



Office of the Northamptonshire Police
and Crime Commissioner

Response to the 'Teens' Report

March 2016
by Charlotte McLeod

In March 2015, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) published our Online Safety report following a large-scale consultation with children, young people and adults across Northamptonshire about the experiences of young people online and the risks they face. The consultation also revealed how children in our county are facing wider issues within intimate relationships at an increasingly young age.

Following this, the OPCC commissioned our 'Teens' consultation in to the experiences of young people in intimate relationships in the county. The aim of this consultation has been to fully understand the issues young people are facing in their relationships, and to understand who young people currently speak to and seek support from when having negative experiences.

Children and young people have shared with us their views on what makes a good or bad relationship, what behaviours they have experienced within intimate relationships, and what their friends have experienced. We were also able to learn how experiencing unhealthy behaviours, such as control or jealousy, made children and young people feel, and whether they felt able to talk to anyone or receive support.

The OPCC surveyed over 2,700 students across 19 main stream schools and four additional Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Special Educational Needs and Mental Health (SENMH) schools. Alongside this, the OPCC commissioned a drama presentation through the Core in

Corby, in partnership with Highly Sprung, which helped to depict how a relationship can become unhealthy. We then assisted students further through a workshop delivered by Service Six, a local youth service. The final part of this project was to give young people tools and techniques to help safeguard themselves in current or future relationships. We've found this to be extremely effective, with many young people coming forward and disclosing their own personal experiences within negative intimate relationships, which has offered us a greater understanding around the problems that young people are facing.

Coercive and controlling behaviour, that forms a central part to domestic abuse, has recently been afforded the legal standing it deserves as a criminal act with the introduction of the 'Coercive and Controlling Behaviour' offence which came into force in December 2015. Despite this much needed change in the law, we have yet to fully understand the scale and impact of emotional abuse taking place within relationships between children and young people. Our consultation has found that a significant proportion of children (64%) as young as 10 years of age state they have experienced relationships with a girlfriend or boyfriend. The internet also means that the forms of communication used by young people are endless, which means that the opportunities and avenues to undertake unhealthy behaviours have become far greater for this generation.

Our consultation is the start of developing a better understanding about what healthy and unhealthy behaviours children and young people are facing within their

relationships. It is the start of building a clear picture as to what children and young people need in terms of what information, education and support that would most help them, and how lead organisations working with children can provide this.

Following completion of the consultation, the Institute of Public Safety, Crime and Justice have undertaken analysis of the findings, the full report of which is available at www.northantspcc.org.uk.

The report

What it means to be in a relationship

The consultation has found that young people tend to demonstrate clear and consistent views of 'what makes good or bad relationships', identifying important values and behaviours in making their assessments and recognising the signs of negative, unhealthy relationships. 'Trust' was most commonly used to describe what a good, positive and healthy relationship involves, followed by 'love', 'honesty', 'loyalty' and 'respect'.

The majority of young people identified bad, negative and unhealthy relationships as those where abuse, including physical, emotional or sexual abuse, take place, and involve lying, a lack of trust, unfaithfulness, arguments and controlling behaviours.

The three issues most prevalent for young people when thinking about intimate relationships were the experience or risk of; pressure to be intimate (or even to enter into, or remain in, a relationship) applied predominantly by the partner, although issues of peer pressure were also raised; secondly, abuse, including physical, emotional or



sexual; and thirdly, cheating and unfaithfulness.

Experiences of being in a relationship

A large number of children and young people stated that they had experienced an intimate relationship. 64% (1,740) of young people said that they had been in a relationship.

69% of 10-13 year olds said that they had been in a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend, compared to 62% of 14-15 year olds and 61% of 16-18 year olds. Identifying that by the age of 10 young people are already starting to experience relationships (bearing in mind that how a young person defines a relationship may differ depending on their age), it is

clear that engagement is needed with children from a young age to prepare them for experiencing relationships and to develop their understanding and identification of unhealthy behaviours.

