



**saferlondon**

# See Beyond

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**A TOOLKIT AND GUIDE FOR CJS  
PROFESSIONALS AND PRACTITIONERS  
WORKING WITH YOUNG WOMEN WHO  
HAVE BEEN EXPLOITED INTO PERPETRATOR  
BEHAVIOURS**



## See Beyond: A Professional's Guide

Our sincere gratitude goes to the See Beyond project team, as well as the Safer London caseworkers and young women that contributed their experiences, opinions and voices to the guide's development.

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## Contents

Introduction	03
See Beyond: Professional Curiosity Changes Lives	04
What is See Beyond?	05
The Need	07
Recommendations for CJS professionals	18
Listening to the Experts	19
Voices unheard: one young woman's experience	20
Insights from Safer London Expert Caseworkers	24
Insights and reflections 15 years on – Madison's experiences	31
Recommendations	35
Resources and guidance for custody suite officers and the police	37
Custody suite resources for young women	46
Further Information and Resources	53





# Introduction





# SEE BEYOND: PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY CHANGES LIVES

The way someone presents in custody doesn't tell the full story.

Across the UK, hundreds of young women are being exploited into situations that lead to their arrests. They need help and support, not judgment.

Many of girls and young women who are often seen as offenders, are actually victims of deeper injustices, including exploitation and abuse. It's time to see beyond the surface and understand their true experiences.

Behind every crime committed by a young girl or woman lies a story of victimisation. Rather than viewing them as perpetrators, let's acknowledge their experiences and offer the support they need to heal and rebuild their lives. With empathy and understanding, we can help heal their trauma, offering them a chance to break free from the cycles of exploitation and victimisation.

To make a real difference, we must challenge stereotypes and change the narrative. Each young woman has a unique story, and many need support, not punishment.

By addressing the root causes - abuse, exploitation, and trauma - we can guide them toward recovery and stability.





# WHAT IS SEE BEYOND?

At Safer London, we believe that every young woman deserves to be seen for more than just the actions that led to her arrest. We challenge the stereotypes surrounding young women involved in crime. We know that behind each offense is often a story of trauma, exploitation and victimisation.

See Beyond is a project dedicated to supporting young women, aged 18-24, who have been arrested for displaying perpetrating behaviours or harming others, but have themselves been victims of abuse or exploitation. Too often, these young women are excluded from the very services meant to protect them, as they are viewed solely in relation to the risks they present, rather than through a lens of care and safety.

Our aim is to provide them with accessible, informative resources that outline their rights while in custody, offer guidance on requesting support for additional needs, and help them identify unhealthy relationships.

See Beyond also seeks to drive change within the criminal justice system. By informing and influencing key partners such as the police and Crown Prosecution Service, we hope to foster more compassionate and informed interactions with these young women.

As part of this project, we've also developed a set of resources and guidance for police officers and other professionals. These resources are designed to help them better understand the experiences of these young women, to engage their empathy and exercise professional curiosity.

Additionally, we have developed recommendations - shaped by conversations with young women and frontline caseworkers - which aim to improve how these services interact with and support this vulnerable group, ensuring that their needs are not overlooked.

By recognising the complex stories and realities of exploited young women, we can help break the cycle of harm and provide a path to recovery. Together, we can see beyond the surface and ensure every young woman has the opportunity to lead a safe and fulfilling life.



It is very easy in custody to become disillusioned and desensitised to the pain and trauma the people we deal with have suffered. A reminder to everyone who works in custody is such a good idea.

FAYE DAVIS-CARRAU  
POLICE SERGEANT 407CJ, MET DETENTION MO9, PUBLIC  
PROTECTION TEAM COMPLIANCE MANAGER



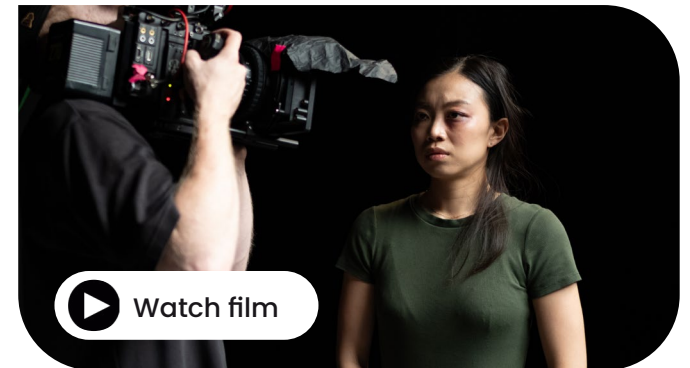


## SEE BEYOND FILM

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The material, in particular the video, is simple, impactful and thought provoking. We really need to open our staff's eyes to the victim offender dynamic that is so often present not only for young women but also children. I think this video is a great tool use to start those conversations.

TRACY FRANKLIN  
AREA CHIEF INSPECTOR, MO9 MET DETENTION PUBLIC  
PROTECTION LEAD, MET DETENTION COMMAND SAFETY,  
SAFEGUARDING, SERVICE





# THE NEED

Through our work with young women affected by violence and exploitation, Safer London is aware that many young women who are arrested for harmful behavior towards others often act as a result of the abuse and exploitation they have experienced themselves.

This often goes unnoticed and unexplored by the police and CPS, who tend to view these young women solely through the lens of the crimes they may or may not have committed, which then results in them not being referred to the support they may greatly benefit from.

There is also a knowledge gap, with police and CPS professionals often lacking awareness or training in trauma-informed practice, as it is neither widely nor regularly provided to staff within these fields.

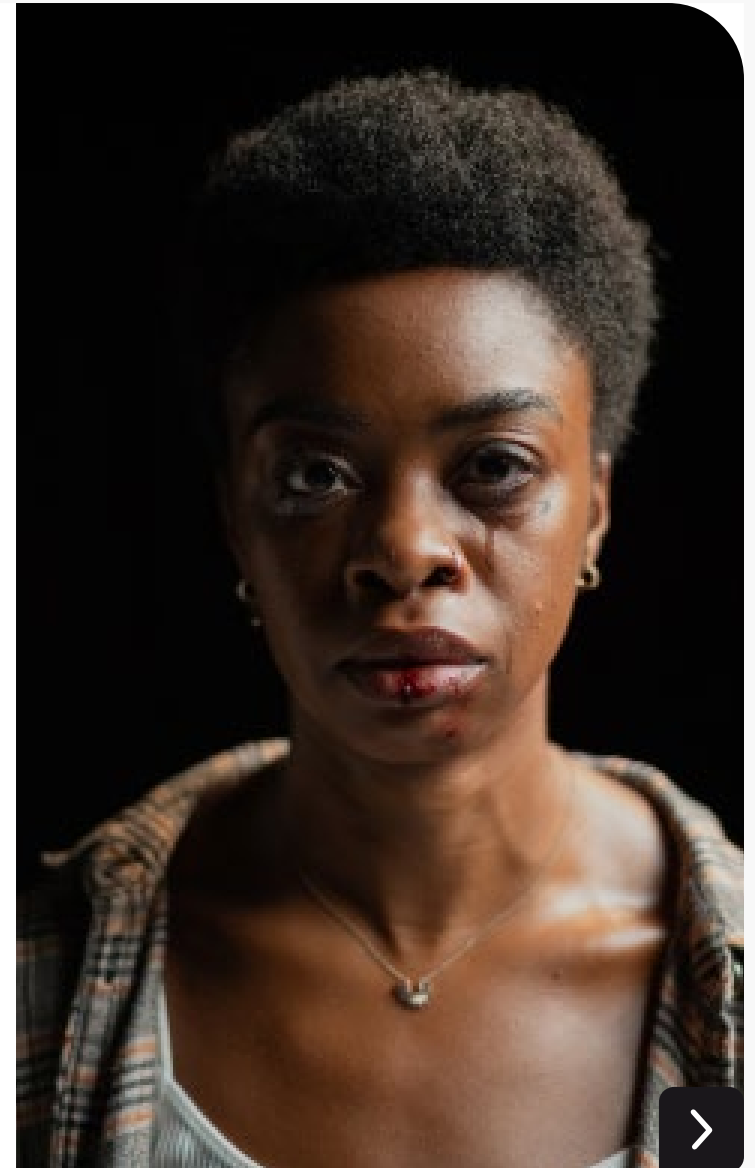
Young women who are arrested are often traumatised or retraumatised by the experience of being arrested, held in custody, and subsequently by how they are treated by the professionals they encounter while in contact with the criminal justice system.

