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Guidance for Creating Safe Spaces for Girls and Young Women

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PRIORITY 1-54

**COMIC
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Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the young women who took part in the I'm Speaking project for their courage, creativity, and commitment.

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Finally, we thank our funders, Comic Relief and Lewes Borough Council, whose support made this project possible.



1. Introduction

This guidance was developed by young women involved in I'm Speaking, project in East Sussex that focused on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and community safety priorities, during 2025, with Comic Relief funding.

Through creative workshops, they turned lived experience into clear recommendations for creating safe spaces for girls and young women in youth setting. The guidance was then piloted in youth hub settings across East Sussex, with learning fed back into this version so others can apply it quickly.

2. Why the Lundy Model sits underneath this work

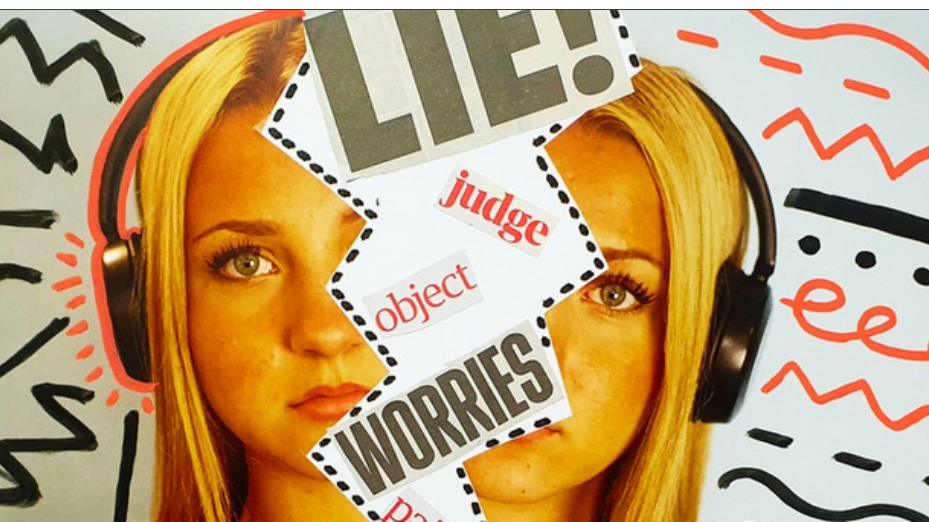
The principles underpinning this work are guided by the Lundy Model of Participation i.e. Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. So, the guidance doesn't just ask girls and young women to speak but sets the conditions for safety, ensures multiple ways to speak up, helps identify audiences who must listen, and looks how young women can influence change. You can also use the four headings as a quick health check when planning or reviewing sessions.

3. How to use this guidance

This guidance is primarily for youth workers, but can be used by schools and other youth settings that want to set up girls' and young women-only spaces that feel safe, welcoming and purposeful. It outlines what young women said matters most. For example, how sessions should be run, who's in the room, and what makes it feel genuinely their space.

You can use this guidance as a consultation tool with girls and young women:

- Before setting up the group, to help identify its purpose, the group agreement, staff mix and session times.



“I’ve faced so much discrimination and sexual harassment. Being part of this group is about me taking back control.”

Young woman, age, 17

“For me being part of this group is about actions speaking louder than words and taking an active role in speaking up for our rights”

Young woman, age 16.

- When a group is newly established, to check that the setup reflects what young people asked for, and to agree on priorities.
- For existing groups, to review, adjust, and evidence change through simple 'You Said, We Did' updates.

5. Expect disclosures

Given the nature of these spaces, i.e. covering VAWG, safety, relationships, and online harms, disclosures are likely. Plan for them and normalise help-seeking:

- Make time for 1:1 check-ins and identify a quiet room.
- Remind young people they can pause/step out at any point.
- Use simple, trauma-informed language to acknowledge what's been shared and explain next steps.
- Follow your policy: if there is an immediate risk, act at once e.g. 999 as required. Otherwise, inform the DSL the same day, record objectively (who/what/when), and agree on a safety plan.
- Share information on a need-to-know basis, in line with law and local protocols, and tell the young person what will be shared and why.
- Build in staff debrief and supervision to manage vicarious trauma and maintain good judgement.

6. Finally

In short, this guidance has been written by young women, for young women, is practical, offers a rights-based approach, and has been tested in youth hubs. Use it to create spaces that are not only safer, but also where young women have influence.

“I liked the range of ways to express our viewpoints like speaking in a group, writing down ideas and the graffiti.”

Young woman, age 15.





Creating Safe Spaces for Girls and Young Women

1. Design the space with care and intention

- Spaces should be calm and welcoming.
- Provide comfortable seating, private areas, free sanitary products, and snacks.
- Consider a sensory-friendly setup for neurodiverse young people.

‘It should feel safe and calm, not just a youth centre but a space for us.’

Young woman aged 14

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



2. Make sure staff are trained and relatable

- Youth workers should receive training in safeguarding, trauma-informed practice and VAWG.
- Ensure at two trusted female worker are present and accessible.
- Staff should model respect, listen without judgement, and support disclosures safely.