Unhealthy behaviour

“At first we were quite happy together...But gradually we became snappier to each other. And we became quite unhappy and I think I became self-conscious. My boyfriend wasn't as tolerant as he could have been. He was jealous and was always checking up on me. He did not take me seriously. Sometimes I worried about his reaction if I said something”

Female, 14 years old

Our consultation has found that overall children and young people have clear views on what behaviours define what a good or bad relationship involves. One area of concern however was that only 8% of young people identified controlling behaviour as a negative behaviour, yet a significant number of young people have themselves experienced such behaviour in their own relationships. For example, over 4 in 10 had experienced a boyfriend or girlfriend constantly checking up on what they are doing, and over half had experienced a boyfriend or girlfriend showing jealousy when they spend time with their friends.

Experiences within intimate relationships

The most commonly experienced unhealthy behaviours of those that had been in a relationship appeared to focus on emotionally abusive behaviours:



had experienced the pressure of a boyfriend or girlfriend saying they can't live without them.



54% had experienced a boyfriend or girlfriend showing jealousy when they spend time with their friends.



had experienced a boyfriend or girlfriend constantly checking up on what they are doing.



had been accused of flirting or cheating.



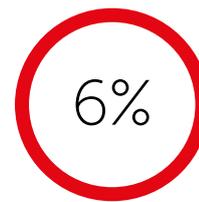
had experienced a boyfriend or girlfriend making fun of them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.



had been pressured into doing something they didn't want to do (21% of 16-18 year olds).



had experienced a boyfriend or girlfriend threatening to hurt them physically unless they did what they wanted.



(91) of the young people on at least one occasion had been physically forced into doing something they did not want to.

Young people also reflected on the experiences and behaviours they witnessed in their friends relationships. The following section presents the data collected about perceptions of negative and unhealthy relationships amongst friends, where young people had seen or heard about at least one friend experiencing negative behaviours:

Abuse

♥ 27% had seen or heard of at least one friend being shouted at, screamed at in their face or being called names by a girlfriend or boyfriend.

"Her boyfriend always shouted at her and sometimes hurt her physically"

♥ 25% had seen at least one friend being criticised or put down in front of them.

"Put down in front of mates, said negative things about him as a joke"

♥ 12% had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing being threatened to be hurt physically if they did not do what their boyfriend or girlfriend wanted.

"Threatened to be hurt physically or humiliated over social media if he didn't do what he wanted"

♥ 9% had seen or heard of at least one friend being physically forced into doing something that they did not want to.

"My best friend got forced into getting touched in her private area"

"My friend was controlled for four years and was forced to have sex, then forced to have her boyfriend's baby"

Pressure

♥ 20% had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing being pressured into doing something that they did not wish to do.

"A lot of my friends have been pressured into sex but most refused which caused conflict"

"My friends boyfriend threatened her if she breaks up with him he will commit suicide"

Control

♥ 49% had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing jealousy from a boyfriend or girlfriend when they had spent time with friends.

"Getting jealous when they have been there with friends"

♥ 42% had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing constantly being checked up on to find out what they were doing, by phone or text by a partner.

"One of her old boyfriend's accused her of cheating and used to be moody all the time, checking her phone, he also got jealous a lot"

♥ 38% had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing being told what to do or who they can talk to by a girlfriend or boyfriend.

"One of my friends girlfriend told him to never be around girls or she is going to show his pictures to his parents and friends"



The experience of controlling behaviours increases when assessing the data captured about what young people told us their friends have experienced. Just under half of young people (49%) had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing jealousy from a boyfriend or girlfriend when they had spent time with friends. Just under 4 in 10 had seen or heard of at least one friend experiencing being told what to do or who they can talk to by a girlfriend or boyfriend, and a quarter of young people had seen at least one friend being criticised or put down in front of them.

Impact of unhealthy behaviours

"It made me feel needed, but at the same time it made me feel guilty if I was to break up with them."

