



# Keeping safe

Developing Preventative  
'Keeping Safe' Education in Primary  
Schools in Northern Ireland

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

# Developing Preventative ‘Keeping Safe’ Education in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland using a randomised controlled trial design 2013–18

## Background

Children in Northern Ireland continue to experience physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. Many are also impacted by bullying (including cyber bullying) and domestic abuse. These experiences have all been shown to have a detrimental impact on children’s health and wellbeing as well as their educational outcomes.

Many children do not seek help and support because they do not recognise their experience as being inappropriate or abusive. Preventative education teaches children to recognise and challenge abusive behaviour. It also equips them with the skills to access appropriate help. However educating children is just one element of what is required to effectively prevent abuse. We know from research evidence that preventative education is most effective when developed as part of a wider public health approach. All sectors, agencies and members of the community must work together to prevent abuse.

## Evidence base

This project has been shaped by international research and practice as well as research completed in 2011 by NSPCC on behalf of the Department of Education Northern Ireland. This research found that there were **significant gaps in children’s knowledge and understanding in relation to sensitive issues such as sexual abuse and domestic abuse**. Children felt they would be unsure about being able to tell a trusted adult about their experiences of abuse.<sup>1</sup> **The findings also showed that teachers are willing to teach sensitive messages but many lacked the confidence to do so**. Teachers identified a need for training and ongoing support in this area.<sup>2</sup>

**Parents were keen for their children to be taught keeping safe messages** however they were uncertain about how to communicate with their children about sensitive issues and requested training and support.<sup>3</sup> The findings highlighted **a willingness across all statutory and voluntary sectors to work together effectively to develop effective preventative education**.<sup>4</sup>

## Project focus

This project will build primary schools’ capacity to embed effective preventative ‘keeping safe’ education in all aspects of school life. This will be achieved through a whole school approach including the formal statutory Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) curriculum as well as other areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum and other informal opportunities that arise. We will be working with the Department of Education and partners from education sector agencies, schools, teachers and parents to promote ownership and sustainability of preventative keeping safe education. NSPCC will engage key partners and stakeholders through the Project Advisory Board to promote the adoption of a public health approach.

1. 236 children took part in a ‘Keeping Safe’ photography project and 532 completed the Children’s Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire.

2. 86 teachers, principals and whole school staff from mainstream and special primary schools took part in focus groups.

3. 248 parents completed a ‘Parental involvement’ survey and a further 33 took part in focus groups.

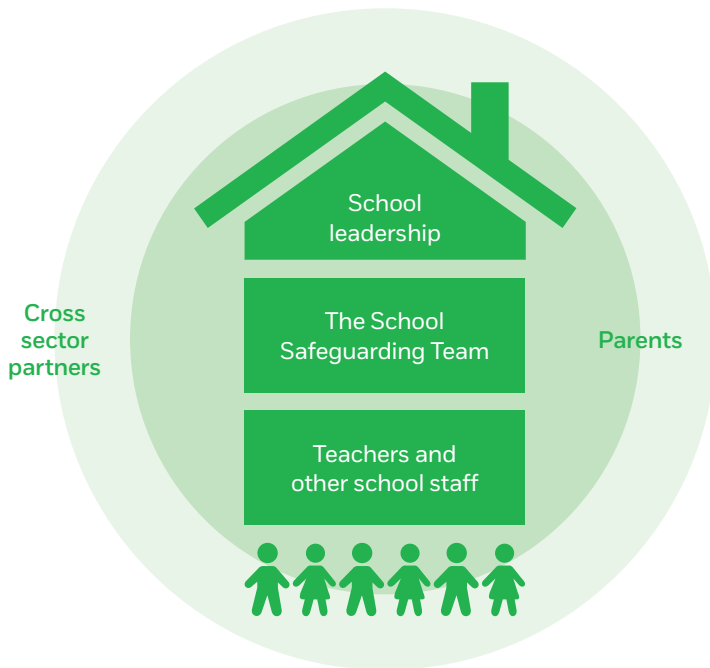
4. 19 semi-structured interviews.

## Project goals

### 1. Develop and deliver training and support for whole school communities making best use of technology

The project will build the capacity of school leadership, the school safeguarding team, teachers and other school staff to promote and deliver effective preventative education.

### A public health approach



### This project will ensure that:

#### School leadership will:

- Embed preventative education in the schools vision and ethos
- Prioritise preventative education within the school development plan
- Ensure resources are available for staff training and support
- Monitor and evaluate effectiveness
- Develop effective relationships with external agencies and the wider community

#### The School Safeguarding Team will:

- Develop and implement school policies
- Optimise training and advice received from Child Protection Support Service for Schools (CPSSS)
- Confidently engage with parents and other external partners
- Support whole school staff

#### Teachers and other school staff will:

- Confidently deliver sensitive keeping safe messages through the formal and informal curriculum
- Engage with parents and external partners
- Promote a school culture of listening and telling

#### Children will:

- Develop the knowledge and skills to keep safe

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### 2. Develop teaching and learning resources for school staff

These resources will assist staff to teach sensitive keeping safe messages to children from p1-p7 through the formal curriculum (lessons, assemblies etc.) and informal curriculum (daily interactions, language and behaviour etc.).

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### 3. Develop resources for parents

Resources will develop parents' confidence, knowledge and skills to communicate with their children about sensitive issues in a way that reinforces the learning at school. These will be available in a variety of formats to meet parents' needs.

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### 4. Provide robust evidence of effectiveness

A Randomised Control Trial design will investigate the **impact** of the project in developing children's knowledge and skills to keep safe in situations of abuse. The trial will also assess changes in teachers' and parents' confidence and skills in communicating sensitive messages. A **process** evaluation will track the project implementation at school level and tease out implications for departmental policy on preventative education.

## **NSPCC**

Northern Ireland Regional Office  
Lanyon Building  
Jennymount Business Park  
Belfast BT15 3HN

## **Contact**

For further information contact:  
**Dr Aisling McElearney**  
[amcelearney@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:amcelearney@nspcc.org.uk)  
**Phyllis Stephenson**  
[phyllisstephenson@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:phyllisstephenson@nspcc.org.uk)

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