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Stereotypical assumptions held by the police and the public concerning girls' appropriate female behaviour and involvement in crime and victimisation create a barrier to reporting and recognising girls' involvement in gang activity and exploitation.

KEEPING GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN SAFE  
REPORT

<https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Keeping-Girls-And-Young-Women-Safe-MMU-and-COYL-report-.pdf>





Across the county, there have been a growing number of young women who have reported to have received inadequate and even harmful treatment by police during their time in custody.

We have explored this through four research case studies. The case studies span of period of six years from 2018 to 2024.

→ The Baird Inquiry

→ "Trauma in Police Custody" report

→ "Trauma-informed training in police custody" report

→ "Women in Police Custody: A Lived Experience Perspective from Scotland" report

## THE NUMBERS:



There were 3.3 arrests for every 1,000 woman in the year ending March 2023<sup>1</sup>

Black women were 1.4 times as likely to be arrested as white women – there were 4.3 arrests for every 1,000 black women, and 3 for every 1,000 white women

**14,655** adult female arrests in London<sup>2</sup>

**3,634** potential female victims referred to the NRM in 2023. This was 21% of referrals that year<sup>3</sup>



Women are more likely than men to commit suicide while in prison<sup>4</sup> 2023

**29%** of all self-harm incidents in prison in 2022 involved women, despite only taking up 4% of the prison population<sup>5</sup>

**53%** Many women in prison have been victims of much more serious offences than those they are accused of committing, with 53% of women reporting having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child.<sup>6</sup>

Over half the women in prison report having suffered domestic violence







## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: THE BAIRD INQUIRY

The Baird Inquiry, *'An independent report into the experience of people who are arrested into custody by Greater Manchester Police with a focus on women and girls'* by Dame Vera Baird KC, was published in July 2024.

The inquiry was commissioned by Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham following a Sky News investigation in July 2023, which reported distressing incidents involving the cases of three women who were arrested and detained by Greater Manchester Police (GMP).

The inquiry was established to guide GMP's future practices, focusing on safeguarding the rights, safety, care, and dignity of those arrested, particularly women and girls, including those reporting crimes.

Baird conducted comprehensive face-to-face interviews with 15 people who had been arrested and held in custody by GMP. Through these interviews, Baird hoped to gain insight into their full accounts of the events they experienced while in custody. Their voices and experiences would inform the inquiry's recommendations.

### FINDINGS

- Unnecessary use of arrest when voluntary attendance could have been used in many cases.
- Incredibly poor, inappropriate and harmful treatment of high-risk domestic abuse and sexual violence victims by the police and custody officers, including shouting and excessive force/manhandling.
- The unnecessary use of strip searches, which caused arrestees to feel demeaned, humiliated and traumatised.
- Women in custody suffering a lack of sanitary towels for prolonged periods of time resulting in their clothes becoming soaked in blood. Furthermore, a lack of (or incredibly delayed provision) of toilet roll after using the toilet.
- Refusals by police at requests by women to contact family members and check on their children.
- Police officers investigating the complaints made against them.

Discover the report's  
recommendations





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: THE BAIRD INQUIRY

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ❖ GMP should ensure that all officers are given training to help them to recognise and manage the effects of domestic and sexual trauma on survivors.
- ❖ Every woman in custody should be allocated a female welfare officer and continuous female welfare support throughout their time in custody.
- ❖ There should be an immediate end to the carrying out of strip searches in response to an arrestee refusing to answer risk assessment questions at the custody desk.

Read the full inquiry  
report



- ❖ Better risk assessment and more humane and dignified treatment of all detainees.

The psycho-emotional impacts of custody may be reduced or minimised by marginal adjustments to treatment where appropriate such as the prompt answering of cell buzzers, and the provision of reading material and other distractions to help reduce stress.

- ❖ GMP should refresh officer training on the availability and utility of voluntary attendance (instead of arrests) given the increased emphasis, it is now given in the PACE codes of practice and the Inquiry's conclusion that many of these arrests were unnecessary or unlawful.

“

I hope that my Inquiry and this report will drive change where it is – sometimes urgently – required in GMP. My aim is strongly to promote a way of working in the police that will justifiably engender trust across the population and particularly among women.

DAME VERA BAIRD KC,  
THE BAIRD INQUIRY

<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/9861/the-baird-inquiry.pdf>





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: “TRAUMA IN POLICE CUSTODY”

In August 2023, Jane Mulcahy released a study “*Trauma in Police Custody*”.

Her research highlighted that despite increasing recognition of the importance of human rights in recent years, most legal systems are currently “*trauma-blind*”.

Subsequently this has had serious implications for “*unrecovered trauma survivors*” who are arrested, detained, charged, prosecuted and punished for offending behaviour.

Mulcahy goes on to state that police can (un)intentionally inflame tense situations with individuals who have a nervous system “*in a chronic state of defence*”. This is because they lack training on the prevalence and impact of trauma on human functioning and behaviour.

The police wield enormous power. Trauma blindness puts police officers in a position where they may unknowingly become embroiled in destructive traumatic re-enactment situations with individuals suspected of criminal activity.

Discover the report’s  
conclusions



“

Problematic drug and alcohol consumption and other self-destructive, risk-taking behaviours including periodic violence can be recast as normal, predictable responses to being perpetually in a state of physiological defensiveness, due to a deadly combination of “structural violence,” “relational poverty” and multiple childhood adversities.

We should re-frame addiction as an attempt to suppress “authentic feelings” that are too painful and overwhelming to face, rather than as “a brain disease” or “caused by chemical imbalance or genetics.”

JANE MULCAHY,  
TRAUMA IN POLICE CUSTODY

[https://www.researchgate.net/  
publication/372852642\\_Trauma\\_and\\_Police\\_Cus-  
tody](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372852642_Trauma_and_Police_Custody)





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: “TRAUMA IN POLICE CUSTODY”

### CONCLUSIONS:

- ❖ Many individuals who are suspected of wrongdoing, have themselves experienced serious injury and trauma. They are often victims of crime(s), as well as perpetrators.

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- ❖ In police custody, trauma survivors may hurl vulgar abuse or become physically threatening following a drug and alcohol binge. Alternatively, nervous system dysregulation may prompt them to self-harm, or they may shut down/dissociate, appearing vacant and unresponsive to questions posed.

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- ❖ Police officers should strive to behave with respect, kindness and compassion whenever they engage with suspected offenders.

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- ❖ The public interest is not served if our “Guardians of the Peace” re-traumatise people accused of offences whose brains and bodies may have been flooded with overwhelming stress since birth, leading to addictions, mental health problems, relational poverty and crime. However, positive, trauma-responsive interactions may have a lasting positive impact on individuals.

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- ❖ All criminal justice personnel, including police officers should urgently receive in-depth training about attachment, interpersonal neurobiology, ACEs, trauma, polyvagal theory, survival responses and traumatic re-enactment.

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- ❖ Training should also aim to empower police officers to recognise and minimise bias in themselves when they encounter people from marginalised, minoritised communities to reduce the risk that their words or behaviour exacerbate racial or cultural trauma.
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Read the full report





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: “TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING IN POLICE CUSTODY”

A similar piece of work was carried out by Goodall et al, who completed a qualitative case study in May 2023 called “*Trauma-informed training in police custody*”.

The study explored the perceptions of the impact of trauma-informed training on a single police custody suite, where all custody staff had undertaken an evidenced-based training package devised by NHS Education Scotland.

In this study, focus groups and interviews were conducted with three groups:

- Custody staff
- Senior staff with responsibility for custody staff
- keyworkers from a women’s support organisation linked to the custody suite

The aim was to examine the perceptions of the impact of the training concerning day-to-day working in police custody, a service-level perspective, and external views on the extent of any impact.

The results suggested that trauma-informed training had positive impacts in relation to police knowledge, attitudes and potentially to behaviour.

There was agreement that police custody is a critical window of opportunity to route people to positive destinations, but that further work remains to be done in relation to moving fully towards a trauma-informed police custody.

Discover the report’s  
recommendations for the  
police



### FINDINGS

- ➔ People who encounter the criminal justice system have experienced a disproportionate level of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or trauma.
- ➔ Given the high levels of mental illness and PTSD in police, trauma-informed training has potential benefits for officers, as well as the public.
- ➔ Women in custody also have a higher incidence than men of mental health problems and history of self-harm.
- ➔ The experience of custody per se can be re-traumatising for individuals. Custody suites are fundamentally intended to house perpetrators and not victims despite most perpetrators having been themselves victims at one point.





