Easy reads – accessible safeguarding information for young people with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN)

The easy read scheme was created with Fairfield College to support young people with disabilities, improving safety, understanding, and independence.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI)
Organisation	Wiltshire Police
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Region	South West
Partners	Police Education Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	January 2025
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people Disability

Aim

The aim of the easy read is to:

- improve safety and safeguarding of young people with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN) by providing clear, accessible resources
- empower young people to understand risks and make informed decisions to protect themselves from harm
- prevent victimisation by reducing vulnerability to crime, exploitation, and unsafe situations
- promote inclusion and accessibility through easy read materials tailored to different learning abilities
- build trust and engagement between vulnerable young people and the police by making information easier to access and understand
- support education settings (SEN, mainstream, and independent schools) with practical resources for teaching personal safety and crime prevention
- expand awareness across the community and other police forces by developing new easy reads on topics like county lines, exploitation, and cuckooing

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the easy read are to:

- increase awareness and understanding of personal safety among young people with disabilities and SEN
- increase engagement and trust between vulnerable young people and the police

- reduce the number of incidents where young people with disabilities are targeted or exploited (for example, county lines, cuckooing)
- increase use of easy read resources by schools, colleges, and community organisations
- reduce barriers to accessing crime prevention and safeguarding advice for people with learning disabilities
- increase proactive safeguarding conversations during school sessions and community visits
- increase knowledge among police officers about the needs of young people with disabilities, improving how they deliver safeguarding messages

Description

Background

The easy read initiative was developed to address a gap in policing communications for young people with disabilities and SEN, as existing safeguarding materials were often too complex. Officers regularly encountered cases where vulnerable individuals were targeted by untrusted visitors in their own homes. These incidents demonstrated an urgent need for a resource that could empower young people to recognise risks, protect themselves, and build confidence in engaging with the police.

Planning process

Planning for the easy read began with a commitment to co-design. Officers from Wiltshire Police's early intervention team worked directly with staff at Fairfield Steps, who provide opportunities for individuals with learning and physical disabilities. They assisted in establishing the right language, tone, and format for the resource. Draft materials were tested with students to ensure comprehension, and their feedback directly influenced revisions.

The approach was deliberately inclusive, enabling young people with lived experience to shape a safeguarding tool designed for their peers. Alongside this, the communications team was engaged to design layouts and incorporate visuals to ensure the document was easy to follow and accessible. Senior managers were briefed at each stage to ensure the project aligned with force priorities around accessibility and community engagement.

Roles and teams involved

The project was a collaborative effort involving several groups. The early intervention team led the initiative and provided expertise on safeguarding risks such as exploitation, county lines, and stranger danger. The Fairfield Steps programme staff and students played a vital role in testing and co-authoring the content, ensuring that it was pitched at the right level for different learning needs.

One supported adult, not only a contributor but also featured in the guide, further enhanced relatability. The communications team supported the production process by finalising the design and uploading the finished guide to the Wiltshire Police website. In addition, community partners such as schools, libraries, and local organisations assisted with the wider promotion and distribution.

Implementation process

The easy read officially launched in January 2025 on the Wiltshire Police website. To maximise reach, the guide was also made available through:

- libraries
- schools (SEN, mainstream, and independent)
- community events
- engagement sessions delivered by police officers

Copies were placed in enquiry offices, custody suites, and communications hubs, ensuring it could be accessed across different parts of the policing environment. The resource was also promoted through Wiltshire Police's social media and news channels, increasing visibility within the wider community.

Beyond the initial launch, the easy read continues to be integrated into school visits and safeguarding sessions, where officers use it as a teaching and discussion tool. Neighbouring police forces have been informed about the initiative, and some are exploring ways to adopt or adapt similar resources for their own areas. Building on the success of the first guide, work has already started on further easy reads covering more specific risks such as county lines, exploitation, and cuckooing, with draft versions currently being tested.

Funding and approval

The initiative did not require a dedicated external funding stream. Costs were absorbed within existing Wiltshire Police resources, with the communications team supporting design work and the early intervention team providing officer time. Fairfield Steps contributed staff and student involvement without additional funding, reflecting a strong partnership model.

Senior leadership within Wiltshire Police supported the initiative from the outset, recognising its potential to strengthen safeguarding, improve accessibility, and build trust with vulnerable communities. Their approval was required for publication on the force website and for distribution across official police sites such as enquiry offices and custody suites. Leadership endorsement also provided the momentum for promoting the resource more widely across the county and beyond.