Three quarters of young people experiencing unhealthy behaviours in relationships said their experiences evoked negative emotions including feeling upset, uncomfortable, horrible and that it reduced their self-esteem. This is a clear indication that children and young people not only need support in identifying unhealthy behaviours to prevent negative emotions, but that support is needed to help them to cope with these feelings and know what they can do.

8% of children and young people said that the unhealthy behaviours meant that they felt positive emotions including feeling loved and cared for. This supports the need for children and young people to be educated in identifying unhealthy behaviours, their understanding of why these are unhealthy and the negative impact they can have.

Some young people reported isolating themselves, by spending less time with family and friends,

either due to the controlling or jealous behaviour of their partner or because they wished to avoid difficult conversations. Some young people also highlighted the detrimental impact an unhealthy relationship can have on existing mental health issues or self-harming behaviour.

Support and information

Children and young people told us that the people they would be most likely to talk to about relationships, and where they would seek information about relationships, were from their friends, followed by their parents. Teachers and the police, for example, were not listed by the majority of children as people they would either speak to about relationships or seek information.

It is reassuring that so many children and young people identified friends as their preferred means of seeking support and information, and is perhaps unsurprising given the personal elements of intimate relationships and the willingness to share these with those closest to you of a similar age. Schools and organisations working with

children should build on the existing communication between friends as an important form of support for young people. We should help and support young people to feel confident and able to support their friends and peers, by equipping them with the right tools and providing them with information about how to best help and advise, and what information is available to them.

We should also build on the communication with parents as an important form of support and information for young people. We recognised in our online safety report¹ that parents actively want more advice and information about how to protect their children online, and the same approach should be taken in relation to intimate relationships.

A number of young people also talked about the value they had gained from talking to an independent source of support as often friends and family can be too emotionally involved. There are a number of local and national independent support organisations

Support

In the interviews and through the survey, comments about negative or positive experiences and direct suggestions highlighted how young people could be encouraged to seek support. Young people want to know:

- ♡ Who they can talk to
- ♡ Who provides support and that they will be receptive, trustworthy and make them feel comfortable
- ♡ That support will be provided if they need it
- ♡ That confidentiality is kept and if it needs to be broken, why this is and what will happen next

1 <http://www.northantspcc.org.uk/our-work/online-safety/>

available, and commitment must be made to signpost children and young people to these existing services and ensure they are aware of what is available. Examples of these include the recently launched website 'Love Don't Feel Bad' from Women's Aid, providing a guide to healthy behaviour in intimate relationships, and the new local service launched by the PCC, 'Voice Children and Young People', for victims and witnesses of crime in Northamptonshire.

We should be concerned that the police are generally not seen as individuals to either seek information or advice from by children and young people. Coercive control has only recently been established as criminal behaviour². 1 in 3 young people in our consultation referenced experiences which reflect the nature of this new offence. The police should develop advice and support to establish themselves as a means by which young people can be supported, through visibility in schools and through a commitment to increasing awareness of the offence itself as applicable to any perpetrators of the age of criminal responsibility (over 10 years of age) and victims under 18³.

Children and young people also highlighted a need for learning how to exit an unhealthy relationship. Schools, practitioners and parents should familiarise themselves with existing sources of information and advice and ensure they are able to support a young person should they come to a decision to exit an unhealthy relationship, and help to identify any risks in unhealthy or abusive behaviour that cause concern to the child or young person.

Education

"There is not enough education for young people about what an unhealthy relationship is and what to do if you are unhappy and get out. I believe that all young people should have the right to be educated about this which equips them with the information and maybe skills to form more positive relationships with their boyfriends or girlfriends"

Male, 14 years old

The most common request for information was for the emotional side of relationships. Key questions in particular included how to exit an unhealthy relationship or how to deal with difficult issues within relationships. This, in our view, is a very clear message from children and young people that they need education on relationships to include emotional behaviour. Currently it is only compulsory for schools to teach children and young people reproduction and human development within national curriculum science. Beyond this, only maintained schools for secondary education are required to teach Sex and Relationships Education. Sex and Relationships Education is not compulsory for free schools, academies or independent schools. Furthermore, schools who do teach Sex and Relationships Education must then 'have regard to' the Department for Education's Sex and Relationships Guidance published in 2000. It is very concerning that guidance is being followed that is over fifteen years old with extremely outdated information, statistics and advice.