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: “TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING IN POLICE CUSTODY”

### POLICE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Working towards a multi-agency approach is crucial to facilitate the best possible custody experience and referral pathways for women in custody.
- Trauma-informed training needs to be ongoing as one-off training limits reflection on, and development of, practical skills.
- Where staff can use their discretion regarding certain custody procedures (e.g., strip search, use of restraint), this should be communicated to them with clear guidance and support for justifying deviations from standard protocol.

- Services should pay greater attention to the application of trauma-informed approaches in police staff support.

Read the full report



The cultural context of policing was raised as a barrier to implementing trauma-informed practice, both through public suspicion of support offered by officers and through a perceived lack of attitudinal change in some police staff, leading to a reduced motivation to engage with support of custody detainees.

KAREN GOODALL, ZARA BRODIE, CAROLINE LLOYD  
AND KARRI GILLESPIE-SMITH

[https://www.sipr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Research-Report\\_Goodall\\_et-al-2023\\_trauma-informed-custody.docx.pdf](https://www.sipr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Research-Report_Goodall_et-al-2023_trauma-informed-custody.docx.pdf)





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: “WOMEN IN POLICE CUSTODY: A LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE FROM SCOTLAND”

In 2018, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) conducted a study, interviewing a small focus group of women (three ciswomen and one transwoman) about their experiences in police custody.

### FINDINGS

- Generally, the women were not aware of their entitlements in custody. They felt it might be useful to have this information somewhere in the cell, as well as, for custody staff to use less jargon as sometimes they weren’t sure of what was happening.
- Women felt unsafe in the holding areas of the custody centres especially when men were present.

- There was a lack of privacy in the custody suites due to custody officers openly discussing names, addresses, charge details and circumstances of other detainees on the cell corridors when booking people in, which made the women fear that others may overhear personal information about them.
- Menstrual products were never proactively offered by staff, nor were the women asked if they were menstruating. Instead, they had to request products from staff which they found embarrassing, particularly with male staff. Women shared that they had to handover used sanitary pads to staff which they found mortifying.

- Custody staff did not make an effort to engage with them during their time in custody, but when they did, it had a positive impact on their mood and anxiety levels.
- The women said that often they are in crisis or very upset when being taken into custody, and that good interactions with staff can help calm them. They also noted that due to being upset/in crisis that they may not take in all information when booked in, and once settled having information repeated would be helpful.
- The women would appreciate better support whilst in custody from non-policing services.

Discover the report’s  
recommendations





## RESEARCH CASE STUDY: “WOMEN IN POLICE CUSTODY: A LIVED EXPERIENCE PERSPECTIVE FROM SCOTLAND”

### RECOMMENDATIONS FALLING OUT OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

- ❖ Staff engagement was the most effective way of dealing with vulnerable women and those in mental distress.

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- ❖ Custody staff should be trauma-informed, have training in mental health and have greater awareness/training of transgender issues.

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- ❖ Women commented that they could use the time in holding cells to contact family, using their own mobiles if able to, to let families know that they were ok. They noted that this would be reassuring and help alleviate their worries during their detention.

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- ❖ Women felt that a greater focus on them getting home safely would be beneficial.

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- ❖ Women would prefer to have a supply of toilet paper in their cells and not to have to ask for either toilet paper or for toilets to be flushed. Overall, giving detainees access to personal hygiene and effective menstrual care was integral to their dignity.

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- ❖ The care given to the transgender woman in custody is to be praised, but consideration should be given to extending this level of care to other women in custody.

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- ❖ Throughout their feedback women strongly expressed a preference for being cared for and being able to talk to female custody staff.

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- ❖ Women would prefer to be kept in cell corridors away from men.

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Read the full briefing







## RESEARCH CASE STUDY CONCLUSION

All these studies appear to conclude on the main points that:

- Women require better support whilst in custody with regards to their sanitary needs, which should be dealt with by female welfare officers.
- Police need to be provide with comprehensive and regular trauma-informed training to improve their practice and awareness of the potential mental health needs of the women they arrest, as well as, how to appropriately and professionally respond to these needs.
- Being in custody is an incredibly isolating, fearful and traumatic experience, particularly for women who have experience domestic violence, sexual abuse or mental health issues, which then often results in significant ongoing trauma after the event.





# Recommendations

FOR CJS PROFESSIONALS





# LISTENING TO THE EXPERTS

At Safer London, we strive to understand the experiences of young women and the challenges they face in their interactions with various institutions – including the police and other areas of the criminal justice system.

Only by listening to the experts – young women themselves – can we better hope to understand what the challenges are and how we can work together to create solutions. It is critical that young women are seen as part of the solution and not as part of the problem.

To help us better understand what the issues are we spoke not only to young women who've had experiences and touch points with the criminal justice system, but to those working directly with them – Safer London's Expert young women caseworkers.

We were particularly keen to understand the experiences of young women who move through the system as both perpetrators and victims. We recognise that, within the context of violence and exploitation, young women often find themselves in both roles.

It is essential to consider the victim/perpetrator cycle. Looking at their experiences through only one lens is not helpful. Viewing young women solely as perpetrators can lead to stigma, reinforcing negative stereotypes that may limit their opportunities for growth and rehabilitation.

This narrow perspective overlooks the complex realities they face and fails to acknowledge the circumstances that contribute to their behaviour, such as trauma, exploitation and social disadvantage.

By defining young women primarily as offenders, we risk missing opportunities for intervention and support that could help them break the cycle of victimisation and offending.

This informed our approach and discussions with those we engaged in with during the development of this guide. Their insights, experiences and opinions of the, have informed the resources and recommendations you can find throughout this guide.

Read through the perspectives and insights of young women and caseworkers





## VOICES UNHEARD: ONE YOUNG WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE WITH RELATIONSHIPS, SUPPORT AND THE POLICE

In a conversation with one young woman, several themes emerged around relationships, support systems, and her encounters with the police, offering valuable insights into areas where change is desperately needed.

“

It was hard to believe they really cared

She began by reflecting on relationships, sharing how many young women struggle to identify the signs of an unhealthy dynamic. Without sufficient education advice, guidance, as well as protection from family and peers, it's easy to overlook the warning signs.

*“Most of the time you kind of know something is off in your relationship,” she explained. “More than likely, you're not really gonna speak about it.”*

There's a sense of normalising unhealthy behaviour, with some young women either unsure of how to address the problem or resigned to it getting better on its own.

*“Some girls don't act like they know the signs, but, like, because they're accustomed to it, they're just gonna, you know what I mean, turn a blind eye and just tell you, ‘aw yea, it'll get better, it'll get better,’”* she said, adding that others might be more direct in pointing out the issue.

When asked if she felt young women would turn to professionals for support, she expressed confidence that they would, given the right circumstances. She suggested that if a trusted adult was available, many would be more open to sharing their concerns, hinting at a gap in accessible, reliable support networks for young people.





Education on consent also surfaced as an area of concern. For many, the concept remains inadequately addressed, leaving young women unprepared for situations that demand a clear understanding of their rights and boundaries.

The conversation then shifted to her interactions with the police, where her tone shifted. The words she chose - *“scary,” “rude,” “judgmental,”* and *“untrustworthy”* painted a bleak picture of her experience. *“She was just rude,”* she recalled of one officer, adding, *“attitude, all the time.”*

This lack of professionalism extended beyond simple rudeness - it created an environment where she felt **judged** and **dismissed**.

Even in moments where police officers seemed to show concern, she struggled to trust their intentions. *“It was hard to believe they really cared,”* she reflected, feeling that their efforts to build rapport rang hollow against the backdrop of the intimidating arrest process.

The situation became even more overwhelming during her arrest. Multiple officers were present, but instead of clarity, their presence only added to the confusion.

*“It was just messy in a sense where they didn’t know what they was gonna do with me,”* she said. Conflicting information from different officers made it impossible for her to understand what was happening. *“It was just so much going on,”* she added, recounting the disorienting experience of being arrested as a young woman.

She described how her treatment shifted once she was in police custody, particularly when she was in an area where there were few people like her, referring to her ethnicity. *“I got arrested, it wasn’t even those officers that were horrible to me,”* she said, *“It was the ones in the station.”* This discrepancy in treatment based on locality and ethnicity highlights a deeper, systemic issue.

