

# Safeguarding is everyone's duty

**Anika Backhouse** reveals how effective safeguarding can help young people build their independence and self-esteem

**A**s staff in specialist education settings know only too well, training in safeguarding and “prevent” is essential. The Government has placed a high priority on it and all schools and colleges are challenged to embed it in the everyday work of SEN provision. It is, however, not only an issue for staff; students can also play their part in engaging with safeguarding and explore the new-found freedom and responsibility it brings.

During the first term of the academic year, it is particularly important to get to know the new intake of students, to understand their backgrounds and to encourage them to feel confident to speak out on behalf of themselves or others. At one specialist college in Hereford, safeguarding is part of the new student induction process. It ensures young people aged 16 and upwards can recognise when circumstances are wrong and right, and provides them with the freedom to ask questions at induction and throughout the rest of the academic year by knowing who they can talk to.

## Helping students to express themselves

Promoting positive relationships between staff and students is key in ensuring young people feel secure in moving on from wanting to talk only to their parents about everything, including their worries; this is especially important in a residential setting. Students have to feel confident in their ability to independently speak to one another or a member of staff, if they have any concerns. Having student representatives or ambassadors can



Real world experiences offer both challenges and risks.

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be helpful, enabling students to talk to their peers rather than to an adult, as some students feel more comfortable using this approach. Representatives should receive specific training around safeguarding for this purpose.

There is a responsibility for all staff in any setting to help young people think about their independence and how it relates to their own safety, as well as that of others. Students learn about their own responsibilities through friendships, by being part of a community and as general members of the public.

## Challenge and risk

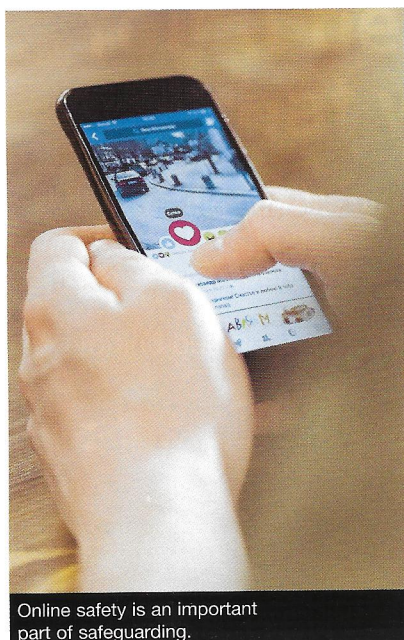
The environment in which a young person lives and studies will have a big impact on how they learn about safeguarding. Schools and colleges

should provide safe places that encourage practical engagement with the real world. For example, a campus with a busy road running through it may prove to be both a challenge and an opportunity for learning. Crossing at safe points, negotiating parked cars and navigating routes, both with friends and on solo journeys, enables students to develop skills to safely meet situations that they will come across with added frequency as they grow older and more independent.

Some students may already have experience of living and/or travelling independently but for many, there will not be an established foundation of independence, or an understanding of how to meet one's own safety needs. Students who received extensive support at school, or in travelling to and from school, may need additional help to develop safe practices, in addition to attaining confidence and enjoyment in their new-found independence. For example, at The Royal National College for the Blind, one visually impaired student had ventured to a local shop

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Online safety is an important part of safeguarding.

with his friends by his first October half-term. He said that this was the first time he had ever been to a shop without a parent or school staff member present.

The setting's safeguarding and prevent policy and practice should strike the right balance between ensuring young people are protected and allowing them to take appropriate risks. At any age, all children need to explore their own boundaries, lifestyles and abilities. As young people move towards adulthood, it can be particularly difficult to achieve this balance – especially when e-safety becomes a greater factor – but with the support of staff, it is possible.

## *Students need to understand their vulnerabilities online, especially regarding personal data*

### **Online threats**

Schools and colleges use secure firewalls to filter out undesirable websites within their immediate environments. However, using mobile devices, like smart phones and tablets, young people can bypass filters by using data allowances. For this reason, it is especially prudent to include online safety within wider safeguarding conversations with students.

The internet is an excellent way of making new friends and keeping in contact, but students have to know that some people will use it to take advantage of others. Students need to understand their vulnerabilities online, especially regarding personal data.

### **Wider awareness**

The curriculum can be used to make sure that issues around safeguarding are part of all students' development. Small group discussions in classes and tutorials can support this learning and can also be used to address specific

issues such as the challenges of having a diverse student body and awareness of the values that can help tackle extremism in all its forms. Students can be also encouraged to understand the democratic process, perhaps with the help of local government services. Staging topical debates and attending local hustings enables students to engage in political processes and voting systems.

### **Responsibility and respect**

If safeguarding is embedded in students' learning of personal responsibility, the school or college environment can provide a safe space for young people to express themselves appropriately, in a way that is respectful of others. Staff awareness of students as individuals is integral to this. By being observant, and not making assumptions about why something may have changed in the young person's attitude or behaviour, staff can be alert to any potential issues and can help students to raise concerns.

Where there is a behaviour management issue, honesty is needed from staff and peers. This needs to be expressed sensitively, so that the student can reflect on their own behaviour and modify it.

By ensuring a safe environment, staff and students can turn many safeguarding challenges into opportunities for learning life skills in any academic setting. **SEN**



Learning about safeguarding can be integrated into the curriculum.

### **Further information**

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