

# Islington Youth Safety Strategy 2025-30 Engagement Report

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*Kids forcing that life causing stress to their  
mums coming from big homes talking about  
bussing guns it's the truth they can't see it's the  
life they want to be I used to stain man up for  
the phones and P*

*All these kids act tough and it's making me stuff  
it's gotten to a point where their mothers tears  
aren't enough you haven't seen what I've seen,  
you haven't done what I've done, you don't live  
the wag that you talk, you haven't made big men  
run*

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*'My Safe Place' artwork completed by a child during an engagement focus group.*

*'Untitled' poem completed by a child during an engagement focus group.*

# Contents

## Contents

Contents.....	2
Executive Summary .....	4
Background.....	5
Literature Review .....	6
Addressing Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health .....	6
Safer Places and Housing Environments .....	7
Online Environments and Digital Harms.....	7
Youth Crime and Exploitation .....	8
Reducing School Exclusions and Promoting Inclusion .....	8
Informal Networks and Community-Led Support.....	9
Conclusion.....	9
Aim.....	9
Methods .....	10
Surveys .....	10
Survey promotion.....	11
Focus Groups.....	11
Participant demographics .....	12
Survey.....	12
Focus groups .....	23
Analysis.....	24
Surveys .....	24
Children and Young People .....	24

Parents and Carers.....	30
Professionals and Volunteers: .....	35
Focus groups.....	39
Existing Data Sources .....	39
Focus Groups .....	40
Themes .....	40
Hobbies.....	40
Trusted relationships.....	40
Places and Spaces .....	41
Time of day .....	44
Vulnerable people .....	44
Social media and online safety .....	48
Youth Crime and Exploitation .....	50
Sense of belonging .....	54
Solutions .....	55
Limitations.....	60
Conclusion .....	62
Recommendations .....	62
Acknowledgements .....	64
Appendix .....	65
Appendices 1.....	65
Appendices 2.....	65
References.....	66

# Executive Summary

This report describes the engagement activities that were carried out with Islington children, young people, parents, carers, professionals and volunteers by Islington Council to inform the Youth Safety Strategy 2025-2030. The engagement activities were completed between March to June 2025 and involved both online surveys and in-person focus groups. A total of 843 voices were heard as part of the engagement activities: there were 620 responses to the survey and 223 people who attended the focus groups.

The topics explored in this research were derived from a literature review with the intention to address the gaps in previous research and local knowledge.

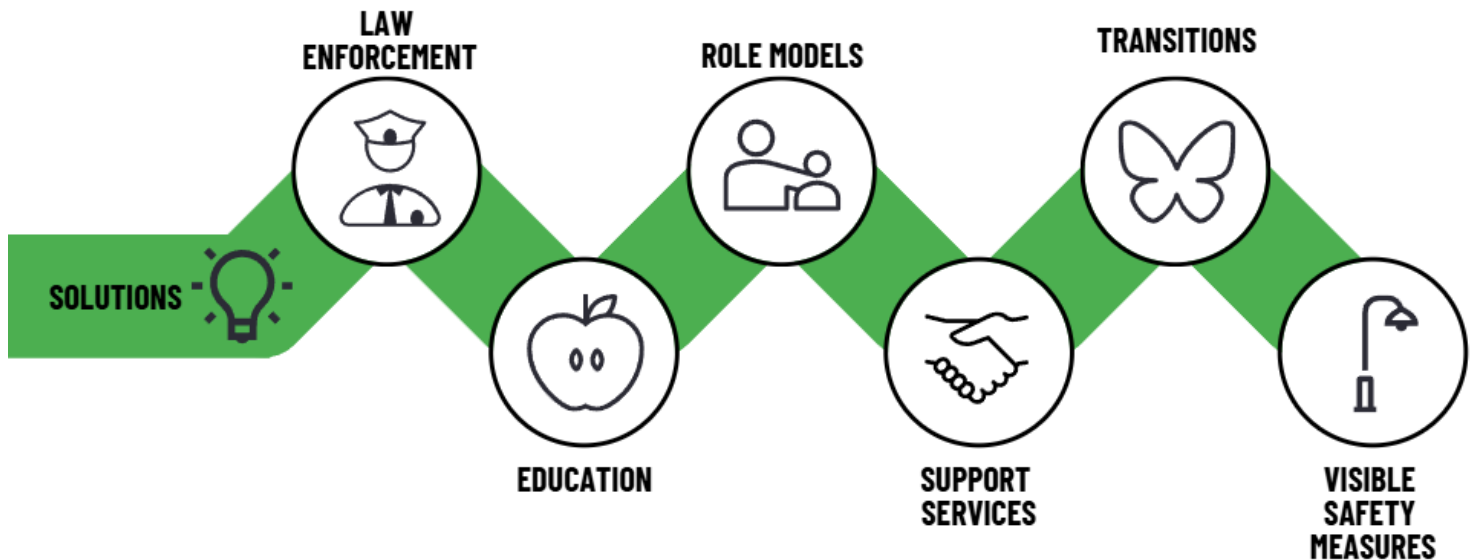
The research findings and other local research highlighted the following themes in relation to youth safety in-:

**Figure 1. Infographic of key themes on youth safety**



The research aimed to empower participants to act with agency to generate solutions to improve youth safety in Islington. The following solutions were identified by Islington children, young people, parents, carers, professionals and volunteers:

**Figure 2. Infographic on solutions to youth safety**



The findings from this work have been used to create recommendations to help guide the development of Islington’s Youth Safety Strategy 2025-2030. The recommendations focus on increasing visible safety measures, boosting police presence and trust, providing more education and awareness training, improved educational support, more multi-agency collaboration, increased safe spaces and prosocial activity opportunities, and improved local data collation to inform local responses to safety concerns.

## Background

Islington Council’s Youth Safety Strategy 2020-2025 is due to expire this year. As part of the development of the new Youth Safety Strategy 2025-2030, which is due to be published and launched in November 2025, several months of engagement activities with Islington residents took place.

Young Islington has worked collaboratively with Islington Public Health to lead an extensive and inclusive research process, reflecting the local authority’s strong commitment to listening to and acting on the voices of children, families, and the professionals working within the sector. This research process included surveys for children and young people, parents and carers, as well as professionals working across the youth sector in Islington. In addition, 12 dedicated focus groups and workshops were held to ensure a deeper, more meaningful dialogue with diverse stakeholders. These focus groups and workshops invited children and young people, parents and carers and professionals to participate in discussions about youth safety in the borough. These research activities will be used to help shape the new strategy, placing the lived experiences and insights of children and families in Islington at its core. The approach exemplifies Islington’s commitment to the ‘Child First’ principles, prioritising the rights, needs, and strengths of children,

and ensures that the strategy is not only informed by those it seeks to support, but also empowers them to be active agents of change within their community.

The strategy will adopt a 'Public Health Approach' to youth safety which is holistic and looks at the wider determinants of safety, as illustrated in the Youth Safety Wheel **Appendices 1**). This broad approach demonstrates Islington's commitment to ensure all determinants of youth safety are considered and addressed in the Youth Safety Strategy 2025-2030.

The co-creation of practical solutions to promote increased safety for children and young people in Islington was also key focus of the research activities and will be reflected as a priority of the new strategy.

## Literature Review

To understand the existing research a literature review was undertaken using the Youth Safety Wheel topic framework set out in appendix 1. As represented in the Youth Safety Wheel, the topic framework encompassed a broad range of factors that contribute to youth safety, including but not limited to physical and mental wellbeing, housing, online safety, crime and exploitation and education. This review considered academic, policy, and practice-based literature, including borough-specific and national evidence, to identify the drivers of harm and inform Islington's commitment to building safer futures for children and young people (CYP).

A Public Health perspective sees youth safety not as isolated behaviours, but as outcomes of adverse social conditions. The World Health Organisation (2014) and Public Health England (2019) advocate early intervention, inter-agency, and systemic prevention as cornerstones of reducing youth harm.

This approach broadens the scope of "safety" to include the wider social determinants of health. Islington's research process to inform the Youth Safety Strategy 2025 - 2030 adopted this approach, and focused on structural determinants such as poverty, racism, school exclusion, housing instability, community connection and exposure to trauma. Addressing these determinants holistically is vital to preventing the conditions in which youth violence and harm occurs.

Across local and national studies, young people consistently highlight safety as encompassing trusted relationships, emotional wellbeing, and inclusion (Children's Commissioner, 2021). CYP definitions of safety often differ from those of adults, focusing more on day-to-day wellbeing, kindness, respect, and feeling seen and heard by the adults and services around them (Levitas, 2024).

## Addressing Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Emotional and mental health is a major factor in youth safety. National data from NHS Digital (2023) shows that one in five children now experiences a probable mental health condition. Bellis et al. (2014), shows that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) like abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction significantly raise risks of later violence, mental ill-health, and victimisation.

According to the Early Intervention Foundation (2021), emotional and mental health difficulties often go unrecognised until crisis point, highlighting the need for earlier, embedded support within universal services like schools and youth clubs. Emotional and mental health needs are also closely connected to feelings of safety, fear, exposure to violence, and lack of trusted adults can all exacerbate psychological distress (Patton et al., 2016). Children exposed to violence, parental substance misuse, or housing insecurity are more likely to experience emotional distress (Early Intervention Foundation, 2021). In Islington, the complex needs of children often require coordination across education, health, and social care.

Children also report the need for safe spaces to talk about their emotional and mental health and to have their feelings validated without judgement. They value peer support, honesty from professionals, and services that reflect their realities and cultural identities (Children's Commissioner, 2021).

## Safer Places and Housing Environments

Housing instability is a key concern for many young people in Islington. A recent systematic review conducted by Hock et al. (2023), found that insecure housing is associated with disruptions to education, emotional and mental health, and peer relationships. Housing insecurity, whether through eviction, overcrowding, or temporary accommodation, can lead to isolation and exposure to unsafe environments.

Centrepont (2020) also highlight the hidden nature of youth homelessness, including sofa-surfing and unsafe informal arrangements, which frequently go unrecorded. Such instability directly impacts young people's mental and physical health, school engagement, and ability to access services, all of which are protective factors against harm.

Islington's housing and community safety strategies increasingly recognise the link between stable homes and youth safety. Estate-based support and tenancy sustainment initiatives are examples of interventions that aim to reduce displacement and foster belonging. Public Health England (2015) and Sport England (2022) show that access to safe, inclusive spaces is protective, fostering physical activity, positive peer interaction, and community cohesion. Local schemes like Play Streets, estate-based youth detached and outreach, and designing-out-crime initiatives seek to reclaim spaces for young people.

## Online Environments and Digital Harms

Young people in Islington navigate complex digital landscapes daily. In 2024, Islington Council explored online youth safety and found that young people's top online concerns include poor emotional and mental health, the inability to switch off, and cyberbullying (Levitas, 2024).

Young people described online spaces as both sources of support and stress, with some using digital platforms to escape offline trauma. However, they also report limited access to tools for managing emotional responses to online conflict or harmful content. SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) students found online communities vital for connection (Levitas, 2024).

This confirms research by Livingstone and Third (2017), who argued that there is a need to move beyond fear-based messaging to equip young people with coping skills and critical digital literacy.

Research by the UK Safer Internet Centre (2022) found that while most young people feel empowered online, many also experience distressing content, peer pressure, and cyberbullying. The Children's Commissioner for England (2021), identified online grooming and exposure to harmful content, including misogyny, self-harm encouragement, and extremist ideologies as significant threats.

Children have been found to state that they want adults to better understand the importance of the digital world to their social lives and to be supported rather than monitored (Levitas, 2024). In the literature, children express the need for relationships built on trust, where concerns can be raised without fear of punishment (Levitas, 2024).

## Youth Crime and Exploitation

Islington has seen significant challenges around youth violence, criminal exploitation, and serious youth offending. Serious violence tends to be concentrated in particular wards and disproportionately affects Black and minoritised young people (Islington Council, 2023).

Local data and case reviews align with research from the Children's Society (2019) and Fitzpatrick et al. (2020), which show how young people involved in "county lines" drug networks are often exploited by adults rather than offending of their own volition. These young people frequently experience exclusion from school, housing instability, and family breakdown.

Islington's response through initiatives such as the Islington Collaborative Action Network (ICAN), Contextual Safeguarding approaches, and community-based mentoring reflects best practice in public health-informed safeguarding.

## Reducing School Exclusions and Promoting Inclusion

Reducing school exclusions was a priority of Islington's Youth Safety Strategy 2020 – 2025 and continues to be a focus area. The borough recognises that exclusion increases the risk of harm, often acting as a gateway to disengagement, exploitation, and criminality.

Gill, Quilter-Pinner, and Swift (2017) and the Early Intervention Foundation (2021), show that children excluded from school are more likely to experience poor emotional and mental health, enter the youth justice system, and face long-term disadvantage. This is particularly concerning in Islington, where certain groups (boys from Black Caribbean backgrounds and children with SEND) are disproportionately excluded. In response, the 'Putting Children First – Islington's Plan for Education 2023 - 2030' is committed to ensuring inclusive Practice in Islington secondary schools to reduce pupil exclusions and increase inclusion to develop a greater understanding of effective school practice. This plan also promotes relational approaches in schools and embedding Trauma-Informed Practice borough-wide.



## Informal Networks and Community-Led Support

Relational support from trusted adults and peers is consistently shown to be protective. Luthar et al. (2000), and the Early Intervention Foundation (2018), identify consistent, affirming adult relationships, including from family and community groups, as key to youth resilience. In Islington, community hubs, detached outreach, sports clubs, and youth workers play crucial roles in providing support.

However, Alexander (2021) critiques the trend toward short-term, professionalised youth interventions, noting that they can undermine existing informal support structures. His ethnographic work on a South London estate found that replacing resident-led programmes with externally commissioned services led to increased youth isolation and vulnerability.

Islington's Young Islington model, which integrates VCS partners and youth voice, reflects a move toward rebalancing formal and informal provision for these cohorts.

## Conclusion

The evidence is clear that youth safety cannot be improved by policing or risk management alone. It must be grounded in a Public Health framework that understands harm as socially produced, preventable, and deeply contextual. In Islington, this means addressing structural disadvantage and inequalities, strengthening community, supporting emotional wellbeing, and ensuring young people have consistent relationships with trusted adults.

During the literature review, it was noted that there has been a plethora of research undertaken looking at young people's perception of safety, however there was a lack of evidence into what young people deem the solutions to safety to be.

The following topics also had limited findings on how they linked to safety for young people, these included: domestic abuse, special educational needs and disabilities, physical activity, sextortion and housing. These topics were included in the research to address this gap and to understand them further.

## Aim

The aim of this research was to better understand children and young people's, parents and carers and professionals' experience of safety and their priorities for the borough in relation to shaping local services and taking strategic action.

A large body of academic, policy, and practice-based literature already exists that explores perceptions of safety for children and young people and their parents and carers. Therefore, this research aimed to take a different approach to focus on co-created solutions and opportunities to make Islington safer for its young people.

# Methods

The research consisted of a two-pronged approach to data collection with three online surveys and twelve focus groups.

## Surveys

Three versions of an online survey were created for professionals, children and young people and parents and carers. They were developed using a robust methodological approach in which a multidisciplinary group approved the research questions and each question was taken from existing validated tools to ensure that the survey was evidence based and robust. The surveys were located on Let's Talk Islington, the council's online engagement platform, and consisted of 40 questions per survey taking a maximum of 10 minutes to complete. The surveys were created in collaboration with a qualitative research expert who advised on the survey design and data collection processes.

Each survey was approved by an internal ethics panel and Information Governance approval process due to the sensitive nature of the topic and age of respondents.

The children and young people survey was incentivised by offering a chance to win one of fifty £20 vouchers and/or a tour of the Emirates Stadium. To ensure that the consent age complied with ethical guidelines, children and young people aged 13-25 were able to complete the survey.

The surveys included general demographic questions and the following themes taken from the previous literature review that was completed:

- General safety: belonging, home life, peer pressure, school/ college/ work life, safe travel, general safety and wellbeing.
- Online safety: online bullying.
- Emotional and mental health issues: self-esteem and mental wellbeing, bullying.
- Violence: exploitation, sexual risks, alcohol, drugs.
- SEND: exploitation, neurodivergence.
- Gender: young women and girls, young men and boys, LGBTQ+ community.
- Housing: housing insecurity, homelessness, location.