“

They don’t  
care about how you feel





Although she was informed of her rights during the arrest, the stress of the situation made it hard for her to fully grasp what was being said. *“They say it so fast,”* she explained, *“so it’s not even something like, do you know what I mean? Am I really taking note of what you’re saying?”*

When asked if she expressed any learning or communication needs while in custody, she dismissed the idea, saying it would have been *“worthless.”*

Even if she had voiced her concerns, she believed it wouldn’t have made a difference. *“You can see I was panicked,”* she recalled. *“At the end of the day, this is their job, they’re just gonna do whatever they need to do. They don’t care about how you feel, do you know what I mean? So, they didn’t really care too much about...how I felt or with the situation being new.”*





One of the most poignant moments in the conversation came when discussing what the police could do better in their interactions with young women, especially those who have experienced abuse.

She spoke about the importance of emotional intelligence and understanding, noting that police often fail to take into account the trauma many young women carry with them. *“I understand you’ve got a job to do,”* she said, *“but read the room. If you can see...it’s brand new to them, they’re quite shaken up...be more understanding, ask questions about welfare.”*

She pointed out that she wasn’t offered any support while in custody and was left in the dark about what was happening or how long she’d be there. *“I don’t really like being in a situation I don’t know nothing,”* she explained. *“I want to know how long you’re intending to keep me here...I panic over the littlest things, so just a bit of reassurance—how long you’re gonna be in there...what I’m to expect.”*

She noted that she requested a book to help pass the time and was given one, drawing on advice from a peer who had previously been in custody. Although the police provided documents outlining her rights, they didn’t offer much comfort. *“I read all these things, but at the same time, it wasn’t really... it wasn’t really much to me,”* she said.

When asked what message she would give to police and CPS professionals, her response was clear – they need to be more mindful of the trauma young women have endured and their mental health. *“[When] the police interact with young females, they’ve been through stuff,”* she explained, *“they have trauma, and I don’t think they’re considerate of that...they just deal with it how they would any other people.”*

She emphasised that young women need to be treated with greater care, saying, *“When it’s females, they just need to be dealt with a bit better – well, a lot better to be honest, like, be mindful of their mental health.”*

She also touched on the isolation many young women feel during these experiences, highlighting the need for more communication and support from custody officers. *“In this situation, I don’t have no friends and family, so... just maybe a bit of conversation [from custody officers]... like, yeah just be mindful, like, of the female’s mental health...just speak to them a bit more...help them understand the situation a bit better.”*

Finally, when asked what advice she would offer to other young women who find themselves in similar situations, her response was reflective. *“We’re getting into these situations...we need to remind [ourselves]... we just need to say to [ourselves]...what I’m gonna do? How is this gonna end for me?”*

It was a powerful reminder of the importance of self-awareness and the long-term impact of the choices young women make in these challenging circumstances, where they are often victims of violence and exploitation.





## CHALLENGES FACING YOUNG WOMEN IN CUSTODY: INSIGHTS FROM SAFER LONDON EXPERT CASEWORKERS

Young women who come into contact with the criminal justice system, particularly as victims of abuse or violence, face a multitude of challenges that can exacerbate their trauma.

Safer London's Expert Caseworkers supporting these young women witness first-hand the barriers they encounter, from inadequate communication with the police to the long-term emotional toll of drawn-out investigations.

Based on interviews with two Expert Caseworkers from Safer London, the following insights reveal the systemic issues that young women face within the criminal justice process.

### BARRIERS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- Lack of awareness about abuse in relationships
- Poor communication and case updates from police
- Lengthy investigations and emotional impact
- Need for more trauma-informed responses
- Staff turnover and overworked police officers

Read the detailed insights,  
alongside recommendations







## LACK OF AWARENESS ABOUT ABUSE IN RELATIONSHIPS

One of the first challenges young women face is a limited understanding of healthy versus unhealthy relationships.

Many young women struggle to recognise abusive behaviour early on, which delays their ability to seek help or report the abuse to authorities.

*“There’s kind of a lack of awareness or a limited understanding around abuse in relationships... there is this pattern of them knowing ‘actually that wasn’t right’ and [not] just reporting it straight to the police,”* one caseworker explained.

This lack of awareness often means that young women endure abuse for extended periods before realising that their experiences were not acceptable or lawful.

## POOR COMMUNICATION AND CASE UPDATES FROM POLICE

Even when young women muster the courage to report abuse, a lack of communication from the police adds to their anxiety and frustration. While victims have rights that should guarantee they are kept informed about their cases, this is not always upheld in practice.

*“There’s like a code of rights for victims... 12 rights on there that victims should be receiving... One of them [the rights] is for victims to be kept up to date on the progress [of their case]... Victims are just reporting the crime and then not hearing from the police for months... It causes a lot of anxiety.”*

This prolonged silence can leave young women in limbo, uncertain about the status of their case or the next steps, which worsens their emotional stress and sense of helplessness.

## LENGTHY INVESTIGATIONS AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT

A recurring issue that amplifies the distress of young women is the prolonged length of investigations, which can stretch on for years. This not only delays justice but also forces victims to relive their trauma for extended periods.

*“The length of the investigations... [can take up to] two years if not longer in some cases. To kind of live with that, and be holding that for such a long time is really quite emotionally draining... they’re still reliving that trauma over and over and over again,”* a caseworker noted.

Such extended investigations often leave victims feeling as though their trauma is never fully resolved, as they are unable to move forward while their cases remain open.





## NEED FOR MORE TRAUMA- INFORMED RESPONSES

Caseworkers expressed the need for the criminal justice system, particularly the police, to adopt more trauma-informed practices when working with young women.

There is a lack of understanding of the unique challenges these women face, especially in today's cultural environment. *"The trauma the young person is experiencing is not always recognised,"* one caseworker pointed out.

They emphasised the importance of understanding the societal influences, such as figures like Andrew Tate, who contribute to harmful attitudes towards women.

One caseworker explained how *"Understanding some of the issues and the dynamics that young people are facing today...like people like Andrew Tate, and how those kinds of people are influencing society"* can help increase understanding of the risks that young girls and women specifically face.

## STAFF TURNOVER AND OVERWORKED POLICE OFFICERS

Another significant challenge for young women is the frequent turnover of police officers handling their cases. This lack of continuity disrupts case progression and frustrates victims, who must repeatedly recount their traumatic experiences to new officers.

*"She had four OICs [Officer in Charge of the investigation] due to them quitting or retiring or going on maternity leave... It had been that long she came back and took back over the case."*

While the officers themselves are often described as friendly and empathetic, they are overworked, which leads to delays and inconsistent handling of cases.

*"Police are always so friendly when you speak to them on the phone and they're really nice people, but they clearly are just... majorly overworked,"* a caseworker explained.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Caseworkers suggested that small changes, such as providing regular updates- even if there is no significant progress - would greatly reduce the stress that young women face while their cases are pending.

*"They would have probably appreciated monthly updates, even just to say like, 'we've got a lot on at the minute,' 'we've not been able to arrest him,' or 'we need more information,'"* one caseworker proposed.

On a larger scale, caseworkers believe that better understanding of trauma and the unique risks faced by young women could lead to more compassionate and effective responses from the police and the criminal justice system as a whole.





## UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG WOMEN DISPLAYING PERPETRATOR BEHAVIOURS

Young women displaying perpetrator behaviours often face unique challenges that can hinder their development and wellbeing.

To gain insight into their experiences and the systemic issues they encounter, we sat down with another Expert Caseworker from Safer London who has extensive experience supporting young women in criminal justice proceedings from the perspective of a perpetrator.

Our discussion focused on how these young women are treated by police, the barriers they face in accessing support, and what can be done to improve their situations.

[Read the full interview](#)



“

Some police officers are well-trained and genuinely care about protecting the young person. But others seem to just go through the motions, ticking boxes without really exploring the resources available for young people.

Communication can vary widely; some officers engage and communicate effectively, while others completely ignore you.

EXPERT CASEWORKER  
SAFER LONDON





## EXPERT CASEWORKER INTERVIEW

**Interviewer:** Can you start by sharing some of the key challenges you've faced while working with young women in this cohort?

**Caseworker:** One of the main challenges is that because they're adults, you don't know much about their background. So, it's hard for you to have an understanding of their past experiences and their past traumas to then be able to effectively work with them. You're getting to know a new stranger, but they need help. That's the hardest thing.

**Interviewer:** That sounds incredibly challenging. Are there any other systemic issues that exacerbate these challenges?

**Caseworker:** Absolutely. The lack of professionals that can work with young people in that age group is a significant issue. There are limited resources available, and even when resources exist, the amount of help they can receive is often restricted. This limitation causes them to avoid seeking further assistance.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned barriers to employment and education earlier. Can you elaborate on that?

