EVERY WOMAN, EVERY GIRL

COUNTY CONFERENCE

Recognising Harm, Building Safety

ATTENDEE PROGRAMME

Thursday 15 October 2026 | 9.15am - 2.45pm

Spinney Theatre, Northampton School for Girls

A practical county conversation on preventing violence against women and girls.

WELCOME

A county-wide response

Violence against women and girls cannot be prevented or responded to by one service, profession or sector alone. *Every Woman, Every Girl* brings together people from education, policing, social care, health, charities, community organisations and businesses to strengthen a shared response across Northamptonshire.

The day is designed to move from recognition to action: to understand harm more clearly, respond safely, make better connections across services and identify practical changes that can reduce risk before harm escalates.

Our shared challenge
What would change if every organisation represented today became better at noticing harm early, responding effectively and using what it learns to prevent the next incident?

Use this booklet actively:

- Capture the messages that matter to your role.
- Note where another sector holds a piece of the picture you may not see.
- Identify both immediate and longer-term changes for your organisation.
- Use the QR-linked resource hub after the conference to continue the learning alongside your organisation's safeguarding and operational procedures.

Confidentiality and professional boundaries

To help create a safe, respectful and constructive space for everyone, we ask attendees to keep discussions focused on professional experiences, organisational practice and learning.

Please do not share personal information or disclose confidential or identifiable details about colleagues, students, service users or individual cases. Any examples shared should be anonymised and discussed in a professional context. We ask all attendees to respect one another's privacy and to be mindful of professional boundaries. These expectations do not replace any safeguarding or professional reporting responsibilities.

Thank you for helping us create an environment where we can learn from one another and work together to build greater safety for women and girls.

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Violence against women and girls is not a marginal or isolated safeguarding issue. The Government's current strategy, *Freedom from Violence and Abuse*, sets an ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade. The scale of that ambition is significant: in the year ending March 2025, one in eight women in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault or stalking, while almost 200 rapes were recorded by police every day in the year ending June 2025. The Government also recognises that these figures do not capture the full picture, particularly where abuse is hidden, unreported or increasingly takes place online.

The national response therefore marks an important shift. It is not focused only on responding once a serious crime has taken place. Prevention and early intervention sit at the centre of the strategy: challenging misogyny and harmful attitudes, teaching healthy relationships and consent, recognising emerging patterns of harmful behaviour, disrupting perpetrators earlier and responding to rapidly developing forms of online and technology-facilitated abuse. Crucially, the Government is explicit that this cannot be delivered by policing or the criminal justice system alone.

That national challenge is clearly reflected here in Northamptonshire. In the year to March 2025, 17,572 domestic abuse and sexual violence incidents and crimes were recorded across the county. Local estimates suggest around 10,400 women in North Northamptonshire and 9,950 women in West Northamptonshire experience domestic abuse each year, more than 20,000 women across the county. Lifetime estimates are higher still, with almost 97,000 women across North and West Northamptonshire expected to experience domestic abuse from the age of 16.

In 2026, North and West Northamptonshire adopted a new Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026–2030. Its priorities closely mirror the national direction: early intervention and prevention; support and protection for victims and survivors; greater trust and confidence in services; a coordinated community response; and holding perpetrators to account. Importantly, the local strategy identifies children and young people, harmful attitudes, misogynistic online content and healthy relationships as areas where earlier action can prevent later harm.

This is the context for our *Every Woman, Every Girl* conference. No single agency sees the whole picture and no single sector can provide the solution. A teacher may notice a change in behaviour; an employer may see repeated absence or controlling contact; a health professional may hear the first disclosure; a charity may build the trusted relationship that enables somebody to seek help; police and social care may hold information that changes the understanding of risk. Building safety therefore depends not only on specialist services, but on all of us becoming better at recognising harm earlier, joining information and insight together, responding well and challenging the conditions in which abuse is allowed to develop.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY VAWG?

Violence against women and girls often shortened to VAWG, is an umbrella term for a range of forms of violence, abuse and exploitation that disproportionately affect women and girls.

VAWG is not limited to physical or sexual violence. It can include patterns of coercion, control, intimidation, exploitation, humiliation and restriction which may develop gradually and be difficult to recognise when each incident is viewed in isolation.