All the survey questions were taken from existing online surveys for children and young people to ensure validity. The survey questions within the three surveys covered the same topics but

were worded differently to suit the target audience. The aim of this was to allow for comparison between the three cohorts answering the surveys.

## Survey promotion

The surveys were promoted through the following channels:

- To existing stakeholders and partners both internal and external with the ask to circulate wider.
- Posters were sent to different settings across the borough with QR codes linking to the surveys.
- Paid advertisements on social media channels such as YouTube and Facebook.
- Internal channels included: bulletins, estate notice boards, blog posts.

## Focus Groups

In total there were 12 focus groups:

- 6 children and young people sessions,
- 2 parent and carer sessions; and
- 4 professionals' sessions.

Each focus group had 1-2 facilitators as well as 1-2 note takers and most were recorded. For each focus group the data collected was anonymised and consisted of:

- Transcripts from the recording of the children and young people's focus groups.
- Flip charts sheets.
- Notes.
- Drawings.

The focus group breakdown is as follows:

- Parent and carer: the participants were selected through voluntary participation on an online event registration page, and this was promoted through posters and stakeholders. The content of the sessions was to focus on different themes in small groups to identify gaps and solutions. The themes were decided upon by the Parent Empowerment Champions and consisted of social media, knife crime, exploitation, bullying, SEND and schools exclusions/suspensions and detentions.

- **Professionals:** the professionals session followed the same session guide as the parent and carer sessions discussing the same themes. The professionals' focus groups consisted of members are the following: Young Islington Service meeting, Minority Matters conference, Youth Safety Delivery Group and Islington's elected Members.
- **Children and Young People:** the participants were selected to cover a range of young people across different ages and with different lived experience. Each young person received a £20 voucher for their participation. The groups of young people included were: SEND, Arsenal in the Community college students, Youth Council members, Year 5 primary school aged, Alternative Provision and migrant and refugee young people. The session plans were different dependent on the age of the session attendees. The more sensitive topics that were not included in the survey were discussed with the older young people such as domestic abuse and sextortion. A mixed mode approach to data collection was used to ensure the sessions were engaging.

The method used for analysing the data was a rapid review using thematic analysis. A small working group from Public Health coded and themed the qualitative data systematically. A code book was created to identify and define the themes that had emerged from an initial open coding approach and the coding was quality assured to ensure validity.

## Participant demographics

### Survey

Given the stark inequalities in relation to youth safety it was important to collect anonymised detailed demographic information of the respondents.

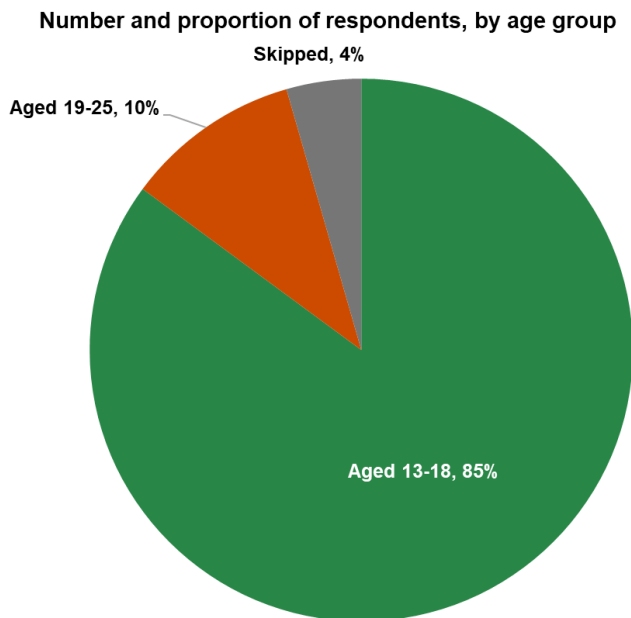
#### **Children and young people**

The inclusion criteria were children and young people aged between 13 years and 25 years old who resided in Islington at the time of the survey. The aim originally for the survey was to consult with young people aged 8-25 years old, however due to ethical concerns and constraints it was deemed most appropriate to start at aged 13 for the survey. This issue was addressed in the focus groups in which 8-year-olds were engaged with.

A total of 450 responses were received. The demographics of respondents are as follows:

## Age

**Figure 3. Number and proportion of child and young person respondents, by age group.**

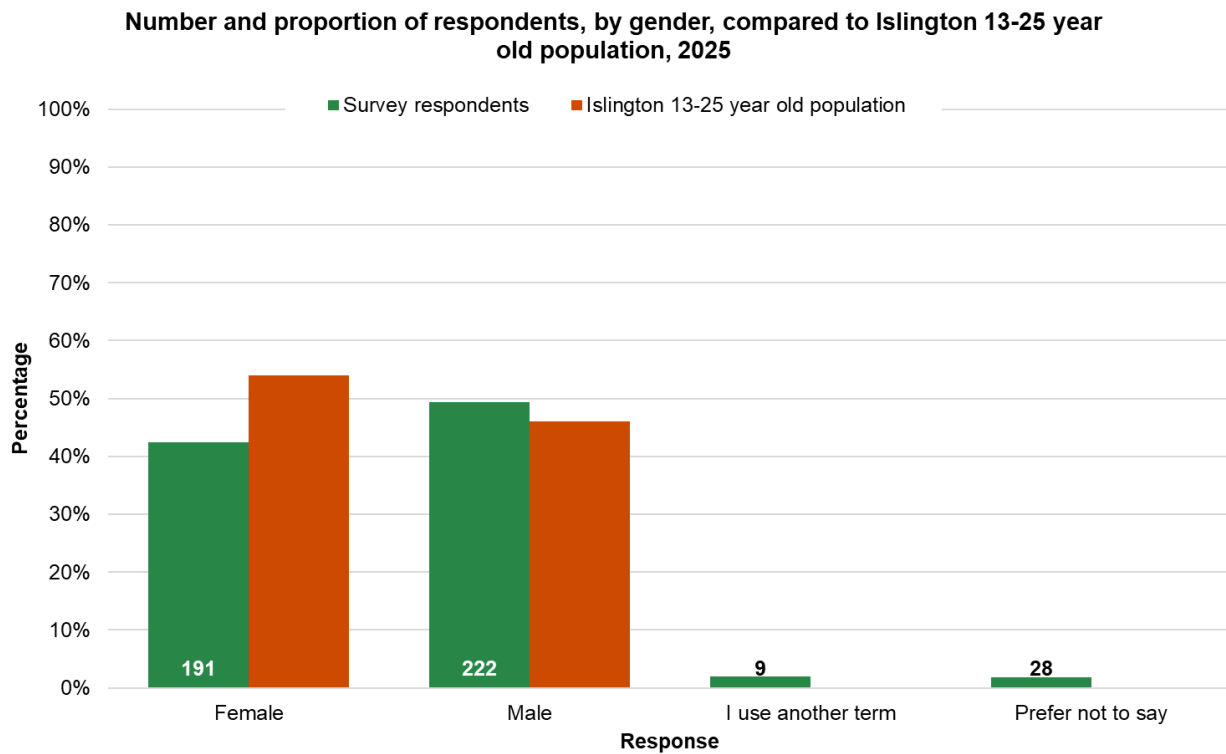


**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

Figure 3 reveals that 85% of respondents were aged between 13 years and 18 years old, with 383 children in this age range. There were 47 young people, representing 10% of the respondents who were aged between 19 years and 25 years old. It is noted that this concentration of younger respondents may be due to the promotion of the survey through schools, youth clubs and local authority services, which were more likely to target children between 13 years and 18 years old. Finally, there were 20 respondents with unknown ages, representing 4% of the cohort.

## Gender

**Figure 4. Number and proportion of child and young person respondents, by gender, compared to Islington 13–25-year-old population, 2025.**

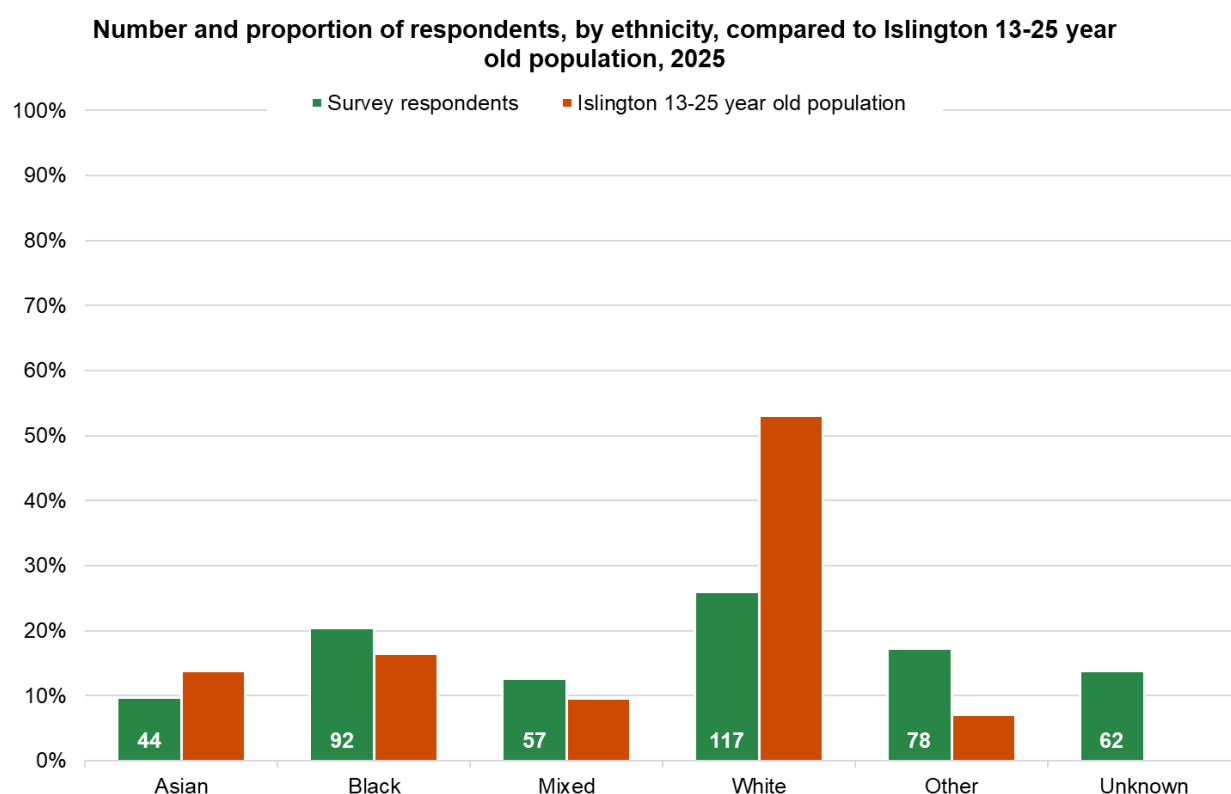


**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025; GLA 2022-based housing-led (central fertility) population projections

In relation to gender, the breakdown was reflective of the Islington population, with 191 or 42% and 222 or 49% of the respondents being female and male, respectively. It is noted that 28 respondents selected that they 'prefer not to say' their gender, representing 6% of the cohort. Finally, nine respondents selected that they 'use another term' to identify their gender, representing 2% of the cohort.

## Ethnicity

**Figure 5. Number and proportion of child and young person respondents, by ethnicity, compared to Islington 13–25-year-old population, 2025.**

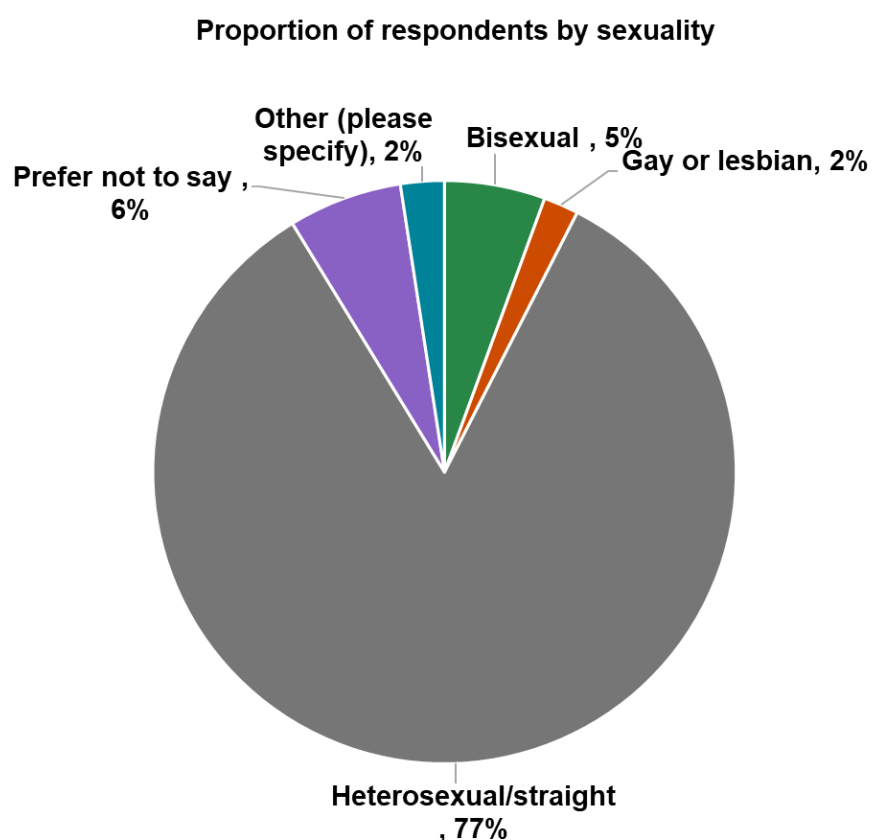


Source: Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025, Census 2021

It is noted that detailed responses about ethnic demographics were collected, however, due to the small sample size demographic subsets have been aggregated. Figure 5 shows that there were 44 Asian respondents, 92 Black respondents, 57 Mixed respondents, 117 White respondents, 78 Other respondents and 62 Unknown respondents. When compared against the Islington census demographics, it is noted that Black, Mixed and Other children and young people were over-represented in the survey response cohort, which is positive. Comparatively, White and Asian children and young people were underrepresented.

## Sexuality

**Figure 6. Proportion of child and young person respondents, by sexuality**



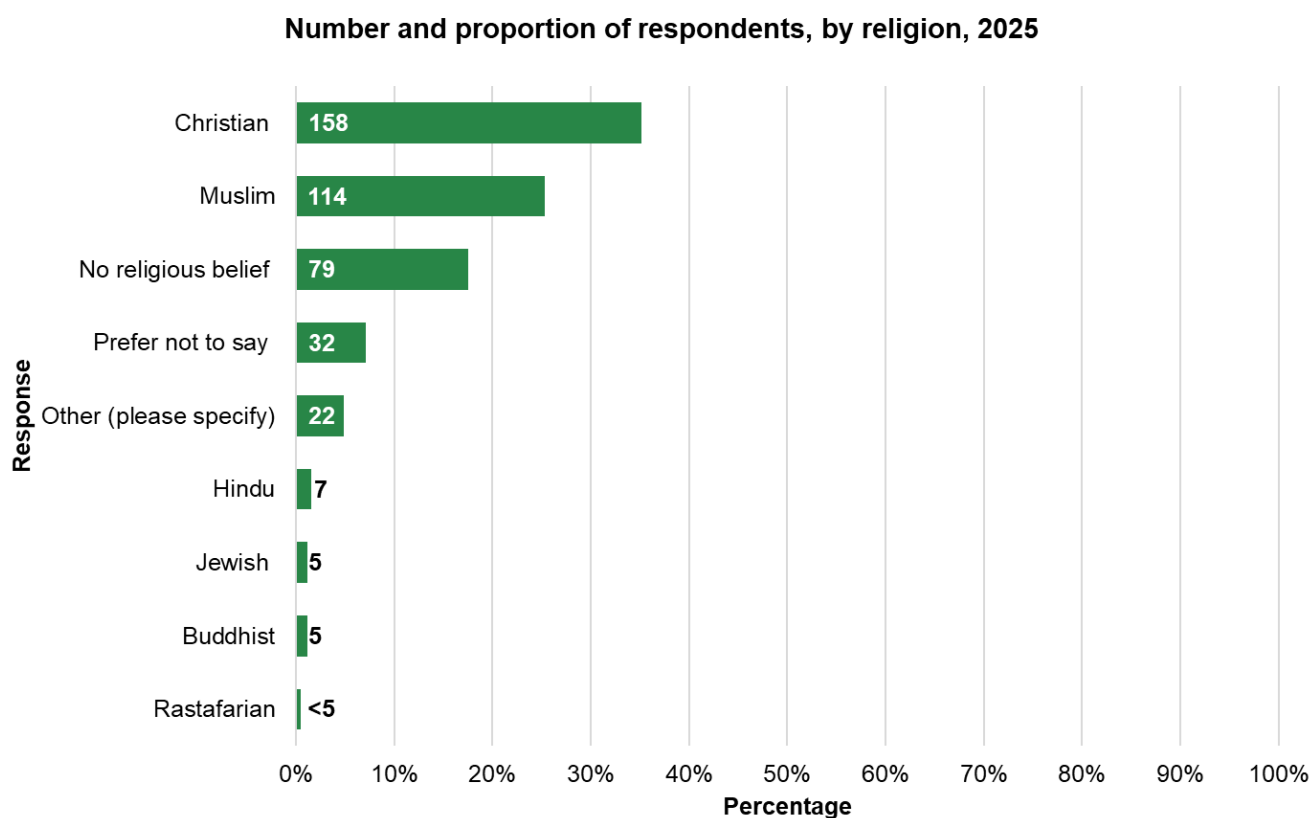
**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

The majority of the respondents, 77%, were heterosexual and gay or lesbian. A smaller percentage of the children and young people, representing 2% and 5% were gay/lesbian or bisexual, respectively. There were 2% and 6% of respondents who selected 'Other' and 'Prefer not to say' in relation to their sexuality.