‘Invite trusted women to speak to the group and youth workers we feel comfortable with.’

Young woman aged 15

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



3. Ensure emotional and physical safety

- Create a group agreement with clear expectations around confidentiality and respect.
- Provide a quiet space or breakout area in case someone feels overwhelmed.
- Always have a safeguarding pathway and mental health support options in place.

‘Let people step back without making it a big deal.’

Young woman aged 18

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**GIRLS JUST
WANNA HAVE
FUNDAMENTAL
HUMAN RIGHTS**

4. Be visible and accessible

- Don't assume young women know about the space, go out and invite them in.
- Promote sessions clearly using posters, youth workers, schools, social media.
- Hold sessions at consistent times and make them easy to attend.

‘Make sure we know about them — PROMOTION.’

Young woman aged 14

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



5. Let girls and young women lead

- Give young women real influence over what's discussed and how it's run.
- Involve them in shaping session formats, group agreements and project aims.
- Offer them roles as peer mentors, session leaders or creative collaborators.

‘Girls should decide the topic or male participation.’

Young woman aged 18

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**yes
girl,
you
can.**

6. Offer different ways to speak up

- Use art, writing, creative prompts or social media for different communication styles.
- Encourage expression through fun and creative activities using poster-making, graffiti, film, or collage.
- Provide structured but flexible space for creative voice, as this boosts confidence and ownership.

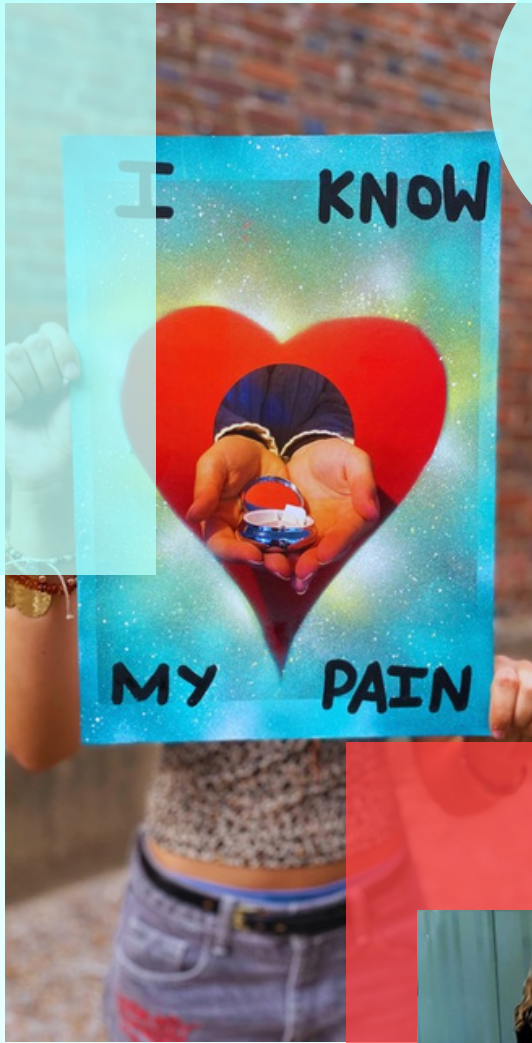
‘Let us speak in our own way. Some of us write it, some say it, and some draw it.’

Young woman aged 16

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.





7. Promote dignity and self-care

- Support positive language (e.g. 'period dignity' not 'period poverty').
- Offer body image support and challenge online toxic norms through education.
- Run self-defence or empowerment sessions on consent and personal safety.

‘Free products in toilets, stop the embarrassment.’

Young woman aged 16

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



8. Be inclusive, but respectful of safety

- Involve all genders only when the group is fully comfortable, by invitation only and agreement of everyone in the group.
- Respect that some conversations need to be women-only to feel safe.
- Promote allyship, but don't dilute the space's core purpose.

‘Inclusion is good, but only if it feels safe.’

Young woman aged 16

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



9. Follow up and show impact

- Share what's happened as a result of the group's input using a **'You Said, We Did'** approach.
- Invite young women into decision-making processes e.g. staff training or consultation panels.

'Don't just listen, but support us to change things.'

Young woman aged 16

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



10. Embed a culture of respect

- Promote respect for girls and young women within the group and beyond it, including online spaces.
- Help young people challenge sexism, harassment, and harmful behaviour in their everyday lives.

'Respect towards women needs to be encouraged in the group but especially outside the group.'

Young woman aged 16

What this means for our group:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Additional Notes

**“Today was about creating meaningful art that I
am proud of”**

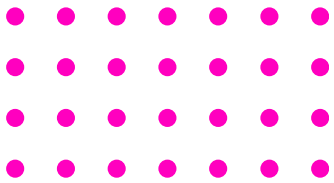
Young woman, age 15.



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07846 137 597



www.priority154.com



john.khan@priority154.com

PREPARED BY:

JOHN KHAN