It includes:

- **Domestic abuse and coercive or controlling behaviour**: including emotional, psychological, physical, sexual and economic abuse, as well as patterns of intimidation and isolation.
- **Sexual violence, sexual harassment and abuse**: from unwanted sexualised behaviour and non-contact offences through to sexual assault and rape.
- **Stalking and harassment:** repeated unwanted behaviour that causes fear, alarm or distress, whether in person or through digital means.
- **Forced marriage and honour-based abuse**: where control, coercion or violence is used to protect perceived family or community "honour".
- **Female genital mutilation and other harmful practices.**
- **Sexual exploitation and trafficking**: including abuse where vulnerability, dependency, money, status or access to opportunities are used to exploit someone sexually.
- **Image-based sexual abuse, cyberflashing and technology-facilitated abuse**: including sharing or threatening to share intimate images, unwanted sexual imagery, location tracking, surveillance, impersonation and the use of AI-generated sexual images.
- **Misogynistic abuse and harmful online cultures**: including the normalisation of hostility towards women and girls, sexual entitlement, degrading language and online communities that reinforce harmful attitudes.
- **Economic abuse**: restricting or monitoring access to money, employment, education, transport, housing or other resources in ways that increase dependence and reduce somebody's ability to leave or seek help.

The scale of this harm is not abstract:

- Sexual offending is a significant part of the county picture. In 2024/25, Northamptonshire Police recorded 739 recorded sexual assaults against females aged over 13 and 202 against girls under 13.
- The nature of harm is changing too. Between January 2024 and June 2025, Northamptonshire Police recorded 223 offences under newer legislation covering the sharing or threatening to share intimate images without consent, demonstrating how sexual harm increasingly crosses between physical and digital spaces.
- Stalking and harassment remain particularly prominent. Northamptonshire Police reported in 2026 that these offences account for around 40% of police-recorded VAWG offences.

These figures also tell only part of the story. Abuse is frequently hidden, normalised or never formally reported.

RECOGNISING HARM

Recognising harm rarely begins with somebody saying clearly, *"I am being abused."* More often, professionals notice changes, inconsistencies or patterns that do not immediately make sense.

A single incident may be significant in its own right. Equally, a series of apparently minor events, missed appointments, repeated lateness, sudden changes in presentation, unexplained anxiety, or withdrawal from friends and activities, may together reveal an escalating pattern of control, coercion or fear.

This is where professional curiosity matters. It means looking beyond the presenting issue, noticing what has changed, asking respectful questions and considering whether another professional or agency may hold a different part of the picture.

What we see will also depend on where we work. A teacher may notice declining attendance or a change in behaviour. An employer may see unexplained absence or somebody becoming increasingly isolated at work. A health professional may notice injuries, anxiety or a partner insisting on remaining present. Police, social care or specialist charities may hold information that places those observations in a very different community or familiar context.

The task is therefore not to diagnose abuse from a single sign. It is to notice, enquire and connect information carefully enough that patterns of harm are not missed.

Prompts for professional curiosity

Consider:

- **What has changed?** In attendance, presentation, behaviour, confidence, relationships, finances, communication, routines or use of technology?
- **Who appears to hold the power?** Who controls access to transport, money, devices, friends, work, education, healthcare or important documents?
- **Is fear shaping behaviour?** Is the person altering what they say or do because they are worried about the consequences?
- **Who else is involved?** Is one person exerting control, or are several people monitoring, threatening, pressuring or enforcing expectations?
- **Is technology part of the harm?** Is it being used to track location, monitor communication, threaten, impersonate, humiliate, share sexual material or restrict access to support?
- **Can the person communicate safely?** Is their phone private? Can messages or calls be seen by somebody else? Is there a safe time or method for contact?
- **What happens outside my setting?** Could something that appears manageable at school, work, a clinic or another service become more dangerous when the person leaves?

- **What might increase the risk?** Could confrontation, contacting family or a partner, sending information home or making an unexpected referral place the person at greater risk?
- **Who else might know something important?** Is there information held elsewhere that could change our understanding of what is happening?