## Religion

**Figure 7. Proportion of child and young person respondents, by religion, 2025**



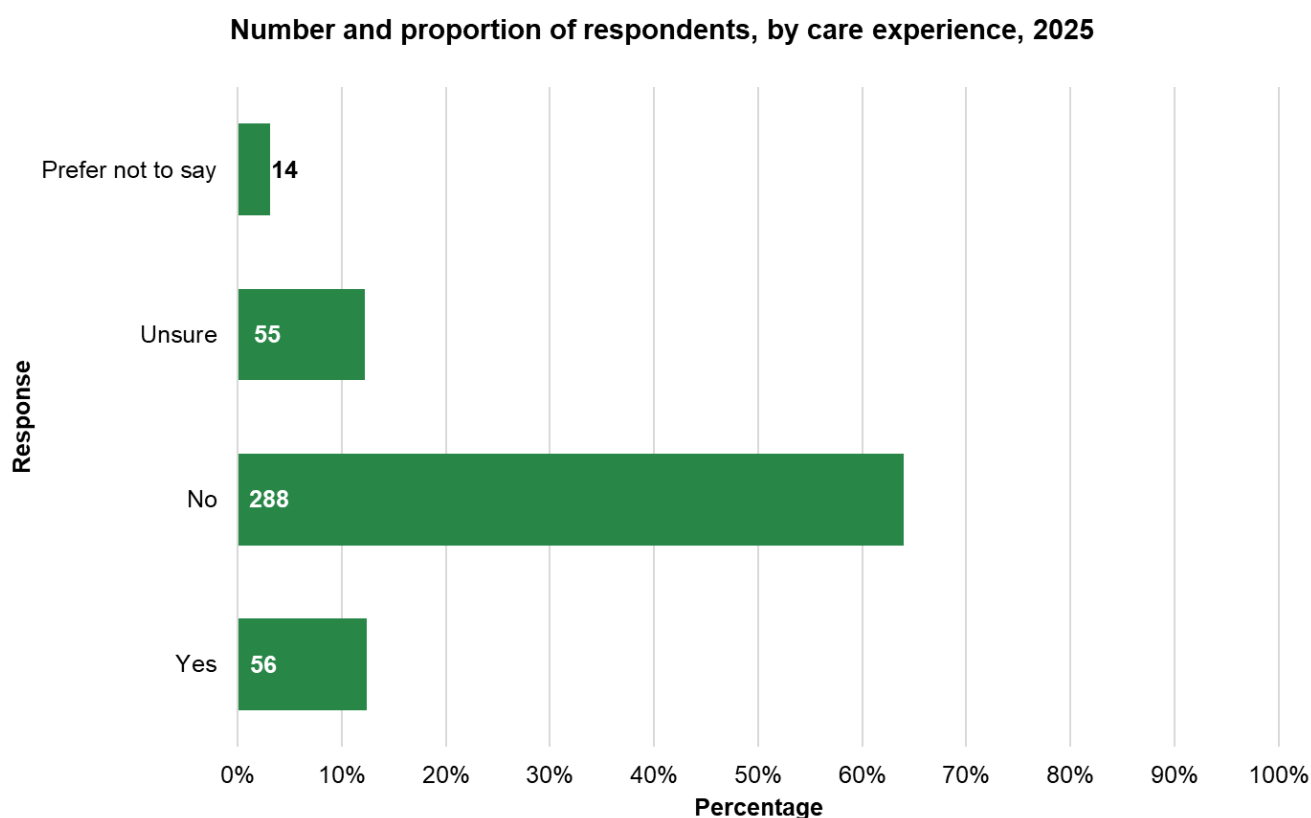
**Note:** No respondents selected Sikh as their religion

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

The predominate religious groups among the survey respondents were Christian and Muslim, with 158 respondents and 114 respondents, respectively. The third and fourth largest groups were 'No religious belief' and 'Prefer not to say', with 79 respondents and 32 respondents respectively. There were also a small number of children and young people who identified as Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist and Rastafarian.

## Care experience

**Figure 8. Number and proportion of child and young person respondents, by care experience, 2025.**



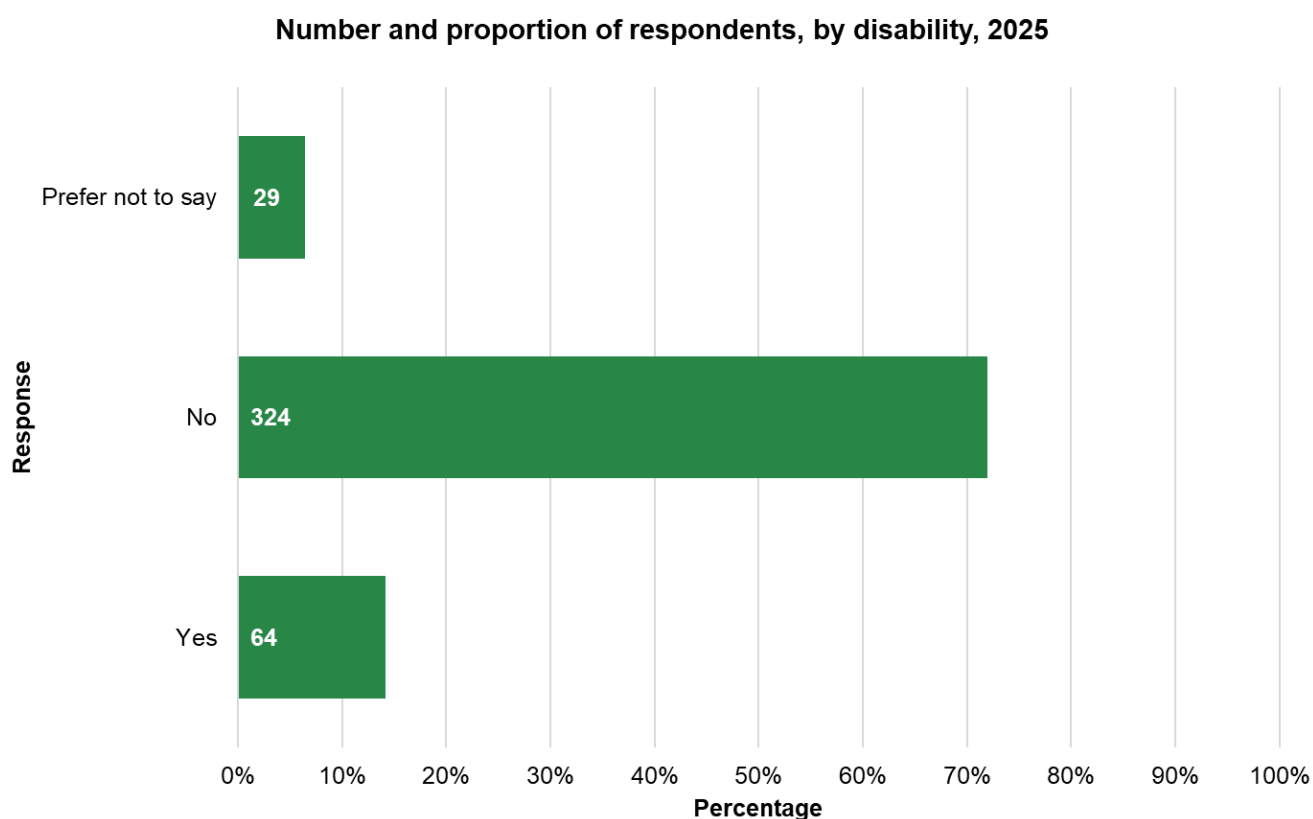
**Note:**

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

There were 56 children and young people who completed the survey who reported that they were 'care experienced'. "Care experienced" is a term used to describe anyone who has been or is currently in the care of a local authority or other care provider. This includes individuals who have lived in settings like foster care, residential care, kinship care, or have been adopted after being in care. It also encompasses those who have been "looked after" at home with a supervision requirement. It is important to gain the views of care experienced children for the purpose of this engagement. survey respondents were not care experienced, with 288 respondents selecting no.

## Disability

**Figure 9. Number and proportion of child and young person respondents, by disability.**

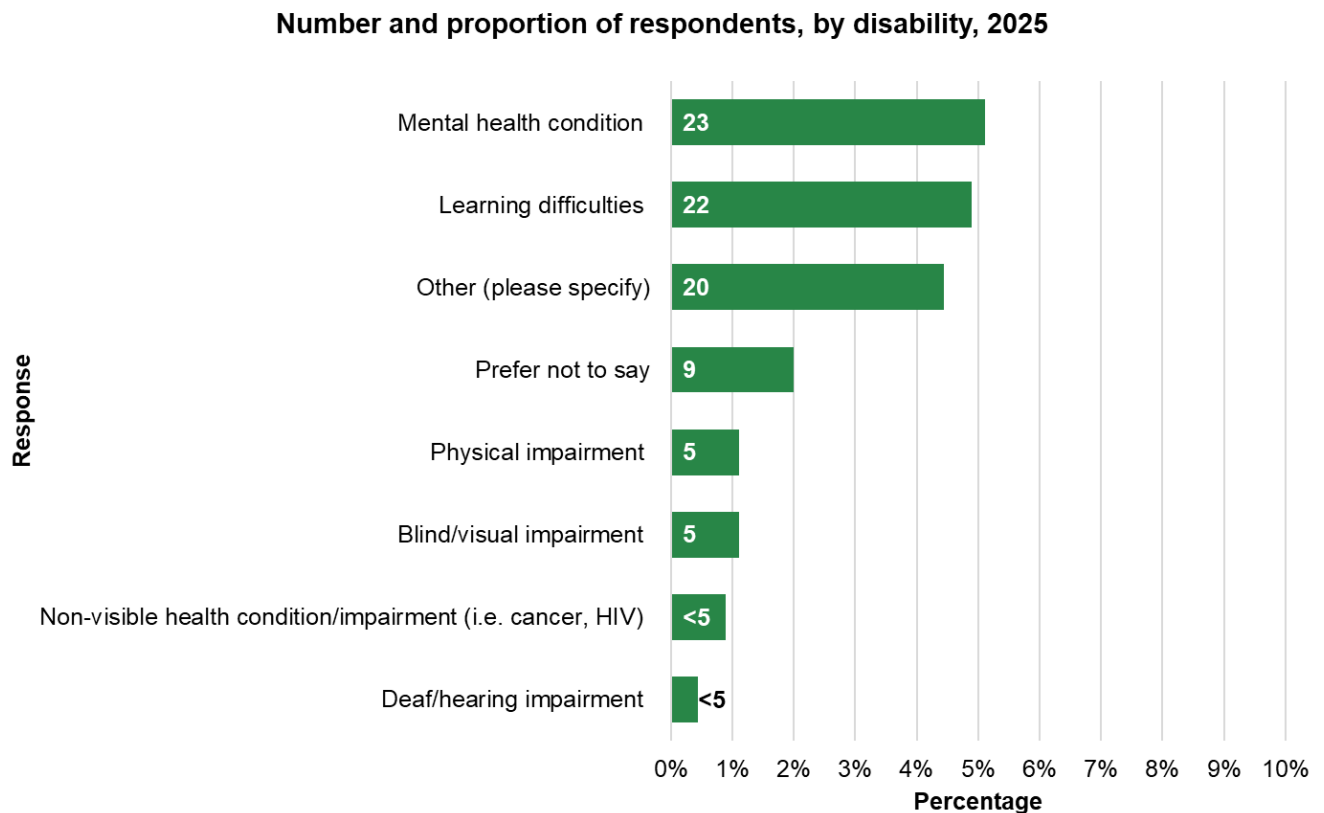


**Note:**

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

Figure 9 shows that of the 450 respondents, 64 children and young people self-identified that they have a disability or a long-term illness. The majority of children and young people, 324 respondents, did not self-identify having a disability and/or a long-term illness and a small number of children and young people, 29 respondents, selected 'Prefer not to say'.

**Figure 10. Number and proportion of child and young person respondents, by disability type.**



**Note:**  
**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

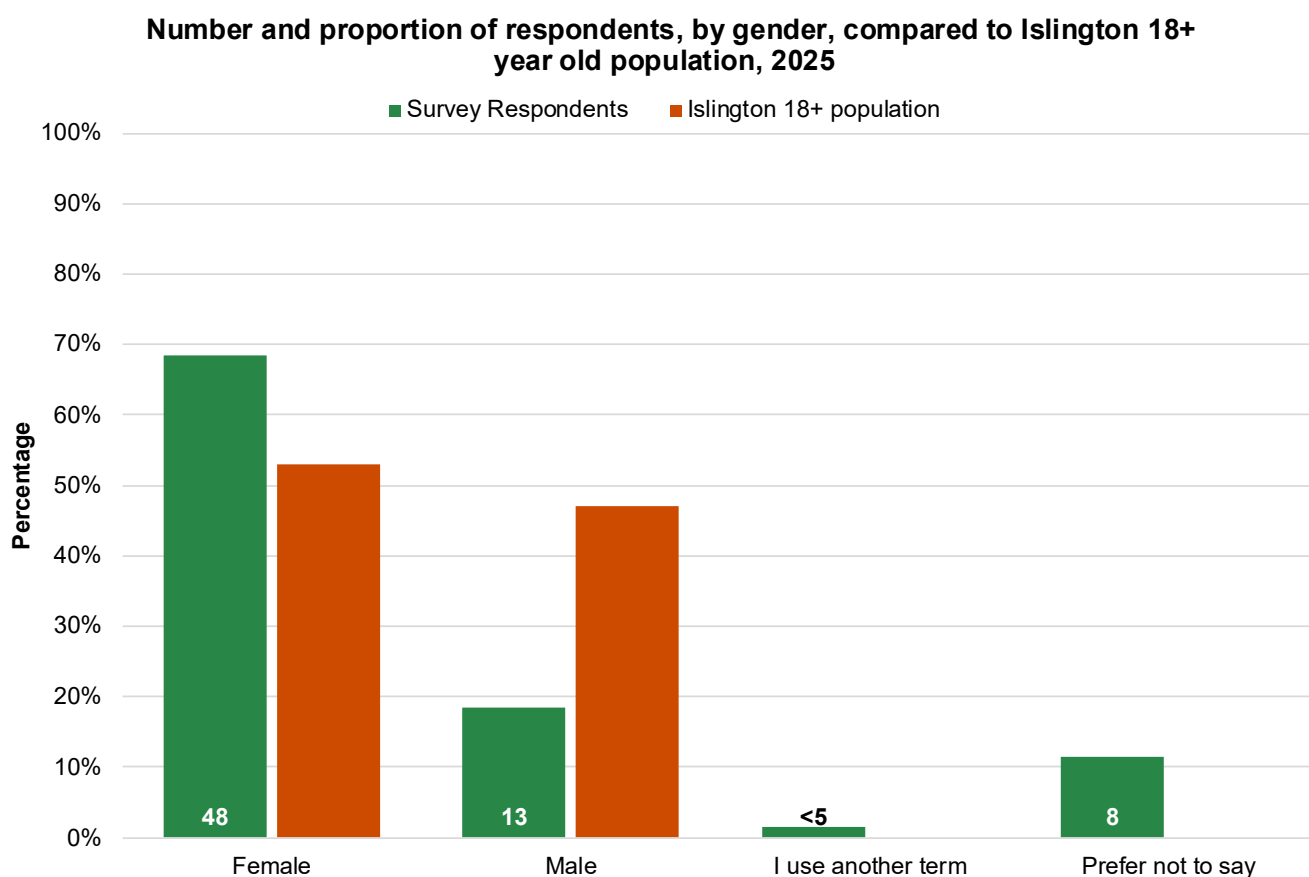
The 64 children and young people who selected that they had a disability and/or a long-term illness, were subsequently asked to identify which type of disability or illness they had, with multiple selections being permitted. The majority of respondents selected that they had a mental health condition, learning difficulties or other, with 23, 22 and 20 children and young people, respectively. There were 9 children or young people who selected ‘Prefer not to say’. There were 5 respondents who selected physical impairments, and 5 respondents who selected blind/visual impairments. There less than 5 children who selected that they experienced a non-visible health condition or impairment and less than 5 children who selected that they were deaf or had a hearing impairment.

