	44	38.6%
In-person conversations with peers or mentors	43	37.7%
Messages from people I respect in my community	33	28.9%
Short videos or creative content	31	27.2%
Messages shared by friends on social media	22	19.3%
Other (please specify)	1	0.9%

Note: Participants could select up to 3 options; percentages may exceed 100%.

Agreement That Safety Messages Lead to Safer Choices

Participants were asked how much they agree that the messages and campaigns they have seen about violence make them more likely to make safer choices. The largest group neither agreed nor disagreed (48.7%), suggesting ambivalence about the impact of current messaging. A combined 39.1% agreed or strongly agreed, while 12.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 25.

Response	N = 115	Participants (%)
Neither agree nor disagree	56	48.7%

Response	N = 115	Participants (%)
Agree	33	28.7%
Strongly agree	12	10.4%
Disagree	10	8.7%
Strongly disagree	4	3.5%

1.8 Neurodivergent and SEN Young People Have Distinct and Under-Served Needs

A proportion of respondents identified as living with a special educational need, autism, or another neurodevelopmental condition. Their responses across the survey point to distinct experiences that deserve specific attention.

When asked whether they feel treated differently in safety situations, many were unsure, and that is a considerable finding, suggesting that experiences of differential treatment are real enough to be felt but perhaps not always transparent or consistent. Among those who did report differential treatment, more described negative experiences (e.g., feeling more watched or suspected, or less protected) than positive ones. This aligns with wider evidence that neurodivergent young people often fall through gaps in safety and support systems that were not designed with their needs in mind. The support most requested by this group was practical and specific: quiet spaces when things feel overwhelming, adults who take time to listen and explain things clearly, and better training for staff on neurodiversity for school and police staff.

Peer support from others with similar experiences was also widely valued. These are not large structural asks. Many could be addressed through relatively targeted changes to how schools and services operate. The consistency of these preferences suggests a clear brief for organisations working with this population.

Do Young People with SEN Feel Treated Differently?

This question was directed at participants with SEN or a neurodevelopmental condition. Of the 73 who answered, the most common response was uncertainty, with 41.1% reporting they were not sure if they were treated differently. Approximately 13.7% said they feel more watched or suspected, and 12.3% reported feeling less protected or more at risk. Only 6.8% said they experience positive differentiation (more support). These findings suggest that many young people with additional needs have unclear or negative experiences in safety contexts.

Table 26.

Response	n = 73	Participants (%)
I'm not sure	30	41.1%
No — I feel treated the same	13	17.8%
Yes — I feel more watched or suspected	10	13.7%
Yes — I feel less protected or more at risk	9	12.3%

Response	n = 73	Participants (%)
Prefer not to say	6	8.2%
Yes — but in a positive way (more support)	5	6.8%

Note: n = 73 (those with SEN or neurodevelopmental conditions only).

Support Most Needed by Young People with SEN

Participants with SEN or neurodevelopmental conditions were asked what adjustments or support would most help them feel safer (select all that apply). Safe quiet spaces to go if things feel overwhelming was the most selected option (68.0%), followed by adults taking extra time to listen and explain things clearly (64.0%) and better training for school staff on neurodiversity and safety (52.0%). Peer support and greater flexibility in how safety support is delivered were also highlighted by around half of participants.

Table 27.

Adjustment / Support	n = 75	Participants (%)
Safe quiet spaces to go if things feel overwhelming	51	68.0%
Adults who take extra time to listen and explain things clearly	48	64.0%
Better training for school staff on neurodiversity and safety	39	52.0%
Peer support from others with similar experiences	38	50.7%
Better training for police on neurodiversity	34	45.3%
More flexibility in how safety support is offered	30	40.0%
Other (please specify)	2	2.7%

Note: Participants could select all that apply; percentages may exceed 100%.