Professional curiosity is not about asking more questions for the sake of it. It is about noticing when the explanation in front of us does not fully explain what we are seeing.

RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE

For somebody experiencing abuse, exploitation or harassment, the first person they tell may shape whether they feel able to seek further help.

A disclosure may be planned, partial, hesitant or made almost accidentally. The person may minimise what has happened, appear uncertain, return to or remain in contact with the person causing harm, or disclose only one part of a much wider pattern. None of these things makes the concern less significant.

Our role is not to obtain a complete account or establish whether an allegation is true. It is to listen, take the person seriously, understand enough to consider immediate risk, and make sure the right help is involved.

A good first response should:

- **Listen without judgement:** Give the person time to speak in their own words and avoid interrupting or pressing for unnecessary detail.
- **Take what they tell you seriously:** Avoid questions such as *"Why didn't you leave?"*, *"Why didn't you report it sooner?"* or *"Why did you keep seeing them?"* These can unintentionally place responsibility back onto the person experiencing harm.
- **Consider immediate safety:** Is the person safe now? Do they feel able to go home or leave the setting safely? Is anybody waiting for them, monitoring them or likely to react to the disclosure? Where there is immediate danger, call 999.
- **Be clear about confidentiality:** Do not promise to keep information secret. Explain calmly what you may need to share, why, and seek to involve the person in what happens next.
- **Do not investigate:** Ask only what is necessary to understand immediate risk and identify the appropriate safeguarding, specialist or criminal-justice response. Detailed questioning may be unnecessary and, in some circumstances, could complicate a later investigation.
- **Record carefully:** Separate fact from interpretation, record the person's own words where significant, and note what you observed, what was said, what action was taken and who was informed.

- **Seek specialist advice when the risk is complex:** Stalking, forced marriage, so-called honour-based abuse, sexual violence and technology-facilitated abuse can require particular safety planning. A well-intentioned but poorly informed response can sometimes increase risk.
- **Think beyond the immediate disclosure:** Consider children, dependants, colleagues or family members who may also be affected, and whether another agency may already hold relevant information.

A disclosure does not need a perfect response. It needs a safe, respectful and purposeful one.

A useful first response
"Thank you for telling me. I am taking what you have said seriously. I want to think with you about what will help keep you safe and explain what I may need to do next."

For colleagues working in business or other organisations without a formal safeguarding structure, your first step may be to seek support from the most appropriate internal lead, for example HR, a People or Wellbeing Lead, line manager, occupational health, security or a senior manager with responsibility for staff welfare. Where the risk is immediate or specialist, external advice may also be needed rather than expecting the employee or manager to manage the situation alone.

FORCED MARRIAGE AND HONOUR-BASED ABUSE

Forced marriage is different from arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, families may be involved, but the decision remains with the individuals. A marriage becomes forced where there is no free and full consent, or where coercion is used. For anyone under 18, causing them to marry is a criminal offence whether or not coercion is used.

Honour-based abuse can involve multiple perpetrators, including relatives or others acting to enforce perceived family or community expectations. This matters because usual assumptions about family involvement, mediation or returning someone to relatives may be unsafe.

Critical safety point

Where forced marriage or honour-based abuse is suspected, do not automatically contact family or community members, attempt mediation, or use relatives as interpreters. Speak to the person alone where possible, use an independent interpreter if needed, and consider whether siblings or others may also be at risk.

Specialist support

- **Karma Nirvana:** 0800 5999 247, Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm.
- **Forced Marriage Unit:** 020 7008 0151, Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm; out of hours via FCDO on 020 7008 5000.
- **Immediate danger:** call 999

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic abuse is wider than physical violence. It can include sexual abuse, threats, coercive or controlling behaviour, economic abuse, psychological harm and technology-facilitated abuse. Children who see, hear or experience its effects are recognised in law as victims in their own right.

The key is often the pattern rather than the individual incident. Repeated contact, monitoring, unexpected appearances or digital surveillance may look minor in isolation but can indicate stalking or coercive control. Separation does not necessarily end risk and may change or intensify it.