Schools are a clear pathway for providing information and support to children and young people, and it is important that teachers and school staff are seen as individuals who children and young people can seek advice and information from. However, children and young people have been clear in their responses to the consultation that they would like to see independent organisations deliver education in schools. Therefore, schools are encouraged to adopt these views and seek independent organisations to deliver education, whilst signposting children to their teachers as individuals who are able to help them.

2 The introduction of the 'Coercive and Controlling Behaviour' offence which came into force in December 2015.

3 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/482528/Controlling_or_coercive_behaviour_-_statutory_guidance.pdf



Recommendations

Awareness and education

- 1 The government to consider our consultation findings, listen to our children and young people, and introduce compulsory Sex and Relationships Education to the national curriculum.
- 2 The government to publish a new or updated Sex and Relationships Education Guidance, the latest version of which was published in 2000, to ensure relevant and up to date guidance and information is being followed by all schools.
- 3 All schools in Northamptonshire to ensure they have a fully developed relationships educational element to PSHE, to be taught alongside sex education. This should include independent organisations coming to schools to deliver the education, as well as signposting teachers and staff as individuals whom children and young people can approach for information and advice.
- 4 The education of children and young people must focus on the following;
 - a. Any education on relationships provided to children and young people must be considered for children from at least the age of 10 and upwards, and developed according to the needs of the specific age group.
 - b. Education to children and young people must focus on the prevention and identification of unhealthy behaviours, through information about what unhealthy behaviours are, advice about the negative impact these can have and what to do if these are being carried out.
 - c. Encouragement of children and young people to challenge the behaviour of their peers,
- 5 Further consultation and development work with the following groups to be undertaken, to improve understanding about specific needs, experiences and the most effective preventative approaches:
 - a. transgender young people
 - b. homosexual, bisexual and questioning young people
 - c. young people with disabilities.*
- 6 Guidance for all frontline practitioners, informed by children and young people throughout its development, regarding:
 - a. the new 'controlling and coercive behaviour' criminal offence
 - b. how to identify unhealthy, negative, controlling and coercive behaviours in relationships between young people and the most appropriate action to take.*
- 7 Where the police and partner organisations undertake awareness campaigns focused on domestic abuse, controlling and coercive behaviour or sexual abuse and violence, the findings of the Teens report are considered and children and young people are targeted as a specific audience.
- 8 Improved provision of information, advice and support about relationships and intimate relationships for young people. This information needs to include:
 - a. guidance about how to recognise controlling and coercive behaviour
 - b. practical advice about how to deal with all types of unhealthy behaviour experienced in relationships and how to access support services
 - c. practical advice about how to leave a relationship, how to reduce fear of repercussions and how to access the most appropriate help and support
 - d. guidance about how and when to report to the police.*
- 9 Development of programmes to better equip young people to support their friends in managing intimate relationships.*
- 10 Introduction of a signposting service available to children, young people, parents and carers in Northamptonshire, of existing local and national services available for information and support about unhealthy behaviours and emotional abuse.
- 11 Development of resources available for parents and carers, developed with children and young people, providing information as to how to support children and young people with negative experiences in intimate relationships.

Partner Activity

- 12 Commissioning of support services for children and young people is undertaken through a co-ordinated approach across partner organisations, using the findings of the Teens consultation and with further consultation with children and young people to inform the development of future services.

*these recommendations are taken from the full report from the Institute for Public Safety, Crime and Justice, and are fully endorsed by the Office of the Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commissioner.



Published by
The Northamptonshire Police and
Crime Commissioner March 2016

More information from
www.northantspcc.org.uk