**Caseworker:** Most of the young people I work with either are not in employment, struggle with employment, or have difficulty progressing due to their criminal records, backgrounds, or pending investigations. If there was a service that literally provided work for young people, along with training and employment support, we could potentially help many of them get off the streets and away from violence.

**Interviewer:** That's an interesting point. What do you think needs to be done to improve the support system for these young women?

**Caseworker:** What would really help is if we could access information from Social Care about these young women, even if they've just turned 18 or 19. Knowing their past history and any previous involvement with services would provide context and assist in understanding their current needs.

**Interviewer:** In light of these challenges, have you noticed any positive aspects when working with this cohort?

**Caseworker:** Yes, I believe they're more independent. They're at a transitional stage where they're reflecting on their lives, which allows for deeper understanding and quicker improvements in what they want. When you engage with them, you can see their potential for growth.

**Interviewer:** That's a hopeful perspective. What have these young women shared about their experiences with the police and the criminal justice system?

**Caseworker:** They often express feelings of having "bad experiences," "not being heard," and feeling unfairly "targeted" by police. For instance, one young woman was placed in a high-risk area by housing services without considering her safeguarding needs, which made her vulnerable to violence.





**Interviewer:** It sounds like there are significant gaps in the support they receive. How do you view the police's treatment of these young women?

**Caseworker:** There's a real gap in police training regarding mental health. You're arresting and stopping and searching a young person – surely you can tell they have mental health needs or vulnerabilities. The police often treat them like just another perpetrator, lacking the understanding that they are complex individuals with their own stories.

**Interviewer:** Given your experiences, how do you find the relationship between your role and the police?

**Caseworker:** It's quite mixed. It's 50/50. Some police officers are well-trained and genuinely care about protecting the young person. But others seem to just go through the motions, ticking boxes without really exploring the resources available for young people.

**Interviewer:** That's concerning. Have you encountered any knowledge gaps among police officers regarding these issues?

**Caseworker:** Definitely. Some officers lack even basic knowledge. You might mention terms like 'CSE,' and they respond with confusion. Communication can vary widely; some officers engage and communicate effectively, while others completely ignore you.

**Interviewer:** In your view, what changes could improve the interactions between the police and the young women you work with?

**Caseworker:** Having caseworkers on-site at police stations would be incredibly beneficial. For young women who have gone through trauma, sitting in a room with a uniformed officer can be daunting. If caseworkers were present, they could help these young women understand the processes and provide support, which would encourage them to engage more.

**Interviewer:** That's a great suggestion. Lastly, do you think there should be more support services tailored for female 'perpetrators'?

**Caseworker:** Absolutely. There are male perpetrators' support lines, but where's the equivalent for female perpetrators? Even if they don't identify as perpetrators themselves, we need organisations that provide support specifically for them.





## CONCLUSIONS FROM CASEWORKER INSIGHTS

Young women navigating the criminal justice system as victims of abuse face numerous challenges, from a lack of understanding about healthy relationships to the emotional toll of long investigations and inconsistent communication.

The caseworkers' own experiences working alongside the police were described as *"quite positive, but also... quite slow."* While the police are typically responsive, caseworkers often find themselves *"working on the police's time,"* which can mean long waits for updates. This, coupled with an overworked system, impacts the overall effectiveness of police support for young women.

Despite these challenges, caseworkers also acknowledged the courage shown by young women in coming forward to report crimes. In some cases, positive support from Sexual Offences Investigation Trained Officers (SOIT) made a significant difference.

While caseworkers acknowledge the bravery of these young women in coming forward, they also stress the need for a more trauma-informed, empathetic approach from the police.



What I find is a lot of these young women are very brave to report crimes in the first place.

EXPERT CASEWORKER  
SAFER LONDON

Insights from caseworkers reveal both the challenges and opportunities within the current support system for young women displaying harmful behaviours.

There are significant barriers to overcome, and a commitment to understanding and addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a more supportive environment.

By improving access to resources, enhancing police training, and establishing tailored support services, there is potential for positive change in the lives of exploited young women.





## INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS 15 YEARS ON: MADISON'S EXPERIENCES

Madison\*, now in her 30s, shared with us her experiences of the criminal justice sector when she was younger. This included being taken into custody and serving a custodial sentence. Madison is able to reflect back on how she felt and provides insight on whether her experiences differ from young women in custody today.

Madison's experiences with the police have been mixed, but certain moments have had a lasting impact. Reflecting on her experiences, she shared, *"my experience of them has not been hugely negative."*

She acknowledges that while there have been negative interactions, her own approach has often influenced how officers responded *"the whole of my experience leading up to me going into custody. I was never put in handcuffs. So that makes me reflect on 'how is the individual acting towards the police to make them react in the way that they have reacted."*

Her first encounter with the police at 14 was particularly significant.

Madison was with a group of friends when they were stopped and searched by police *"it was quite intense... I felt very vulnerable."* This encounter shaped her view of the police: *"My mum even made a complaint about it at the time because we was asked to, like, pull down our trousers and stuff and yeah, it was it was very intimate."*

“

I suppose that really shaped my vision of them before I had any other interactions with them, and kind of put me on the fence of like, yeah, police are not people that I really want to be around.

Madison reflected on the gendered dynamics of the situation *"we was all girls as well"*, Madison and her friends were all female and the police who stopped them were a mixture of male and female, but it was a male police officer who searched her.

She further reflected on the impact this experience had on her and her friends: *"We wasn't in an area that none of us lived. We'd just gone out like shopping for the weekend and [got] subjected to that. So I think that was quite disturbing. Like that kind of shaped us, not wanting to go back to the area again."*

Madison described this encounter as *"my only like extremely negative interaction with them [police]."*

\*Name changed to protect identity





Madison's interactions with the CPS have been limited but positive. She appreciated the approach taken in her case: *"They was very considerate in how they approached my case, like I honestly believe they could have been a lot harsher. They took a lot of factors into consideration where they could have just overlooked it."*

It wasn't until later that Madison learned she had ADHD. Looking back, she understood how personal struggles, including the loss of her father at a young age, had contributed to her challenges, particularly around managing her anger *"I did feel like I experienced some kind of outbursts of unnecessary anger."*

Madison's experience with custody was brief but left a strong impression. Though she was informed of her rights, she admitted, *"I didn't fully understand them."* Her solicitor became her main source of guidance: *"I asked questions through my solicitor. I didn't really directly ask them [the police] anything."*

After two hours in custody, she was released on bail, but the experience was still overwhelming as she explained it was *"quite overwhelming, quite distressing. I didn't have good knowledge of what was happening, so yeah, I was a bit stressed."*

When further reflecting on her time in a police cell Madison shared *"Did I feel like I was supported? No, I don't feel like I [was] supported throughout it. Yeah, I think I was left feeling very vulnerable."*

She also shared how her lack of trust in the police affected her. When asked if she felt safe enough to share her feelings and experiences with the police whilst in custody, Madison expressed *"Most definitely not. Not at all"* explaining that it was because *"I just suppose I didn't have the trust in them"*.

Her negative experience with the police as a teenager shaped this view: *"I just didn't have any faith in them. I don't believe they was there to help me."*



“

Some of my peers have had really negative interactions with police. One [person] that is quite young, she's had a negative interaction with the police and it's quite concerning because they used a lot of force on her and she's a baby.







Madison offered suggestions for how police could improve their approach when working with young women: *"I do think there is a known difference to the way police treat different individuals of colour. I think that needs to be addressed when they are trying to navigate these situations and how they respond to individuals."*

She expressed hope that the growing diversity within the police force could help: *"they're trying to diversify the police force so they can create those spaces, those safer spaces for individuals that they actually feel comfortable to reach out to the police and have those conversations."*

*If they did use the individuals that they have hired to diversify the force to help create that trust and that security within the communities, build those relationships actually be there for the community, rather than use those individuals against the community, that would be a lot [better for] them and how individuals respond to them and how they react to situations."*

Madison also spoke about the need for a more nuanced approach to victims of abuse who may also be caught up in the justice system: *"sometimes they can't differentiate when an individual's been a victim of a situation, but also whilst being a victim of that situation, has fallen into crime."*

*They can't find the balance between the two and still navigate towards the crime side. They also need to identify the individual and what they've experienced, because I suppose a lot of the time they just suppress that and deal with the individual as a criminal. That can be quite damaging for the individual and how they respond to the police."*

“

There'll be a lot more forthcoming if they actually recognise them as victims before we recognise them as criminals

Madison's experiences, particularly during her time in custody, also highlighted the ways in which sexual exploitation can intersect with interactions with the justice system.