Look for:

- **Repetition and escalation**: what is happening more often, becoming more intrusive or changing in nature?
- **Multiple forms of harm**: coercion, stalking, economic abuse and sexual or digital abuse may overlap.
- **Changes in risk**: new information, separation, disclosure or attempts to regain independence can alter the picture quickly.
- **Wider impact**: consider children, dependants, colleagues and others who may also be affected.
- **Context across agencies**: one service may hold the piece of information that makes the pattern visible.

Do not ask only: “How serious was this incident?”

Ask: “What pattern is developing, and what has changed?”

Specialist stalking advice: National Stalking Helpline: 0808 802 0300

Northamptonshire Police also advises that stalking can include repeated unwanted contact, following, appearing at workplaces or other familiar places, monitoring online activity and use of tracking technology.

CONSENT

Consent means agreeing by choice, with the freedom and capacity to make that choice. It cannot be inferred simply because somebody did not say no, because sexual activity has happened before, or because two people are in a relationship. Consent can apply to one activity and not another, and it can be withdrawn at any time. Pressure, fear, intoxication, age, dependency and differences in power can all affect whether a choice is genuinely free.

For professionals, the concern is not only whether an incident meets a criminal threshold, but whether there is coercion, exploitation, grooming, imbalance of power or a wider pattern of sexual harm.

When responding

- **Prioritise safety and immediate medical needs.**
- **Listen without investigating:** Avoid repeated or leading questions that may distress the person or complicate later evidence.
- **Look beyond the single incident:** Consider relationships, power, coercion, online activity and whether others may also be affected.
- **Do not minimise peer-on-peer sexual harm:** The fact that those involved are similar in age does not remove the need to consider safeguarding, consent and power dynamics.
- **Offer specialist support and explain available choices**: including reporting routes where appropriate.

A useful question to ask yourself is not only **"Did they say no?"** but **"Did they have the freedom and capacity to say yes?"**

ONLINE AND AI-FACILITATED HARM

Online harm is not separate from "real-world" harm. Technology can intensify familiar patterns of sexual harassment, coercion, stalking, humiliation and control, while AI makes harmful content easier to create, personalise and distribute.

Laura Bates' work highlights how deepfake pornography, "nudification" tools and synthetic sexual content sit within a wider culture of misogyny and sexual objectification. The image may be fake; the violation and impact are not.

For children and young people especially, online and offline harms overlap. Sexual harassment, pornography, misogynistic influencers, peer culture and AI-generated abuse can shape expectations about relationships, consent and entitlement.

When responding

- Treat the impact, not just the technology.
- Preserve evidence carefully without unnecessarily forwarding harmful material.
- Consider impersonation, account compromise, location tracking, doxxing and persistent contact as part of the wider risk.
- Follow safeguarding and reporting routes promptly, particularly where children are involved.
- For under-18s, Childline Report Remove can support removal of eligible sexual images from public online spaces.

The question is not only what technology can do, but what attitudes and behaviours it is enabling to spread faster and at greater scale.

ECONOMIC COERCION

Economic abuse can restrict a person's independence through control of money, debt, employment, transport or access to everyday essentials. It may be subtle: wages being monitored, work sabotaged, transport disrupted, or attendance and performance affected by pressures outside the workplace.

For some employees, work may be one of the few places where they have regular contact away from the person causing harm. It can therefore be both a point of vulnerability and an important source of safety and stability.

For employers and managers

- Make clear who employees can approach and how confidential concerns will be handled.
- Respond supportively without expecting managers to investigate or provide specialist counselling.
- Consider practical safety measures such as safe contact arrangements, changes to phone or email handling, reception awareness and flexibility around working patterns.
- Look again at absence, lateness or performance concerns where there may be a wider safety context.
- Know where to seek specialist advice and how to signpost without leaving the employee to manage the risk alone.

A useful question to ask yourself is **"What would a safe disclosure route look like in my organisation?"** and "**What practical workplace adjustments could we realistically offer?"**

WOULD WE RECOGNISE IT?

SITUATION 1

A colleague discovers that a sexualised image appearing to depict her is circulating in a private messaging group. She believes the image has been created or altered using AI, but does not know whether an original image was used, who created it or how widely it has been shared.