**Parents and carers**

The inclusion criteria consisted of any parent or carer with children and young people (any age) who resided in Islington at the time of the survey.

A total of 70 responses were received. The demographics of respondents are as follows:

**Figure 11. Number and proportion of parent and carer respondents, by gender, compared to Islington 18+ year old population, 2025.**

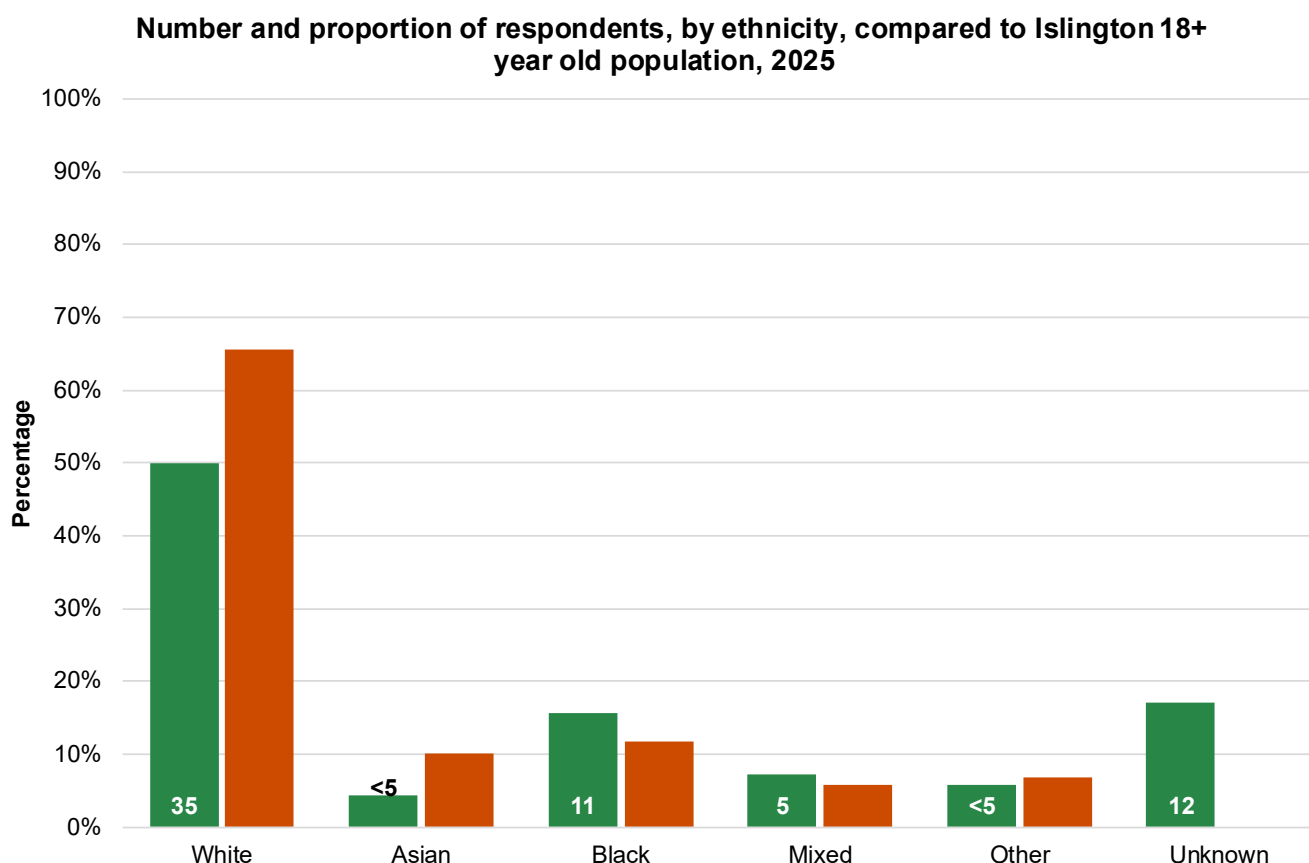


**Note:**

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Parents and Carers, 2025, Census 2021

The data indicates that 69% of the parents who completed the survey were female, and only 19% of the parents who completed the survey were male. It is noted that when compared against Islington census adult population (noting this may not be accurately reflective of the Islington parent population), females were over-represented, and males were under-represented. This may be indicative of mothers taking on more parental responsibility than fathers, and it is noted that the participation of fathers should be promoted in future engagement work to better understand their views. It is also hypothesised that this could indicate more absent fathers and single mothers in this cohort.

**Figure 12. Number and proportion of parent and carer respondents, by ethnicity, compared to Islington 18+ year old population, 2025.**



**Note:**

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Parents and Carers, 2025

The above graph shows that there were 35 White respondents, less than 5 Asian respondents, 11 Black respondents, 5 Mixed respondents, less than 5 Other respondents and 12 Unknown respondents. When compared against the Islington census demographics for adults, it is noted that similarly to the children and young people survey respondents, Black, and Mixed parents are over-represented in the survey response cohort. Comparatively, White, Asian and Other parents were underrepresented.

### **Professionals and volunteers**

For this survey any professionals or volunteers who worked with Islington-based children and young people at the time of the survey were invited to complete it.

A total of 100 responses were received. The only demographic information that was collected for the professionals and volunteers survey was about what organisations that the respondents worked for, this was a free text question and included the following responses:

**Figure 13. Categories of professional and volunteer respondent organisations**

Category	Organisations
Local Authority Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Justice Service (YJS)</li> <li>• Targeted Youth Support (TYS)</li> <li>• Islington Collaborative Action Network (ICAN)</li> <li>• Children's Social Care (CSC)</li> <li>• Violence Against Women and Girls team (VAWG)</li> <li>• School Improvement Service - Health and Wellbeing Team</li> <li>• Youth Employability and Skills (YES) Programmes team</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary schools</li> <li>• Secondary Schools</li> <li>• Colleges</li> <li>• Alternative Provision</li> </ul>
Youth Clubs and Voluntary and Community Sector Enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LIFT Youth Club</li> <li>• Highbury Roundhouse</li> <li>• Prospex</li> <li>• Isledon Arts CIC</li> <li>• Arsenal in the Community</li> <li>• The Ben Kinsella Trust</li> <li>• Islington Play Association</li> <li>• Copenhagen Youth Project</li> <li>• Cripplegate Foundation</li> <li>• Wipers</li> <li>• YMCA London City and North</li> <li>• All Change Arts</li> <li>• Other registered charities</li> </ul>

## Focus groups

In order to maintain a level of confidentiality during the in-person focus groups, only high-level demographic information was collected.

### Children and young people

The inclusion criteria for the research were children and young people aged between 8 years and 25 years old who resided in Islington at the time of the focus group. A **total of 88 children and young people** participated in focus groups, with **67 being male and 21 being female**. The children and young people's ages ranged from **9 years old to 25 years old**. The ethnicities of the children and young people included **Asian, Arabic, Black-African, Black-British, Black-Caribbean, Mixed, White-British and White-European**.

## Parents and carers

The inclusion criteria was any parent or carer with children and young people (any age) who resided in Islington at the time of the focus group. In **total 32 parents and carers** participated. The ethnicities of parents and carers included **Asian, Arabic, Black-African, Black-British, Black-Caribbean and Mixed**.

## Professionals and volunteers

The inclusion criteria were any professionals or volunteers who worked with Islington-based children and young people at the time of the focus group. A total of **103 professionals and volunteers** participated.

# Analysis

## Surveys

The survey findings were analysed by the Knowledge and Intelligence team within the Public Health department. The findings were extrapolated from Let's Talk Islington and analysed using a comparative approach between the three surveys and the demographic variables. For the full survey analysis and breakdown see Appendices 2.

## Children and Young People

It is important to note is that knife crime was the issue that concerned children and young people the most (**Figure 14**). For respondents aged 19-25-year-old, gangs/group-based offending was the most selected concern (62%), while for 13-18-year-olds, knife crime was the most selected concern (66%). When children and young people were asked to reflect on why they do not feel safe in Islington, similar themes were highlighted in written responses, for example:

“There's a lot of anti-social behaviour and drug dealing”- CYP Survey Response

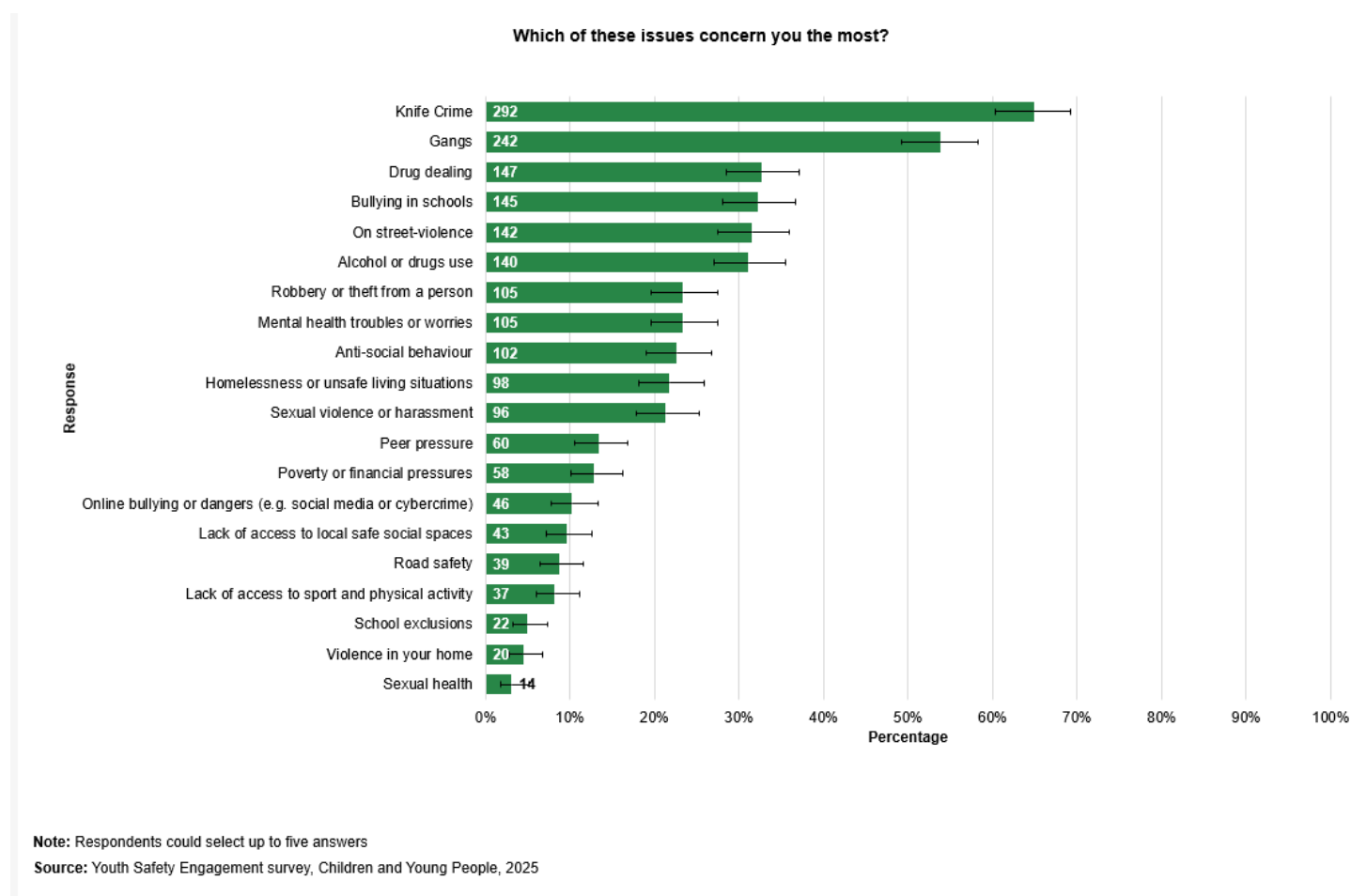
“There are lots of bad stuff happening like knife crimes” – CYP Survey Response

Lack of access to sport and physical activity was a more significant concern for Black and Asian (13%), Mixed or Other ethnic background respondents (11%) compared to White respondents (3%).

Female respondents are significantly more concerned than males about sexual violence or harassment (35% compared to 11%), mental health troubles or worries (32% compared to 17%), and online bullying or dangers (16% compared to 4%). Male respondents were more concerned about gangs and drug dealing than females (61% compared to 44% and 38% compared to 24%).