Replication guidance

For other areas considering a similar initiative, the process can be summarised as follows.

- Identify the communication gap and establish the specific needs of vulnerable groups.
- Co-design resources directly with those groups to ensure accessibility and relevance.
- Engage communications staff early to support design and distribution.
- Secure senior leadership approval to integrate the resource within official channels.
- Promote and embed the guide through schools, community partners, and police outreach, while continuously gathering feedback to refine and expand the approach.

Overall impact

Findings and observations

The easy read has demonstrated its value in making safeguarding information more accessible to young people with disabilities and SEN. Observations from Fairfield College sessions show that students are able to engage with the materials more confidently than with standard resources, and they can discuss safety scenarios with greater clarity. Officers also reported that the resource improves comprehension of complex issues, such as recognising "stranger danger" or understanding exploitation risks.

As a result of the practice, the easy read has been rolled out widely across:

- the Wiltshire Police website (published in January 2025)

- schools (SEN, mainstream, and independent), enquiry offices, custody suites, and communications hubs, and used actively during school visits and engagement sessions by officers
- libraries and community venues to increase public accessibility
- neighbouring forces, with some beginning to develop their own easy reads

A second easy read focusing on county lines, exploitation, and cuckooing has been drafted and is currently being tested, showing clear momentum for wider roll out and subject expansion.

Feedback from officers, staff and service users

- Feedback from Fairfield College students indicates that the easy read is easy to understand and relatable, with the involvement of a supported adult helping make the material more approachable.
- Staff at the college reported that students were able to grasp safeguarding concepts more quickly, and officers highlighted that the guide has become a valuable discussion tool during visits. Internally, Wiltshire Police staff have expressed support for expanding the resource to cover other safeguarding themes.

Achievements of intended outcomes

The intervention has already achieved several of its intended outcomes.

- Increased awareness and understanding - students with SEN are better able to understand safeguarding messages and apply them to real-life scenarios.
- Increased accessibility - safeguarding materials are now available in easy read format both online and in physical locations across the county.
- Reduction in barriers - feedback confirms that students who previously struggled with complex materials can now engage meaningfully.
- Increased engagement and trust - by co-designing the resource with young people, the police have built stronger trust and engagement with a group often considered hard to reach.
- Expansion to new topics - work is already underway on further easy reads, which shows sustainability and growth of the initiative.

While it is too early to evidence measurable reductions in crime or exploitation, the qualitative impact on awareness, empowerment, and accessibility is clear. The intervention has laid strong

foundations for long-term safeguarding benefits.

Learning

What went well

- The co-production approach with Fairfield College students worked well. By involving young people directly in testing and shaping the easy read, the resource was both accessible and relevant to its intended audience.
- Launching the easy read with a visible ambassador helped personalise the message and increase relatability for service users.
- Internal support from Wiltshire Police's early intervention team and communications team ensured that the project progressed smoothly and was delivered professionally.
- Embedding the easy read into school visits and safeguarding sessions added immediate practical value, rather than leaving it as a static resource.

Challenges or barriers

- The main challenge was the limited awareness and uptake outside of Fairfield College. While the resource was shared widely, ensuring consistent use across all schools and community groups requires greater promotion and follow-up.
- The Wiltshire Police website is subject to a national template, which restricts flexibility. This makes it harder to ensure that the easy read is immediately visible to those who need it most.
- There is currently no formal evaluation framework in place, making it difficult to quantify the impact beyond qualitative feedback.

Weaknesses

- The reliance on a single partner school (Fairfield College) for testing and feedback limited the diversity of perspectives in the development phase. Wider piloting across multiple schools and learning environments could have strengthened the product.
- Promotion beyond Wiltshire has been limited, and without stronger marketing, the potential impact across neighbouring forces is reduced.
- Lack of dedicated funding meant the project was entirely resourced through officer and staff time, which may limit scalability in the long term.

Advice for others

- Co-design is essential - engage the intended users directly from the outset to ensure accessibility and relevance.
- Pilot in multiple settings - testing with a broader group of schools or organisations will provide more robust feedback and improve the final product.
- Secure strong communication channels - ensure resources are easy to find online and supported by clear promotional campaigns.
- Plan for evaluation early - establish measurable outcomes (such as student comprehension, uptake numbers, distribution reach) before launch to strengthen evidence of impact.
- Embed in existing programmes - use the easy read not just as a standalone resource but as part of wider safeguarding education, ensuring officers and teachers use it actively in discussions.

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