She is distressed and worried about who may have seen it. One person dismisses it as "only a joke", while another suggests that formally reporting it could make things worse.

Discuss

- What is the immediate harm and what should happen first?

- What should be recorded or preserved without causing further circulation?
- Who needs to be involved — safeguarding, HR, police, IT, specialist support?
- Would your response change if the person depicted, or anyone involved in creating or sharing it, were under 18?

SITUATION 2

An employee has become increasingly late, distracted and reluctant to stay after work. She says things are “difficult at home” but insists it is nothing serious.

Her partner has recently started taking more responsibility for household finances because, she says, she is “not very good with money”. He often offers to collect her from work and becomes frustrated if she changes plans at short notice. Colleagues have noticed that he sometimes phones reception rather than contacting her directly, and that she regularly checks her phone during meetings. She has also mentioned that she avoids certain social events because “it is easier that way”.

After the relationship ends, the contact becomes more persistent: repeated messages, new accounts after she blocks him, and several occasions when he appears near her workplace.

Discuss

- What are you noticing, and at what point does the pattern become concerning?
- What might be coercive control, economic abuse or stalking — and what might have an innocent explanation?
- What could the employer do that increases safety without removing her agency?
- What should be recorded, and when should specialist or police advice be sought?

SITUATION 3

A young woman mentions to a colleague that her family is planning an overseas trip during the holidays. She initially talks positively about seeing relatives she has not seen for some time, but over the following days makes several comments about family expectations, “doing the right thing” and pressure not to disappoint people.

She says an aunt has been asking questions about whether she is “serious” about her future and that her parents have been showing her photographs of a family friend’s son. She laughs this off at first, but later admits she is worried that the trip may involve more than a family visit. She is not sure what has actually been arranged and says she may simply be reading too much into it.

She asks the colleague not to raise the issue with anyone else, explaining that her family would be very upset if they knew she had spoken about private matters.

Discuss

- What are you noticing, and what is still unclear?
- How do you respond without either minimising her concerns or assuming what is happening?
- Why might contacting family or attempting mediation increase risk?
- What specialist advice would help before deciding on the next step?

FROM RESPONSE TO PREVENTION

Prevention is built through the everyday decisions an organisation makes: what it notices, what it challenges, how easy it is to speak up, and how consistently concerns are acted on.

Organisations help prevent harm when they make it harder for abusive behaviour to be normalised, easier for concerns to be recognised and reported, and more likely that early warning signs lead to action.

A useful way to test this is to ask six questions:

Area	Questions to consider
Culture	What behaviours are tolerated, challenged or rewarded? Do sexist, controlling, humiliating or intrusive behaviours get dismissed as jokes, banter or "just how things are"?
Knowledge	Do people recognise early indicators of abuse, harassment or coercion? Do they know what to do, who to tell and when specialist advice is needed?
Access	Can someone disclose safely and privately? Are there trusted routes for people who do not want to make a formal complaint but need help or advice?
Environment	Are there physical, organisational or digital practices that create avoidable risk — for example isolated spaces, poorly monitored communication channels, unsafe travel arrangements or unchecked access to personal information?
Learning	Do we look across incidents and identify patterns, or deal with each event in isolation? Are repeated low-level concerns ever brought together to ask whether something more serious is developing?
Partnership	Do we know which other agencies or specialists may hold another part of the picture? Are our referral routes clear, and do we understand when involving others could increase rather than reduce risk?

BUILDING THE PICTURE TOGETHER

No single organisation is likely to see the whole pattern of harm. What looks like an attendance issue in education may sit alongside repeated health presentations, police call-outs, workplace disruption or information already held by a specialist service.

The value of partnership working is therefore not simply referral. It is the ability to combine different pieces of information so that risk, escalation and context become visible earlier.

What might others be able to add?

Education may hold the longitudinal picture: changes in attendance, behaviour, friendships, attainment, presentation, peer dynamics or online incidents. Schools and colleges may also know siblings, family history and previous safeguarding concerns.

Police and criminal justice may see repeated incidents, reports involving different locations or people, escalation over time, offending history, breaches or patterns that are not visible to another service.