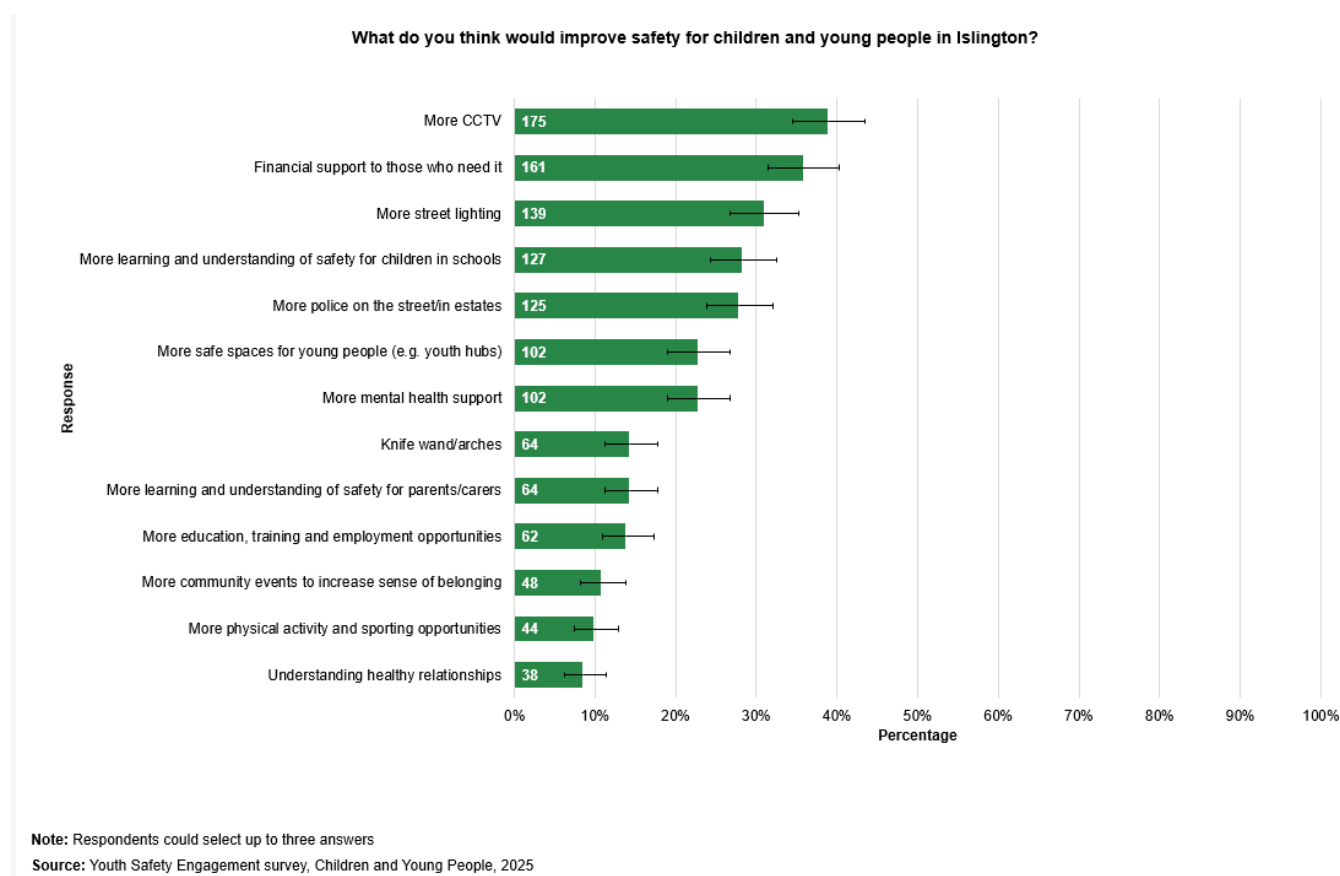


**Figure 14. Issues that concern Islington children and young people (aged 13-25) the most (from multiple-choice options)**



When asked about their solutions to improving safety in Islington, more CCTV (39%) and financial support to those who need it (36%) were the most selected options (**Figure 15**). Visible safety measures, such as increased CCTV, street lighting, and police presence, were also discussed as being important in the focus groups with children and young people.

**Figure 15. Children and young people’s views on what they think could improve safety in Islington.**



Respondents from a White ethnic background chose more police in the streets/ in estates as a potential protective factor at a significantly higher rate than Black respondents (37% compared to 17%). It is important to note that children and young people’s perceptions of police are often intrinsically tied to subjective and individual and experiences but can also be influenced by intergenerational and community-based views. These mixed responses were mirrored in the written responses of the survey, with children and young people writing the following contradicting reflections about police:

“I don’t feel safe because of the police always being everywhere makes me feel like there is something bad happening all the time”- CYP Survey Response

“There could be more police officers maybe patrolling around the streets for extra safety”- CYP Survey Response

The written responses highlighted the high importance that children and young people put on seeing more police presence, CCTV and lighting on streets to improve safety. The children and young people also shared insightful ideas when asked to think about what Islington can do to

better support young girls and women safety, similarly, there was a clear theme in relation to wanting more police, surveillance and better lighting. There were also consistent calls for more dedicated female-only spaces, both physical and online:

“Maybe more activities and sports just for women or community projects and places that are just for girls” – CYP Survey Response

“Have [...] online website for girls and women to access if they feel unsafe or a phone number to call for help that leads to a mental health website” – CYP Survey Response

Furthermore, the children and young people stated that they felt more education should be available to help young boys to develop positive views in relation to young girls and women and of what constitutes healthy relationships. There was also a need expressed for education for young girls and women about how to protect themselves.

“More education in schools about violence against women” – CYP Survey Response

“Create a program to educate young women and girls to protect themselves” – CYP Survey Response

Similarly, when the children and young people were asked to think about what Islington can do to better support young boys and men to stay safe, they identified the need to have more opportunities for them to meet in safe places and engage in prosocial and positive activities:

“Invest in them. Give them opportunities for work or training” – CYP Survey Response

“More access to community in their local area including sports or mental health help” – CYP Survey Response

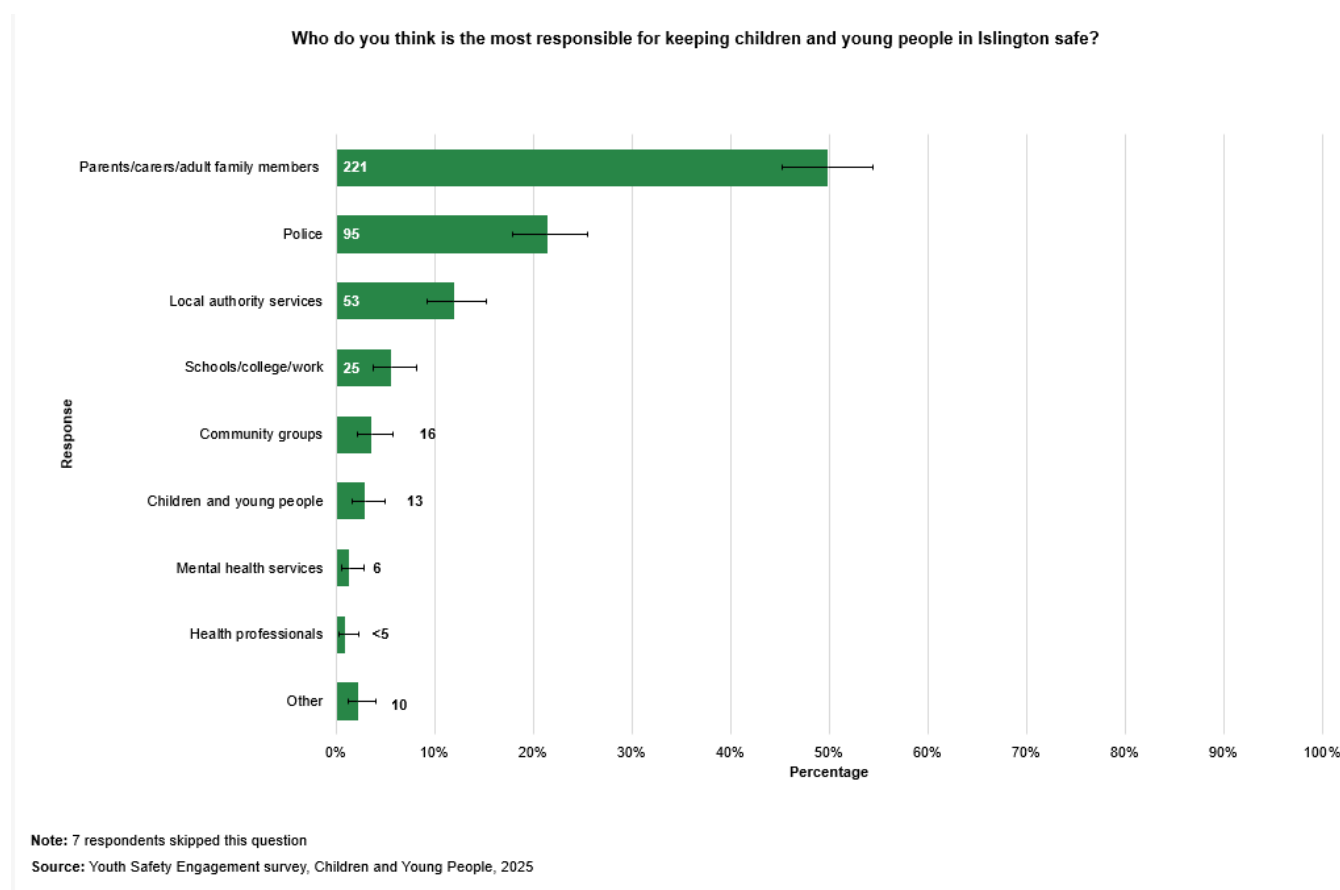
The most common responses to how much young people think is being done in Islington to improve safety were ‘a little’ (45%) and ‘nothing at all’ (21%). When comparing the age of the responses to this, respondents aged 13-18-years-old are significantly more likely to think enough was being done compared to 19-25-year-olds (19% compared to 2%). Regarding gender, male respondents were significantly more likely to think ‘a lot’ was being done compared to female respondents (9% compared to 2%).

When children and young people were asked about who was most responsible for keeping them safe, the most popular response was ‘parent/carer/family members’ (50%) followed by the police (21%) and local authority services (12%) (**Figure 16**). This was also the same for both the parent and carer survey and the professionals and volunteers. Young people aged 13 to 18-years-old were more likely to think that police are most responsible for children and young people's safety compared to 19-25-year-olds (22% compared to 6%). Similarly, White respondents had

significantly higher rates of having the view that police have the most responsibility for children and young people's safety compared to Black respondents (30% vs 10%).

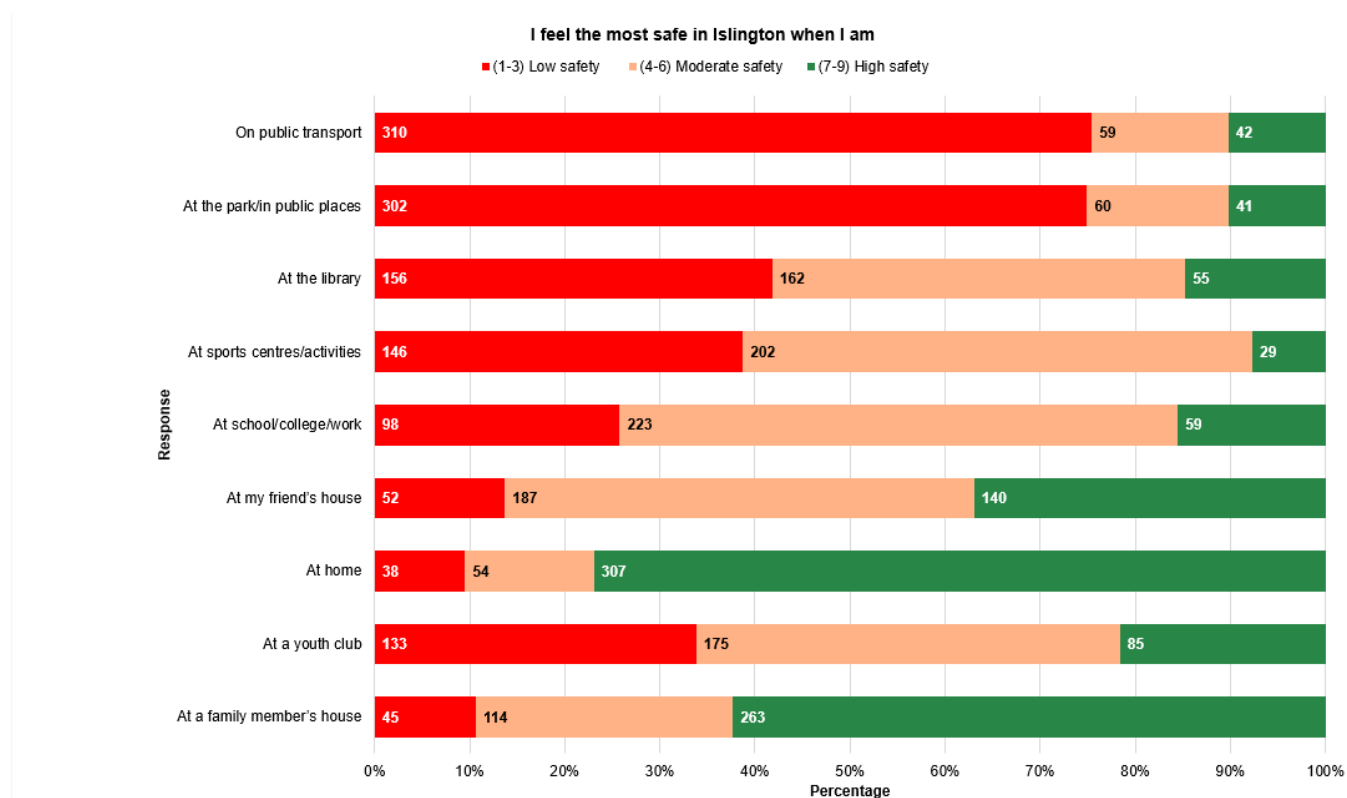
Despite 21% of young people citing police as being responsible for keeping them safe, in an additional question, 32% of respondents identified that they would only be 'somewhat likely' to report crimes to police, with over a quarter of respondents being 'unlikely' (16%) or 'very unlikely' (12%) to report crimes to police. This indicates that more work is required to strengthen the levels of trust between some young people and the police.

**Figure 16. Children and young people's responses as to who they deem is most responsible for keeping them safe in Islington.**



When asked where in Islington children and young people feel safe, the responses of 'at home' (77%) and at 'a family member's house' (62%) were chosen the most **Figure 17**). On public transport (75%) and at the park/in public spaces (75%) were chosen as places where they feel the least safe.

**Figure 17. Where children and young people in Islington feel the safest.**



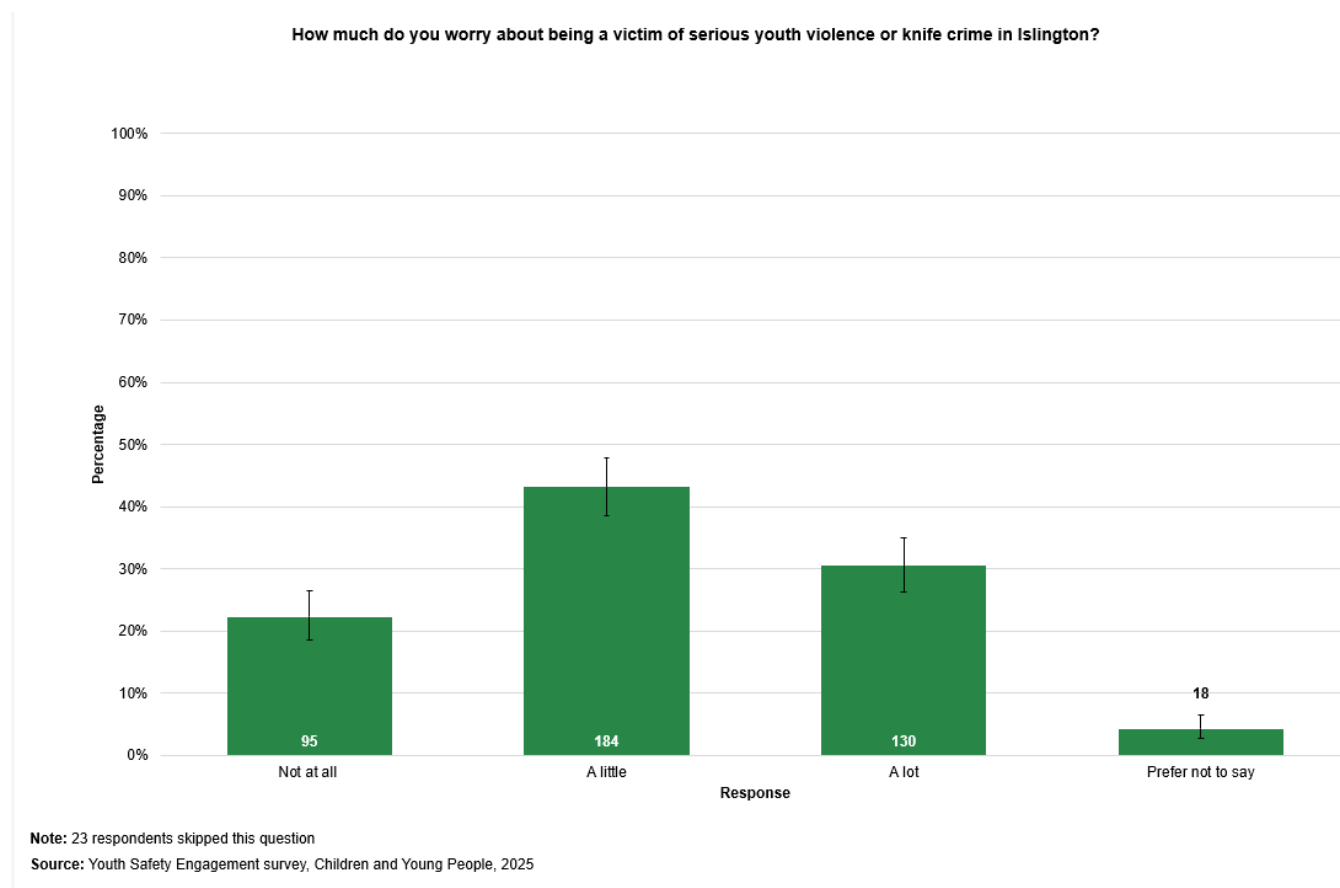
Note: Rankings have been grouped

Source: Youth Safety Engagement survey, Children and Young People, 2025

When asked about having a sense of belonging to their community, one-third of children and young people felt like they were part of their community (32%). Young people with a Black and/or Ethnic background were significantly more likely to say no compared to White respondents (37% compared to 20%).