Madison shared that her first real understanding around sexual exploitation came from her time spent in prison, *"I think my first major encounter with it [understanding sexual exploitation] was when I was in custody. Serving at my custodial sentence and my cellmate actually was a victim of sexual exploitation. I think that's what really gave me the insight to understand that this is not just a generalised thing, and maybe there's more context to it when exploring different avenues of it."*

Madison acknowledged that recognising the signs of sexual exploitation wasn't easy, especially when she was younger, *"I think there's a slight factor of normalisation [around unhealthy relationships]"* she reflected.





Madison emphasised the importance of self-awareness and education in avoiding such harmful dynamics. *"I've done a lot of inner work and like reached out, done a lot of counselling that has given me that knowledge as well."* she noted. She also shared that she felt there is a need for more support for young women *"I think mentorship, surrounding this area at the moment, especially with females, is not really there."*

Madison shared her thoughts on the need for greater awareness of issues surrounding unhealthy relationships, particularly in the context of exploitation, as well as promoting self-love and respect among young women. She emphasised, *"I think there's a lot of work that needs to be done with females in terms of how they value themselves, how they see themselves in the world. Especially if they've been impacted by certain things. I've done a lot of research, I've looked into it and I don't feel like there's that core reach out to the young females. So I think that's definitely a gap that needs closed. How we close it is a big question."*

“

It takes experience and your own perseverance and I suppose you don't have that at 18 when you're just trying to navigate the world.

Reflecting on how progress could be made, Madison highlighted the influence of social media: *"The access to social media is evident and it has such a huge impact on their decisions and how they structure life. In my age bracket we did have the social influence of the internet, but not as heavy."*

She also considered how social media could be leveraged for positive engagement, stating, *"I suppose now it's more of a case of reaching out to the youth and finding a platform that they're actually tuned into, so I suppose a lot of the social media could play a huge impact on how."*

Madison also thought the power of tapping into real stories or scenarios could help with awareness and education: *"reflecting on that for my own personal experience, I would say it would be for me to actually see how the relationships play out and maybe some role play."*

*I think reaching out to the youth and getting them involved in like re-enacting some of these situations that can play out - so exactly what you're doing now here in the impact stories and gaining that knowledge and then replaying it to the youth so they have understanding."*

Read our recommendations based on what we have heard from speaking to young women and the Safer London team





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Reflecting on existing research, inquires and reports, as well as conversations we held with young women and frontline caseworkers it is clear that:

Not enough young women are educated about spotting signs of unhealthy relationships and how to seek support to safely leave them.

Multiple approaches can be taken to help improve this. For example, comprehensive and robust SRE curriculums delivered at school, online learning spaces that young people can access so they can deliver healthy and informed peer support, and both online and offline spaces that parents can access to gain the confidence, knowledge and tools to educate their young people.

Trust between young women and the police is low.

This is largely due to ongoing traumatic experiences that occur as a result of the often harmful treatment displayed by the police.

Young women are largely not being treated with respect and dignity by the police throughout their time in custody.

This also goes for when they are being brought into and released from custody.

Young women's mental health and emotional wellbeing deteriorate when in custody.

They often feel isolated, fearful and powerless and that none of professionals around them (namely police and custody officers) care about them or their welfare.

Discover our recommendations based on our reflections, insights and learnings





## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Ongoing trauma-informed training amongst police is crucial in order to improve the treatment of potentially vulnerable young women in custody and to hopefully reduce the number of arrests made in the first instance.

3

Specialist therapeutic intervention should be offered to young women after leaving custody. This is so they can receive the emotional support they may likely need to process their experience of being in custody and anything that took place whilst there.

5

Police need to ensure that the personal information shared by young women when entering custody is kept private and confidential at all times.

2

For CPS staff, mandatory trauma-informed training would likely also have a positive impact. This would encourage staff to acknowledge the complex experiences and needs of the young women they encounter and help move towards more holistic decision-making.

4

Women should be asked multiple times throughout their time in custody, whether they understand their rights, if they have any additional needs or require any further information e.g. about their rights. The shock and likely trauma of being arrested, can make it hard to mentally process or take in any information provided at the initial point of arrest.

6

Trauma-informed female staff members e.g. female welfare officers (as suggested in the Baird Inquiry 2024) should be allocated to young women when in custody, especially concerning matters of female personal hygiene.





# Resources and guidance

FOR POLICE AND CUSTODY SUITE OFFICERS





## EXERCISE YOUR PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY

**REMEMBER:** Every interaction you have with a young woman is an opportunity to help break a cycle of abuse and victimisation

It's important that vulnerable women are safeguarded from abuse, despite their criminal status.

It's not always black and white. It's important to exercise professional curiosity and use your power positively, to help support these young women.



The key to investigating something that is hidden is to believe it is there.

POLICE OFFICER,  
OPERATION DIANA, 2011

<https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Out-of-place.pdf>

## THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING

- ? If legal representation has been arranged for them, discreetly ask them if they would like alternative representation.
- ? Sensitive establish whether they have any medical or menstrual related needs.
- ? Determine if the young women have any additional needs, such as language barriers or SEND, and arrange further support if they indicate it is necessary.
- ? Speak to the young women about making a referral to a local support services.





## UNDERSTANDING EXPLOITATION

Did you know it's possible that a significant proportion of young women that present in custody, may have experienced or are experiencing sexual and/or criminal exploitation?

This group of young women often become excluded from being signposted to support services, as they are often viewed primarily in relation to the risk they present to others, and not through a safeguarding and welfare lens.

You play a crucial role in identifying signs that may indicate a young woman is a victim of exploitation. Be aware of indicators and signs of exploitation during your interactions with young women.

Read more about the signs that can help you identify potential exploitation



## NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM

Do you know what the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is?

It is framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. Speak to the young woman about referring them to the NRM if necessary.

National referral mechanism guidance: adult (England and Wales)



National referral mechanism guidance: adult (Northern Ireland and Scotland)



Report Modern Slavery





## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EXPLOITATION

### Limited Personal Possessions

Be mindful of young women carrying very few personal belongings. A lack of possessions can indicate that they may have been removed from their homes under duress or that their ability to retain personal effects is restricted.

### Behavioural Indicators

Observe non-verbal cues, such as avoiding eye contact or displaying signs of fear and anxiety. If a young woman seems frightened or hesitant to communicate, it may signal an underlying fear of her circumstances or possible repercussions.

### Fear Responses

Pay attention to expressions of fear toward police or concerns about violence against themselves or their family members. Such fears can be significant red flags indicating a vulnerable situation requiring immediate attention.

### Signs of Abuse

Look for physical or psychological signs of abuse. This may include untreated injuries, noticeable anxiety, agitation, or a withdrawn demeanour. These symptoms can reflect a history of trauma or neglect, suggesting that the individual may require support.



### Physical Condition

Assess the young woman's physical appearance. Indicators of malnutrition or neglect – such as poor hygiene, unkempt hair, or inappropriate clothing for the environment – can signify a lack of care or support.

### Use of Burner Phones

Be alert for young women using disposable or burner phones. This might indicate that they are attempting to avoid detection or maintain communication under restrictive circumstances, which is often associated with exploitation.

### Lack of Personal Documents

Young women without essential documents, such as passports or other identification cards, may be at risk. The absence of proper documentation could suggest they are in a vulnerable situation.

### Pre-arranged Representation

If it appears representation or assistance has been arranged for them without their clear consent or understanding, this could indicate coercive control. Look for signs that the young woman is not freely choosing her next steps or lacks awareness about her situation.







## UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

It's important to be trauma-informed when working with vulnerable young women, which is to know that trauma impacts people differently.

There can, however, be some signs that indicate someone is suffering from the effects of traumatic experiences.

### SPOTTING THE SIGNS

Some signs of trauma to be aware of are:

- Blank stares or difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty with verbal communication
- Aggressive outbursts
- Being easily startled
- Being highly fearful
- Being highly anxious or on edge

“

Women who enter the Criminal Justice System as suspects or offenders often have complex needs and their engagement with the police throughout the criminal justice process must take account of lived experience including routes to crime and female-specific considerations (be they physical, psychological, criminological and societal).

WOMEN IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM,  
NPCC PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

<https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/prevention/2024/wcjs-toolkit-npcc-2024-version-1.pdf>





## HOW TO ENGAGE

In 2022 we worked alongside a group of young women affected by violence to understand how professionals can better support this cohort of young women who are often overlooked by services.