Social care may understand the wider family system: previous involvement, parenting or caring pressures, household relationships, vulnerability, dependency and risks affecting other children or adults.

Health may hold information about injuries, reproductive or sexual health, mental health, repeated presentations, missed appointments or changes in who attends with the person. A health setting may also provide one of the few opportunities for private disclosure.

Charities and community organisations may know what statutory services do not. Trusted relationships can reveal fear, coercion, barriers to help-seeking or community dynamics long before somebody is willing to make a formal report.

Employers and businesses may notice patterns outside statutory systems: unexplained lateness or absence, repeated contact from a partner, financial difficulty, changes in working arrangements, anxiety about leaving work or somebody repeatedly appearing at the workplace.

The important question is therefore:

What do I know and who might hold the piece of information that changes what it means?

Information Sharing: GDPR is not a reason to do nothing

Multi-agency working does not mean sharing everything with everyone. Information should be relevant, necessary, proportionate, accurate and shared with the right people for the right purpose. But concern about data protection should not prevent appropriate safeguarding information sharing.

KCSIE 2026 states this very clearly:

"Data protection is not a barrier to safeguarding."

For schools and colleges, the guidance goes on to say that information should be shared and recorded where necessary to protect a child. More broadly, UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 provide the legal framework within which safeguarding information can be shared; they do not prohibit it where sharing is necessary, justified and proportionate.

There is an important development for 2026 too. From 30 September 2026, a new statutory information-sharing duty under section 16LA of the Children Act 2004 applies to specified safeguarding bodies and designated education and childcare agencies. Where relevant information may facilitate another agency's safeguarding functions, the legislation creates a positive duty to share it, subject to important safeguards about potential detriment to the child.

That makes the message for this conference particularly timely:

Good safeguarding is not about choosing between information sharing and data protection. It is about sharing the right information, with the right people, for the right safeguarding purpose.

CONFERENCE NOTES

What am I noticing differently now? What patterns, changes or forms of harm am I more alert to?
What challenged or changed my thinking? What assumption, habit or professional lens do I need to reconsider?
What does this mean for my organisation? Where are our strengths, gaps or blind spots?
Who else helps complete the picture? Which people, services or sectors do we need to understand and work with more effectively?
What will I take forward? One practical action, conversation or change I want to make after today.

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SUPPORT AND REFERRAL DIRECTORY

Service	Contact	Use for
Emergency	999	Immediate danger. If unable to speak on a mobile, follow the operator prompts for the Silent Solution.
Sunflower Centre	01604 888211	Independent domestic violence advice, safety planning and crisis support in Northamptonshire.
Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service	0300 012 0154	Support for people affected by domestic abuse across Northamptonshire.
EVE	07827 239496	Specialist domestic abuse support in Northamptonshire.
Northamptonshire Rape Crisis	0300 222 5930	Advice and support following rape or sexual abuse.
Serenity Northamptonshire	01604 601713	Support following rape or sexual assault.
Karma Nirvana	0800 5999 247	National specialist helpline for honour-based abuse and forced marriage; supports individuals and professionals.
Forced Marriage Unit	020 7008 0151	Government advice and practical support for those at risk of, or affected by, forced marriage.
National Domestic Abuse Helpline	0808 2000 247	Free, confidential 24/7 support.
National Stalking Helpline	0808 802 0300	Specialist advice on stalking, risk and safety planning.
Childline	0800 1111	Free confidential support for children and young people; includes Report Remove for under-18 sexual images online.

Check service details before onward publication or reprinting; services and opening times can change

CONTINUE THE LEARNING

Scan for the NSG conference page

NSG CONFERENCE PAGE

www.nsg.northants.sch.uk/conference

Resources and further information

Thank You

Thank you for being part of *Every Woman, Every Girl: Recognising Harm, Building Safety.*

Our sincere thanks to our speakers, contributors and partners, to Barclays for their generous support, and to everyone who joined us today.

Every woman. Every girl. Every one of us has a part to play.

EVERY WOMAN, EVERY GIRL

RECOGNISING HARM | BUILDING SAFETY

This booklet is a conference learning resource. It does not replace statutory guidance, professional judgement, local safeguarding procedures or emergency response arrangements.