The survey asked young people to rank how much they worry about being a victim of serious youth violence or knife crime in Islington. The most common responses were 'a little' (43%) and 'a lot' (30%) (**Figure 18**). There was no significant difference across the demographics for this question. Although, 72% of respondents are 'not at all worried' about committing a violent or knife related crime, 16% of respondents were worried 'a little' and 8% were worried 'a lot' about this. Black (10%) and Asian, Mixed and Other respondents (8%) were twice as likely to worry 'a lot' about committing a violent or knife related crime compared to White respondents (4%).

**Figure 18. How much children and young people worry about being a victim of serious youth violence or knife crime in Islington.**



## Parents and Carers

Similarly to the children and young people survey, parents and carers also chose knife crime (74%), on-street violence (51%) and gangs (50%) as the issues that concern them the most regarding their child's safety from a list of issues. Many parents reflected on concerns about the safety of their children due to crime, drug and gang-related behaviour and a lack of police presence and youth provision, with one parent stating the following:

“Walking through dark estates, witnessing drug users steal frequently, witnessing local gangs in area and on bikes, not seeing ANY police or Safer neighbour police, youth resources closing at 6 when clearly young people wish to be out longer socialising, walking in my building and round people smoking weed in the block. Fearing my daughter coming home and being approached by non-residents in the block. More searches of people and local parks for weapons needed.” – Parent Survey Response

### “Street robberies are normal for children and young people in Islington” – Parent Survey Response

Additionally, to the themes in the written responses from the children and young people surveys, parents and carers, cited the support of friends and family and familiarity with the area as things that made them feel safe in Islington (data not shown). One respondent listed the various reasons for their feelings of safety as the following:

“Family near. Community centre. Local provisions. Friends in area who look out for each other” – Parent Survey Response

When asked about what could be done to improve safety for CYP in the borough, the parent and carer respondents had differing views to the young people. The highest selected responses to this were more police in streets/ estates (32%) and increase learning and understanding of safety for parents/carers (24%) (**Figure 19**). One parent/carers summarised the need for increased police support and community-wide collaboration to increase children’s safety:

“Knife crime is too common. Very little police presence on the streets. It is unsafe for young people specifically teenage boys. I feel anxious if my son is out without an adult present. More funding is needed to tackle knife crime. More police presence, stop and search, stronger penalties for carrying weapons and committing knife crime...” – Parent Survey Response

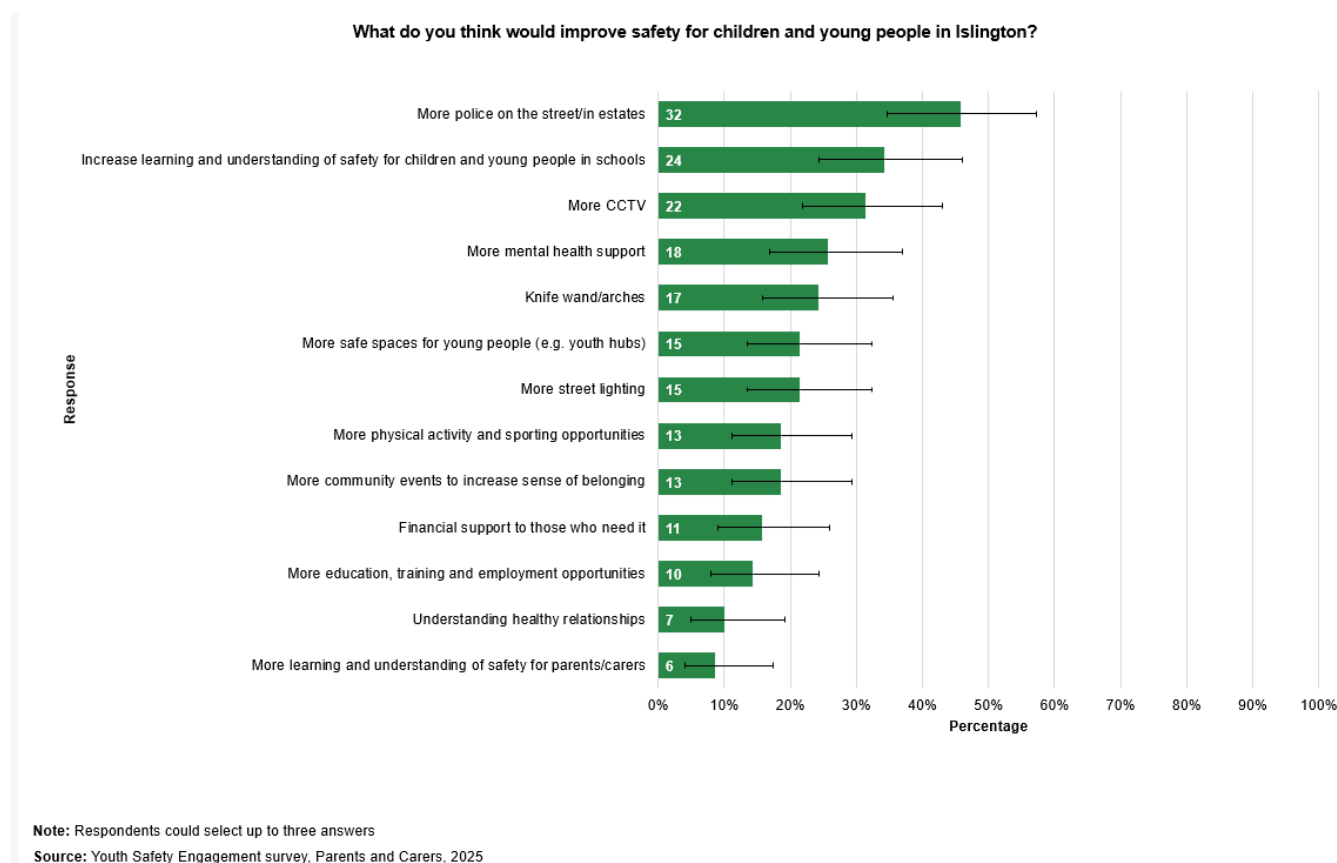
Another parent/carers emphasised the need for earlier education for children and young people on a range of important topics:

“More education about mental health and consent. Education on sexual exploitation and healthy relationships. More youth clubs or social activities that are free. Education on gangs earlier.” – Parent Survey Response

Similarly to the children and young people, the parents and carers also commented about the need to improve Islington’s physical environment and infrastructure environment to improve safety, with one parent/carers providing detailed solution suggestions:

“To ensure that young women and girls feel safe and secure in Islington, it is essential to improve our streets through enhanced safety measures such as better lighting...” – Parent Survey Response

**Figure 19. Parents and carers priorities for improving safety for young people in Islington.**



Parents and carers responses to how much is being done to make Islington safer mirrored the CYP findings in that the most common responses were ‘a little’ (44%) and ‘nothing at all’ (36%).

Parents and carers also selected parents/carers/adult family members as being most responsible for keeping CYP safe in Islington with 64% of them choosing this option as well as the police (13%). Schools/colleges/work, children and young people and mental health services were all rated the lowest (1%).

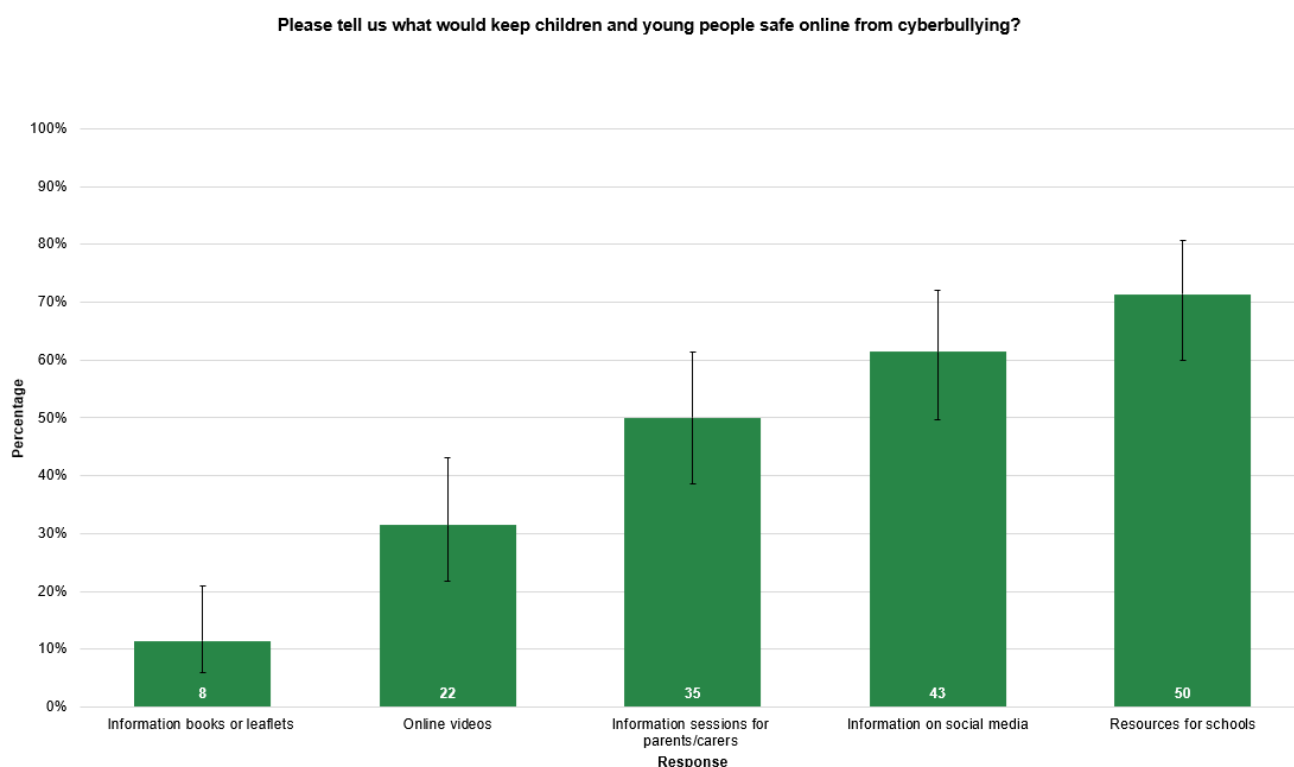
The most popular responses about keeping CYP safe online involved education particularly support for schools, information on social media and sessions for parents (**Figure 20.**) When parents and carers were specifically asked if there was anything more that they would like to know about keeping their children safe online, availability of education for parents and carers was important, with some parents commenting that:

“I am always one step behind my daughters use of social media” – Parent Survey Response



“I think more classes on online bullying even with parents that don't speak English to be able to get a class also in their language” – Parent Survey Response

**Figure 20. Parents and carers preferred solutions for keeping children and young people safe online from cyberbullying.**

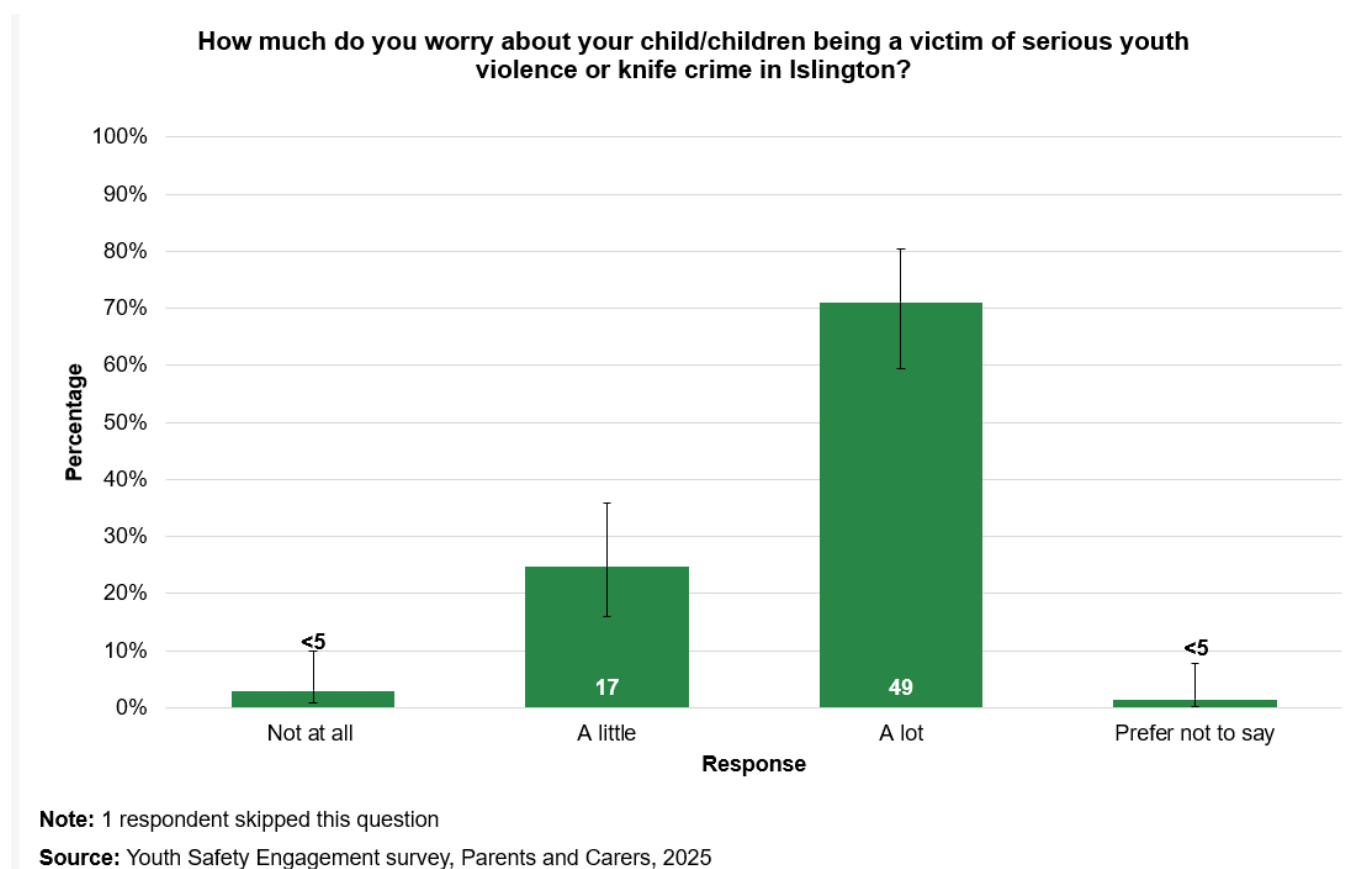


Note: Respondents could select up to three answers

Source: Youth Safety Engagement survey, Parents and Carers, 2025

Nearly three quarters (71%) of parents and carers stated that they worry about their child being a victim of serious violence or knife crime in Islington ‘a lot’. (**Figure 21**). This could be because of a multitude of factors such as media coverage of crime or recent local violent incidents, but it is important to recognise that this accurately reflects parents and carers perception of these issues. When comparing parents and carers responses to the children and young people’s there is a significant difference in the perception of serious violence and knife crime. Parents and carers had a 71% response to worrying a lot about this issue compared to only 30% of young people. It is important to consider if young people’s perceptions of safety is less risk adverse than that of parents and carers.