Through conversations, workshops and a residential we developed [Listen to Learn](#), a professional's guide to working with young women affected by violence. Some of the learnings for this guide can be applied to working with young women in custody.

How to engage:  
Creating safe spaces



How to engage:  
What language to use





## CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Creating a safe space between the police and young women who have experienced trauma is essential for building trust. Trust enables connections, allowing young women to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences.

When creating safe spaces young women shared with us that professionals shouldn't make them feel:

Anxious



Judged



Disregarded



Intimidated



Unsupported



Ashamed



Disbelieved



To create a safe space:

Encourage dialogue where young women can voice their concerns and experiences without fear of judgment.



Young women need to feel heard, understood and respected.



Be cultural sensitivity. Recognise and understand the diverse backgrounds and experiences of young women, ensuring you approach interactions with empathy and respect.



Additional needs should be responded to with care.





## WHAT LANGUAGE TO USE

How we talk to, and about, young women can have a significant impact on how safe and supported they feel and whether they want to engage with professionals.

The young women said they wanted professionals to make sure that the words and language they used were:

No big words



Not patronising



Accessible



Conveys interest in understanding the young women's context



If in doubt they suggested that professionals should:

Use urban dictionary!



Use plain simple language



Talk to them about the language they want to use





## SIGNPOSTING & REFERRING

It is essential for police officers, particularly custody suite officers, to identify and support young women who have been arrested but who are also victims of exploitation or abuse. Many of these young women may have experienced sexual violence, domestic violence, drug trafficking, or other forms of trauma that need to be recognised and addressed.

It is crucial to guide these young women toward the appropriate support services. National organisations provide invaluable resources for victims, while local charities can offer tailored support in communities.

By connecting these young women with the help they need, custody suite officers can empower them to rebuild their lives, ensuring long-term safety and wellbeing.

Explore national and local support services





# Custody suite resources

FOR YOUNG WOMEN





## CUSTODY SUITE ASSETS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

It is important to recognise that custody can be an opportunity to help young women recognise the abuse they're facing and how it may be influencing their actions.

For some, time in custody can serve as a safe space, acting as a brief escape from their abuser(s), offering a chance to reflect on their situation.

We've developed resources specifically for young women that can help support them to understand how they've been exploited into their situation.

By providing this information, we hope to guide young women who may be displaying harmful or 'perpetrator' behaviours, helping them understand and articulate their experiences of abuse to professionals in the justice system.

The resources come in a variety of formats, from printed materials to videos, ensuring they're accessible and engaging for young women.

They focus on helping them understand unhealthy relationships in the context of exploitation, giving them information to help make sense of their situation. Additionally, another resource provides clear information about their rights while in custody.

Custody suite officers play a vital role in offering these resources at this critical moment, creating an opportunity for support and reflection.

Fact sheet: Do you know your rights?



Fact sheet: Unhealthy relationships & exploitation



Animations



Comic strips





## FACT SHEET: UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS & EXPLOITATION

This fact sheet is designed to help girls and young women recognise the signs of exploitation and unhealthy relationships.

Understanding when someone is taking advantage of their trust, emotions, or body is crucial for protecting their safety and wellbeing.

By learning about the different forms of exploitation and identifying the red flags of toxic behaviour, they can make informed decisions and build healthy, supportive relationships that empower them.

You can access fact sheets with signposting to Safer London support\* in the additional resources at the end of this document



**Fact sheet: Unhealthy relationships & exploitation**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**



\*Safer London support is only accessible to young women aged up to 25 who are living in London





## FACT SHEET: DO YOU KNOW YOUR RIGHTS?

This fact sheet aims to help girls and young women understand their rights when in police custody.

It is important for them to know their rights to ensure they are treated fairly and with respect in any situation. Whether being questioned, searched, or detained, laws exist to protect individuals from mistreatment.

By understanding these rights, young women can feel more confident and informed, helping them navigate difficult situations. Knowing these protections is key to ensuring their wellbeing and dignity are upheld while in police custody.

You can access fact sheets where we have combined the two topics together in the additional resources at the end of this document



**Fact sheet: Do you know your rights?**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**





## ANIMATIONS

Recognising that every young woman is different and may have additional needs, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) such as dyslexia and autism, we created two animations.

These animations address the same topics of exploitation, unhealthy relationships, and rights when in police custody as in the fact sheets.

They provide clear, accessible information and are available in six languages and British Sign Language (BSL) to ensure inclusivity for a wide and diverse audience.





## ANIMATIONS

**Animation: Do you know  
your rights?**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**



**British Sign Language (BSL)**



**Animation: Unhealthy  
relationships & exploitation**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**



**British Sign Language (BSL)**



You can access animations  
where we have combined  
the two topics together in the  
additional resources at the  
end of this document





### COMIC STRIPS

In addition to the animations, we have developed comic strip versions that can be printed and given to young women to read and absorb while in custody suites.

These comic strips serve as a supplement to the videos or can be used instead, providing a valuable resource for understanding these critical topics.



- Comic: Do you know your rights?** >
- Polish >
- French >
- Bengali >
- Albanian >
- Romanian >

- Comic: Unhealthy relationships & exploitation** >
- Polish >
- French >
- Bengali >
- Albanian >
- Romanian >





**Further information  
and resources**





## SERVICES & SUPPORT

### NATIONAL

#### EPCAT

Dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of children and young people, providing support services for those affected.

[www.ecpat.org.uk/](http://www.ecpat.org.uk/)

#### Unseen UK

Focuses on combating human trafficking and modern slavery, providing support and resources for victims.

[www.unseenuk.org](http://www.unseenuk.org)

#### Catch22

Provides support and services to vulnerable young people, including those at risk of exploitation and violence.

[www.catch-22.org.uk/](http://www.catch-22.org.uk/)

#### St Giles Trust

Offers support to vulnerable individuals, including young people affected by exploitation and gang involvement, through various programs.

[www.stgilestrust.org.uk/](http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/)

#### Barnardo's

Works with vulnerable children and young people, providing a range of services to support those who have been exploited.

[www.barnardos.org.uk/](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/)

#### Victim Support

Offers emotional and practical support to victims of crime, including young women affected by exploitation.

[www.victimsupport.org.uk/](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/)

#### The Survivors Trust

A national umbrella organisation for specialist services supporting survivors of sexual violence.

[www.thesurvivorstrust.org/](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/)

#### Women's Aid

Supports women and children experiencing domestic violence, offering resources and refuge for those escaping abusive situations.

[www.womensaid.org.uk/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/)

#### Refuge

Provides support for women and children experiencing domestic violence, offering safe accommodation and advice.

[www.refuge.org.uk/](http://www.refuge.org.uk/)





## SERVICES & SUPPORT

### REGIONAL - LONDON

#### Safer London (London)

Works to support young people who are impacted or at risk of exploitation and in violence.

[www.saferlondon.org.uk/](http://www.saferlondon.org.uk/)

#### NIA (London - Haringey and Hackney)

Provides support to women through their East London Rape Crisis Service, IDVAs, exiting prostitution services and refuge support for women escaping domestic abuse and sexual violence.

<https://niaendingviolence.org.uk/>

#### Ashiana (London)

Provides specialist refuge, advice, support, and counselling services for black and minority ethnic women and girls (14+) affected by domestic violence, sexual violence, forced marriage, honour based violence, and female genital mutilation.

<http://www.ashiana.org.uk/>

#### South London Rape Crisis (RASASC)

Offers helpline support, counselling, group support and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVA).

<http://www.rasasc.org.uk/>

#### Women and Girls Network (London)

Provides advice and helpline services, counselling and therapeutic support, practical support, advocacy and a young women's service.

<http://www.wgn.org.uk/>

#### North London Rape Crisis (Solace Women's Aid)

Offers specialist emotional support through their helpline, counselling, ISVAs, group work and a family and friends service.

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/solace-rape-crisis>

#### Abianda (London)

Focuses on supporting young women affected by gang exploitation, providing tailored support services.

[www.abianda.com/](http://www.abianda.com/)

### REGIONAL - SOUTH

#### Centre for Action on Rape and Abuse (Essex)

Provides independent, specialist support to victims and survivors of any kind of sexual violence.

<http://www.caraessex.org.uk/>

#### SERICC Rape and Sexual Abuse Specialist Service (Essex)

Provides one-to-one counselling for adults who are victims and survivors of any type of sexual violence, either recently or in the past.

<https://sericc.org.uk/>

#### Survivors' Network (Sussex Rape Crisis Centre)

Provides therapeutic support to all self-identifying women aged 18+ years for survivors and their supporters, SVA service open to survivors of all genders aged 18+ years, and anonymous/confidential support via telephone and email.

<http://www.survivorsnetwork.org.uk>





## SERVICES & SUPPORT

### REGIONAL - NORTH

#### Safety Net

A free service supporting the recovery of those affected by rape, exploitation, sexual and domestic abuse in Cumbria.

<https://www.safetynetuk.org/>

#### Tomorrow's Women (Merseyside)

A charity for women, run by women, offering support with a range of issues including domestic abuse, mental health, substance misuse, wellbeing & confidence, and social isolation.

<https://www.tomorrowswomen.org.uk/>

#### RASA Merseyside

A specialist service for anyone who has experienced sexual violence at any time in their life. The offer advice and support, independent advocacy and counselling among their services.

<https://www.rasamerseyside.org/>

#### Greater Manchester Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Support Centre

A women led, women only service, committed to providing a safe space in which survivors can heal.

<https://www.manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk/>

### REGIONAL - MIDLANDS AND WEST

#### SARSAS (Somerset and Avon)

Provides support for anyone affected by sexual violence and abuse in Somerset and Avon.

[www.sarsas.org.uk/](http://www.sarsas.org.uk/)

#### Black Country Women's Aid

An independent charity which has supported survivors of abuse and exploitation in the West Midlands

<https://blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk/>

#### Lincolnshire Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Services

Provides support to survivors in Lincolnshire.

<https://lincolnshirerapecrisis.org.uk/>

#### SV2

Provides support from Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) to survivors of sexual violence in Derbyshire.

<https://www.sv2.org.uk/>







## READING LIST

### Reports and research

[We've not given up: young women surviving the criminal justice system](#) – final report of the Young Women's Justice Project, run by Agenda and the Alliance for Youth Justice

[Keeping Girls and Young Women Safe: Protecting and supporting the girls and young women at risk of exploitation, violence, gangs and harm](#) – Manchester Metropolitan University and the Commission on Young Lives study

[A thematic review of Outcomes for Girls in Custody](#) – HM Inspectorate of Prisons report

[Arresting the entry of women into the criminal justice system](#) – Howard League for Penal Reform

[Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system](#) – Ministry of Justice report

[What do the public want from police? Towards a Minimum Policing Standard](#) – The Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre

### Articles

["Polluted the entire bloodline" – A spotlight on the experiences of young Muslim women in the criminal justice system](#) – interview with Dr Sofia Buncy, Director and Founder of the Muslim Women in Prison (MWIP) Project

### Guides and resources

[Role of the police in domestic violence and abuse](#) – Social Care Talk guide for friends, family, and professionals who suspect someone is in an abusive relationship and want to learn how to help effectively.

[Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault](#) – Survivors' Network's tips on the 'DOs' and 'DON'Ts' of supporting someone through

### Books

Working with the Trauma of Rape and Sexual Violence: A Guide for Professionals. Sue J. Daniels (Author). Foreword by Ivan Tyrrell





## FURTHER RESOURCES

### COMBINED ANIMATIONS

**Animation: Combined**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**



**British Sign Language (BSL)**



### YOUNG WOMEN COMBINED FACT SHEETS

**Fact sheet: Combined**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**



### LONDON BASED SUPPORT UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS & EXPLOITATION

**Fact sheet: Unhealthy  
relationships & exploitation**



**Polish**



**French**



**Bengali**



**Albanian**



**Romanian**





## REFERENCES

PAGE 8

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## GET IN TOUCH

To discuss potential partnerships or to commission our services, please email [bd@saferlondon.org.uk](mailto:bd@saferlondon.org.uk).

Information on our services, including criteria and how to make a referral, can be found on our website: [www.saferlondon.org.uk](http://www.saferlondon.org.uk)

For general enquiries please email [info@saferlondon.org.uk](mailto:info@saferlondon.org.uk)





## ABOUT SAFER LONDON

Safer London works with young Londoners and families affected by violence and exploitation.

Through specialist one-to-one intervention, we are supporting young Londoners to move onto the positive futures they deserve. We put young Londoners at the centre of their support, focusing on them and their needs. By building strong, trusting relationships we gain an insight into their world, begin to understand what they need and together we find the best ways to keep them safe.

With a footprint in every borough in London, we build trusting, professional partnerships to embed our approaches and work towards achieving our vision of a city that is safer for all young Londoners who live here.

Safer London is a registered charity in England and Wales No. 1109444; and a company limited by guarantee No. 5190766. [www.saferlondon.org.uk](http://www.saferlondon.org.uk)

### ANIMATION AND FILM CREDITS

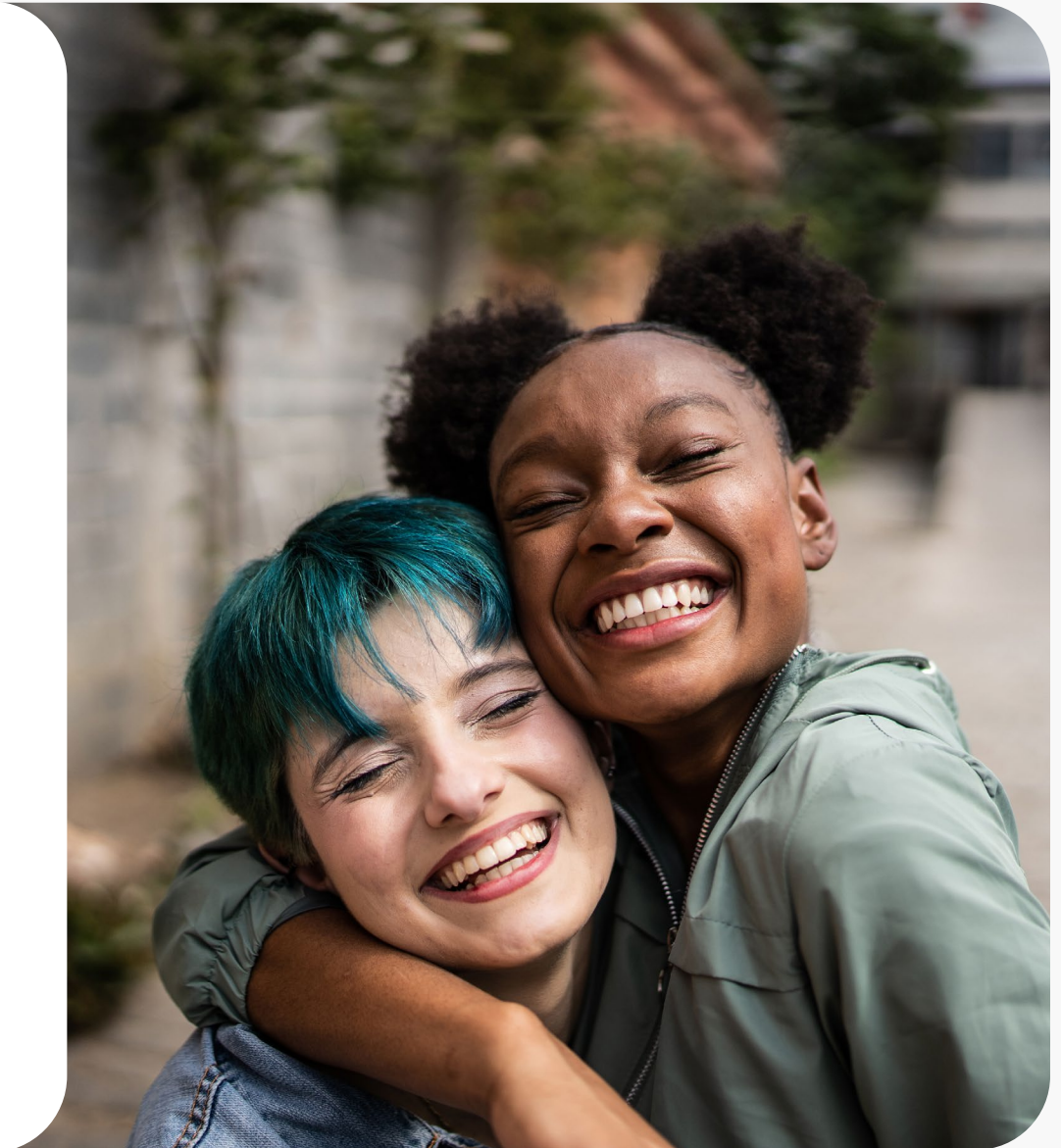
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- Photographer/ Production Assistant: Lukas Smith
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- Illustrator: Charlie Emsley
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# saferlondon

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