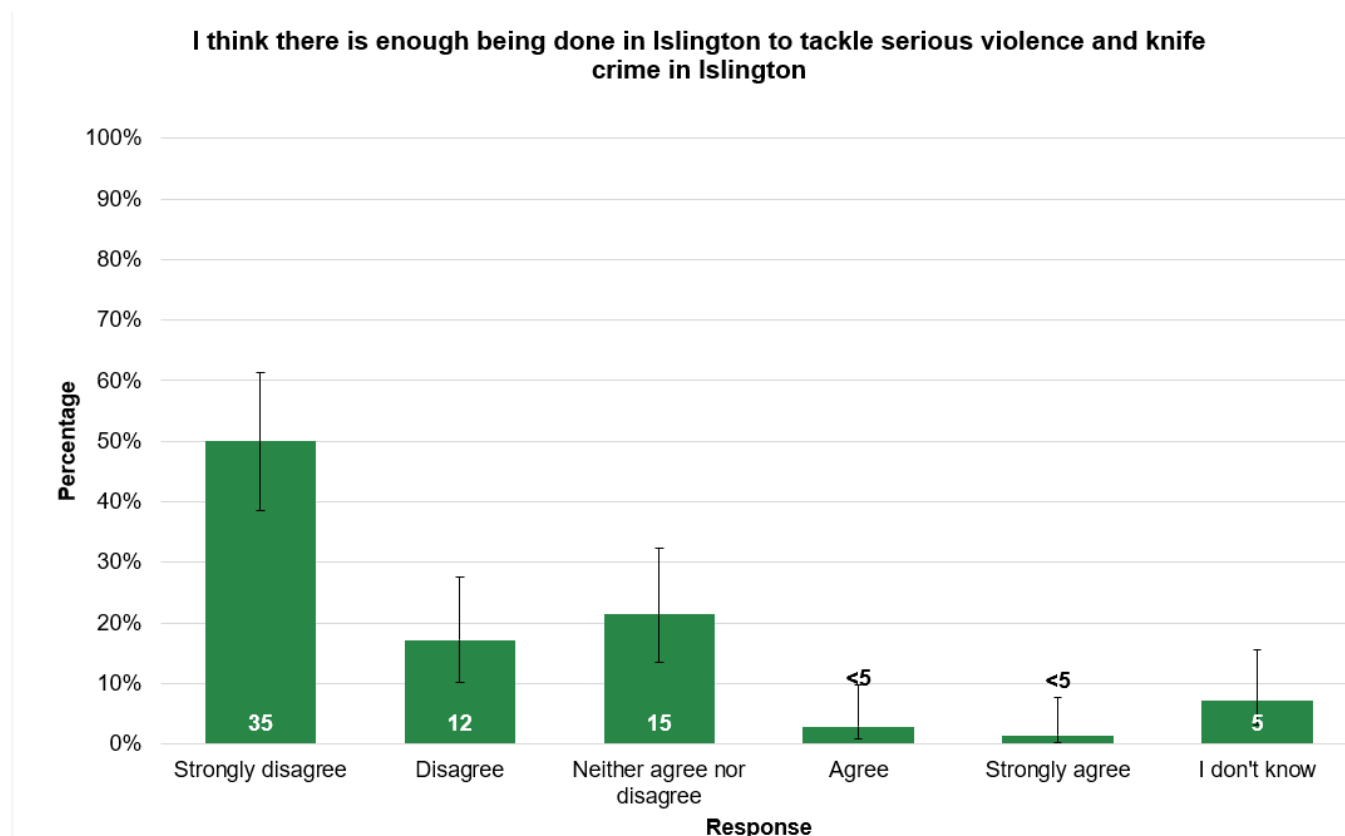
**Figure 21. Percentage of parents and carers who worry about their child/children being a victim of serious youth violence or knife crime in Islington.**



On the contrary to their concerns about their children being a victim of crime or violence, 71% of parents and carers stated that they do not worry at all about their child/children committing a knife or violent related crime themselves 25% of respondents selected 'a little' as their response and 3% chose 'not at all'.

Only a very small proportion of parents and carers agreed or strongly agreed (4%) that enough is being done in Islington to tackle serious violence and knife crime. Many said they did not know (7%) or neither agreed nor disagreed (21%), while 67% expressed dissatisfaction in relation to current efforts (**Figure 22**).

**Figure 22. Percentage of parents and carers who think enough is being done to tackle serious violence and knife crime in Islington.**



**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Parents and Carers, 2025

There was also a consistent theme that parents and carers were dissatisfied with the availability and accessibility of emotional/mental health and Special Educational Needs and Disability support services for their children in Islington, in both community and educational settings. Specifically, parents and carers reported that the wait times are too long, that the referral processes for support are unclear and that the type of support offered does not meet their children's needs adequately, with one parent/carers stating the following:

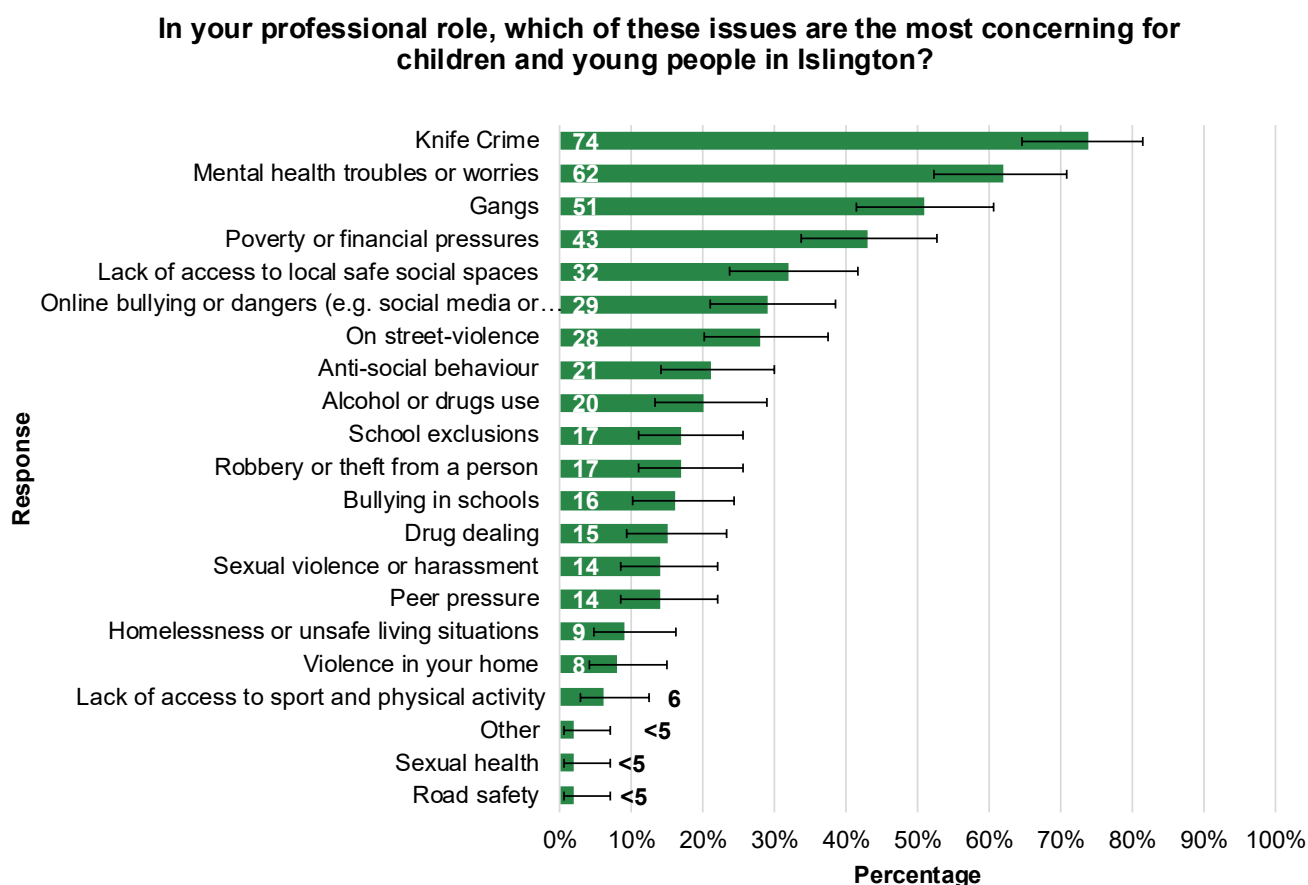
“Waiting list for CAMHS is too long then the sessions once finally given are too short. Schools not quick enough to support when parent raises concerns i.e.: child missing school due to anxiety, no plan in place just constant attendance threats...” – Parent Survey Response

## Professionals and Volunteers:

Professionals and Volunteers were found to be the most concerned about knife crime (74%) and emotional and mental health needs (62%). Mental health troubles and worries and needs was

selected in the survey significantly more than the young people and parents and carers survey (**Figure 23**).

**Figure 23. Ranking of professionals and volunteers' issues of most concern for children and young people in Islington.**



**Note:** Respondents could select up to five answers

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Professionals and Volunteers, 2025

Professionals and volunteers cited more safe spaces for young people (49%) and more mental health support (42%) (**Figure 24**) Interestingly, compared to young people and parents and carers who both voted for increased street lighting and more CCTV as important solutions to improving safety, professionals selected these options a lot less with each option only getting 1% of the total vote.

Professionals and volunteers also reflected and elaborated on solutions to safety issues for young people in their free text responses. The most common solutions to create a safe environment in Islington were linked to training (for young people, professionals and sometimes parents).

When discussing training for professionals, they identified several topic area gaps including, online safety, exploitation, and gendered issues, as well as existing training programmes needing

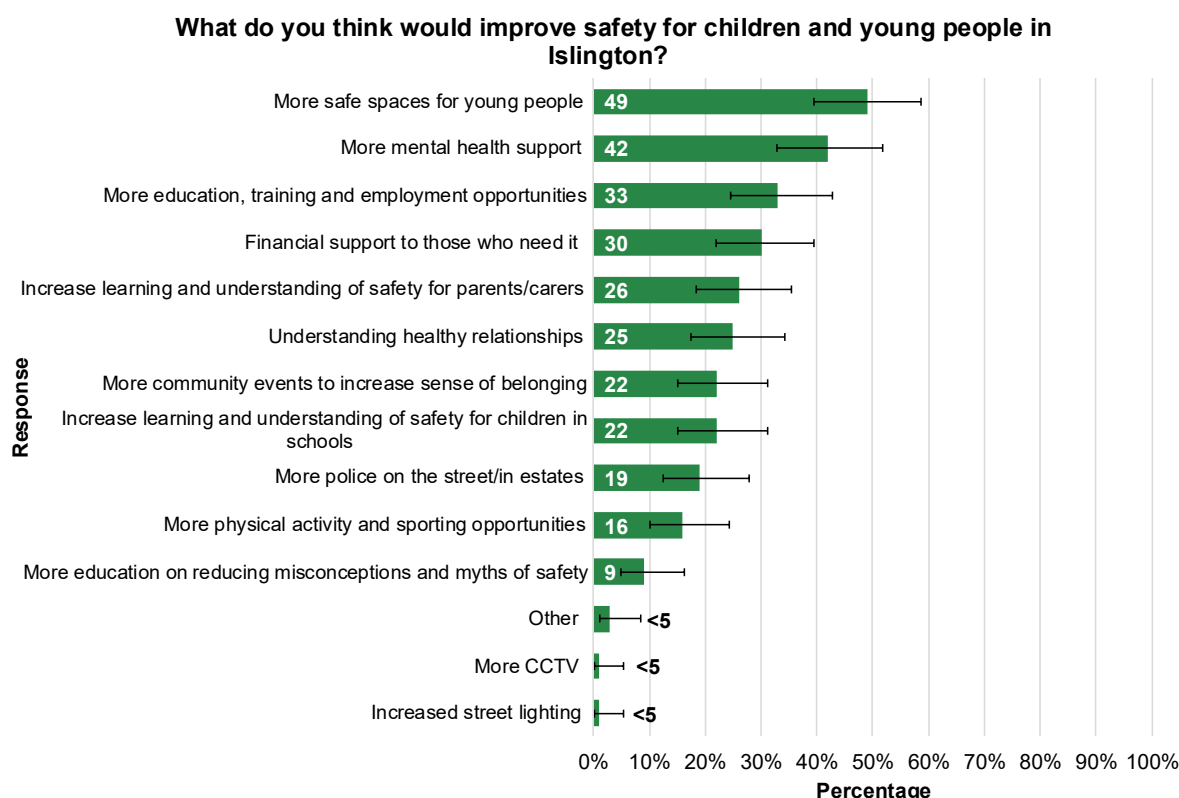
improvement. However, 62% of respondents also stated that they agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with the youth safety training available to them. Some of the respondents described a lack of awareness of the support and training that is currently available, and work done to date to tackle these issues in the borough. A respondent summarised this need for greater investment in education and training when reflecting on solutions for safety:

“More investment in services, more education in schools / youth provisions. More training for professionals and parents / carers” – Professional Survey Response

Within the free text responses, professionals and volunteers, identified that children and young people having a trusted adult in their lives and trust in local services (including the police) are important factors for making Islington safer for them. They also considered a sense of community and belonging as being significant to helping a young person to feel safe.

“I think when they look around and see people and spaces they can trust, it's a real confidence booster” – Professional Survey Response

**Figure 24. Percentage of professionals and volunteers think would improve safety for children and young people in Islington.**



**Note:** Respondents could select up to three answers

**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Professionals and Volunteers, 2025

In response to the question asking about if much is being done to improve safety in Islington there was a fairly even split in responses between 'a little' (38%) and 'a lot' (32%).

Similarly to both the young people's and parents and carers surveys, the professionals and volunteer's cohort selected 'parents/carers/adult family members' as being the most responsible for keeping children and young people safe in Islington (52%) and the local authority was ranked as the second highest (17%).

A stark finding was that 83% of the professional and volunteers' respondents stated that they 'worry a lot' about the children and young people that they work with being a victim of serious youth violence or knife crime compared to 14% of respondents who were 'a little worried'. When asked about the young people that they work with committing a violent crime, 91% of the professionals and volunteers stated that they worry a lot about this happening. Several professionals and volunteers expressed concerns about the limited resources to meet the needs of these children who are at risk of engaging in anti-social or violent behaviours:

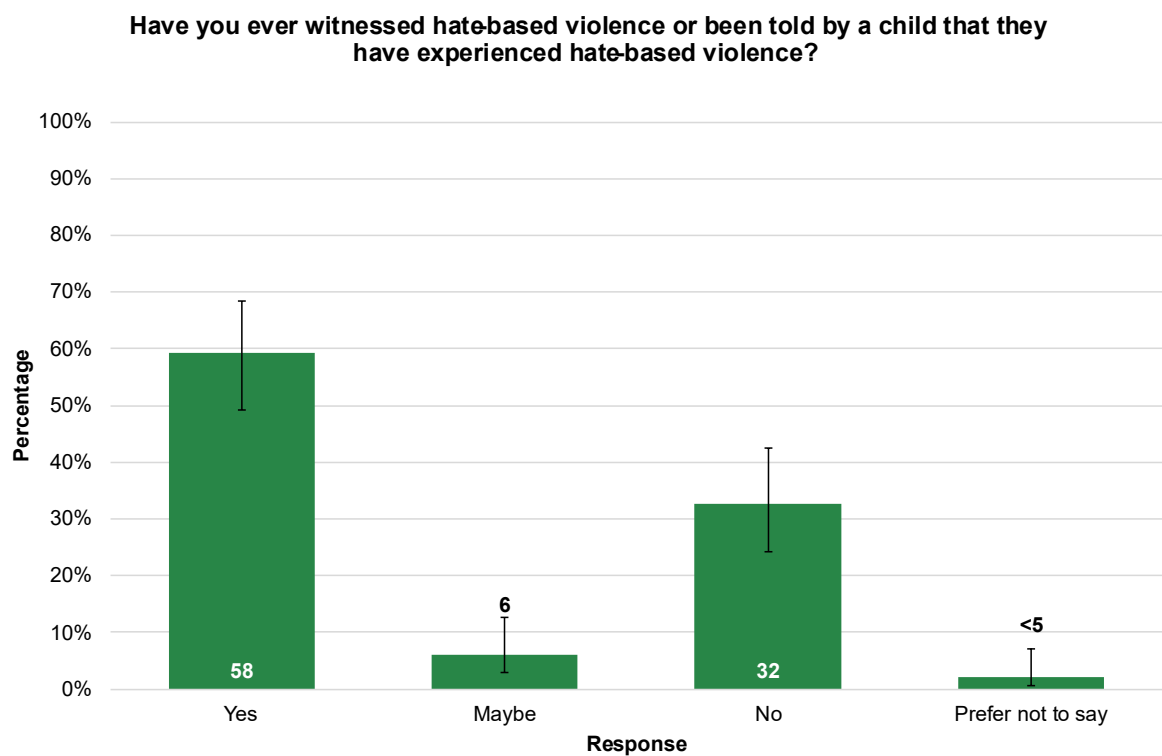
"Knife crime persists, suggesting current measures may be insufficient. More effective solutions are needed to address this issue." – Professional Survey Response

"I know a lot is being done and really appreciate that. But hard to say enough is being done when it's still way too often we hear of yet another person being killed in a knife attack" – Professional Survey Response

Over half of professionals and volunteers surveyed (59%) stated that they have witnessed or been told by a CYP about hate-based violence (**Figure 25**). Within the free text responses for the professional's survey knife crime was mentioned as a cause for concern amongst professionals working with young people within the borough.

"I know a lot is being done and really appreciate that. But hard to say enough is being done when it's still way too often we hear of yet another person being killed in a knife attack"- Professional Survey Response

**Figure 25. Percentage of professionals and volunteers stating if they have ever witnessed hate-based violence or been told by a child that they have experienced hate-based violence.**



**Note:** 2 respondents skipped this question  
**Source:** Youth Safety Engagement survey, Professionals and Volunteers, 2025

## Focus groups

## Existing Data Sources

To strengthen the accuracy and validity of the qualitative insights gathered through this engagement work we triangulated the data with existing research that has previously taken place within the borough, including:

- Islington Council’s Public Health Online Youth Safety Research Report March 2024 (Levitas, 2024).
- Camden and Islington VRU Funded Parenting Project Evaluation August 2023- London Metropolitan University (Alexander & Streng-Lazerini, 2023).
- Islington Council’s School-based Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire (HRBQ) 2025 (Islington Council, 2025).
- Minority Matters Engagement Report- Criminal Exploitation and Youth Violence Engagement (Minority Matters, 2024).

- Evaluation of London Borough of Islington's Targeted Youth Support (TYS) Detached Youth Worker Offer June 2025- London Metropolitan University (Alexander, Shariff, & Pitts, 2025).

## Focus Groups

### Themes

After collating the findings from the focus groups, previous research and Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire several themes emerged as poignant.

### Hobbies

Many of the young people shared how important hobbies were to help them to feel safe but also highlighted how they deemed the significance of more opportunities to engage in positive activities may help to reduce the prevalence of crime and deter young people away from adverse behaviours.

“Actually, I wrote sports in general I think because it’s a good place to meet people and friends.” - CYP Focus Group (FG) 1 when asked about where they feel safe

“[To keep young people safe, they should] Do some activities like sport, because sport is best for the kids.”- CYP FG 6

The young people also highlighted that opportunities to partake in hobbies can dwindle as they get older.

“At an older age you don’t have as many sports to play. I remember in year 11 I got introduced to hockey and loved it. If I got introduced that in year 7, I would have taken that up.”- CYP FG 2

### Trusted relationships

The importance of trusted and reliable relationships came up frequently throughout all the focus groups with the different cohorts particularly in the context of what makes an individual feel safe and what could be done to improve safety. These were often relationships with peers, family, professionals and pets.

“I like spending time with my family because it’s kind of freer to talk about whatever you need to talk about.”- CYP FG 4 when asked ‘what makes you feel safe?’



The consistency of meeting with people and the dependability of these relationships particularly with professionals was raised by the young people as important factors for building trust.

“I think it’s just the sense of like everyone that comes in here, you’ll know, once you’ve been here for a while, you know why they’re here.”- CYP FG 4 talking about attending college.

In a recent evaluation into Islington’s TYS detached youth work offer (Alexander, Shariff, & Pitts, 2025). it was also found that both staff and young people recognised and identified the importance of relationship building over time. One TYS worker summed up their approach by stating:

“You have to work out how you’re going to best build their trust and how you’re best going to build a relationship. And if they think that you’re just nosing around to get information, you know you’re not going to build that up.”- TYS worker

## Places and Spaces

There are certain environments and situations that make young people feel unsafe such as unfamiliar areas, quiet train stations or being in crowds. On the contrary, young people stated that they feel safe in environments where they are seen, heard and valued as individuals.

### Transport

Young people consistently described feeling unsafe on public transport, particularly at night after school. They cited feeling trapped on public transport as if something did happen, they would not be able to escape the situation. The young people also raised feeling more exposed to staring and being judged on public transport.

“So, like especially through Arsenal [station], like that’s a long way and no one’s ... Say something did happen and someone got off a train, there’s no one there.”- CYP FG 3

### Green Spaces

Many young people talked about spending time in green spaces particularly parks but also recognised that they are not always aware of who will be in the park and that criminal behaviour can often take place there.

“People carry weapons in parks and sell drugs which makes me feel unsafe.” – CYP FG 1

“We need more detached workers in the park especially. Where they currently are [...] isn’t needed but we need them in parks where more activity is. Youth workers who are popular with young people and seeing familiar faces in parks will make people behave.”- CYP FG 1

Young people also expressed the need for more parks and green spaces within the borough to help them to feel safe.

“I think it’s just if you have big parks like that, it’s more like free space for people to go and have more fun.” - CYP FG 4

## **Schools**

A common theme that emerged across many of the focus groups was that young people felt schools were not fully equipped to educate young people on youth safety issues, saying they viewed schools as potentially being unsafe due to observing bullying on-site and lack of support from staff when issues have arisen. They also expressed a need for more training for teachers to be more proactive when it comes to issues around safety.

“If a teacher sees a child on Snapchat, they need to let the parents know as you need to be 13 to be on Snapchat” - CYP FG 2

Some young people felt that schools were more focused on grades and appearance as opposed to the wellbeing of their pupils.

“I don’t think schools generally care about mental health and like really keeping you safe. I think they’re more just focused on you getting an education so that the school can continue to look good.”- CYP FG 1

Some professionals also agreed with the perception that schools were very education and grades focussed.

“Young people do not trust their schools, because they only focus on GCSEs and who they trust are their peers” - Professional FG 3

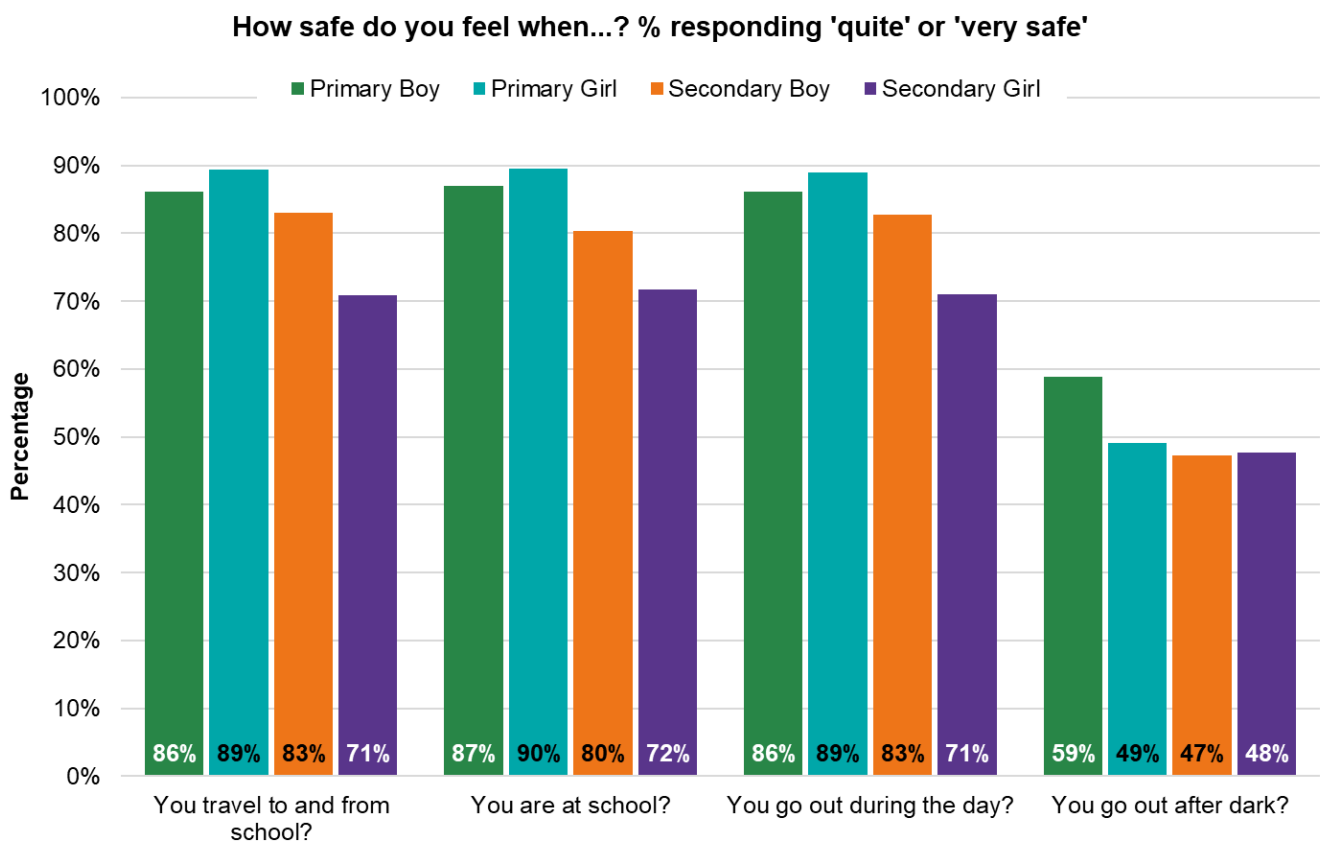
Young people expressed that having school uniforms with easily identifiable badges makes them (especially girls) feel unsafe as they believe they are targeted after school.

“If I’m walking and it’s dark, and I don’t want to make it about gender, but because I’m a woman, we’re targets.”- CYP FG 3 female talking about walking home from school.

“So, we’ve been told to “hide your lanyards away, if you have your school t-shirt on, cover up your logo or take a different route,” which is what I did today. It was a lot longer, but it made me feel safer.” – CYP FG 2

However, the recent HRBQ 2025 (**Figure 25**) found that 87% of primary school boys, 90% of primary school girls, 80% of secondary school boys and 72% of primary school’s girls said that they feel ‘quite’ or ‘very safe’ when they are at school (Islington Council, 2025). These findings also highlight that feelings of safety at school for both boys and decrease as they move from primary to secondary school, and the difference is much more marked for girls (72% compared to 90%) (Islington Council, 2025).

**Figure 25. Responses from male and female primary and secondary school pupils’ feeling ‘quite’ or ‘very safe’ in different locations/ situations in Islington from the HRBQ 2025**



**Note:** 126 primary students and 285 secondary students did not answer this question

**Source:** Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire 2025

## Home

Young people commonly referred to home as the place where they feel the safest, this was largely attributed to the familiarity and security it provides.

“I feel safe when I’m at home with my family.” - CYP FG 1

## Time of day

When asked about when they do not feel safe young people often shared that they feel less safe at night when it is dark, and when visibility is poorer. The fear of the unknown was discussed as a contributing factor to not feeling safe and many of them, including the youngest cohort, acknowledged that risky or adverse behaviours are more likely to occur at night.

“It’s really unsafe, especially at nighttime, to walk around.” - CYP FG 2

“I had one night alone, and I don’t really do it a lot but if I did, it’s a lot darker and then there’s no one with me, so if something does happen, my mum, no one knows about it. It’s just anything could happen.”- CYP FG 4

“Yeah, so at night mostly more kidnapping, burglaries, they all happen at night, so it’s even scarier.” - CYP FG 4

## Vulnerable people

When focus group participants were asked about who the most vulnerable groups are for feeling unsafe, being exploited or exposed to crime all the focus groups identified a plethora of different demographics. These included the following:

### **Children and young people with SEND**

Parents and carers shared that they believe there are not enough trained Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in schools and that there is a lack of general understanding of the needs of young people with special educational needs. Parents and carers said they face significant challenges navigating the SEND system such as accessing support, including long wait times, being denied assessments, a general lack of support and bureaucratic hurdles.

“Younger SEN kids slipping through gaps, slipping through the net and long waiting lists.”- Parent FG 1

“Rather than punishing the condition, look at it more as a health need.”- Parent FG 1

“If you can navigate the system there are supports, however, they are hard to navigate.” - Parent FG 2 talking about having a child with SEND

## **Younger children**

Young people, professionals and parents and carers all identified that younger children are more vulnerable to coercion and exploitation by older peers. One focus group with young people recognised that Year 7 pupils are often targeted by older young people and are potentially more likely to succumb to peer pressure.

“Definitely Year 7s, when a new group of Year 7s first come to secondary school, obviously it’s a wild experience, being the youngest again and peer pressure plays a big role in that.”- CYP FG 2

Parents and carers and professionals also recognised that younger children with access to social media might be at greater risk of sexual exploitation.

“Sexual exploitation on younger children via apps and games is happening a lot more now”- Parent FG 1

“Younger people can fall through the provision of services and are more vulnerable to being targeted by people who may exploit or groom them.”- Professional FG 2

Within the Alexander et al.’s 2025 evaluation of Islington’s TYS detached youth offer, younger aged people were also recognised as being important to offer additional support to.

“Often, the damage is already done with the older, the focus needs to be on those who aren’t too involved.”- Young Person involved in the Islington TYS detached youth offer.

## **Young people with emotional and mental health difficulties**

It was recognised by all focus groups that experiencing emotional and mental health struggles can make a young person more vulnerable to criminal activity and that criminal activity may in turn impact their wellbeing.

“This is a group of people, people with mental health issues, because for people with mental health issues, they couldn’t be, since their minds could work on a different scale, they may not be aware of what’s around them [discussing people with mental health issues being vulnerable to exploitation].”- CYP FG 4

Some parents and carers shared that they do not view the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAHMS) as effective, with concerns about the lack of available therapies and an over-reliance on medication.

“Mental health issues have to come from the child to get noticed.”- Parent FG 2

“There is no therapy, there is no CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy]. It is a label on the child’s head and pill to be normal for society.”- Parent FG 1

“There should be more places for people with mental health issues. There needs to be specialists who can help them.”- CYP FG 1

Professionals also discussed the need for support for parents and carers of young people who are experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties.

“If parents feel that they can’t help the youth, there is your breakdown, we should have more sessions for parents because there are still a lot of parents who don’t know how to approach mental health matters or fear stigma from communities, we want to make mental health support more accessible” - Professional FG 3.

### **Young men and older boys**

Young men and boys were identified as a key group at risk of concerning behaviours such as joining gangs or county lines activity.

“I think the older male population are more involved in gangs and more of the younger boys are trying to join out of safety...” - CYP FG 2

Targeted work with this group was recognised as imperative by professionals.

“We should prioritise trauma [informed] and early [prevention] work...especially boys and young men.”- Professional FG 2

### **Young people from Black and minoritised communities**

Minority Matters, a voluntary sector organisation within Islington recently looked at the experience of younger members of the Somali community within the borough focusing on serious youth violence. The feedback included them communicating that (Minority Matters, 2024):

- They have lost trust in the system and police.
- There is limited cohesion between schools, parents, the council, police, youth services and voluntary organisations.
- They are terrified and grief stricken due to too many losses with the community.

- They are scared but tight-lipped with the fear of repercussion.
- There is a sense of anger and that they are overcome with despair.
- Division and blaming within the community.

Alexander and Streng-Lazerini's (2023), evaluation of the TYS detached youth worker offer found that detached workers seemed less able to engage groups, such as Somali young men.

Within the current approach to research, young people from Black and minoritised backgrounds were also recognised as being vulnerable to exploitation and criminal behaviour by all cohorts engaged with.

Casual racism was discussed not only in the context of the system but also amongst peers by young people and professionals.

"The 'p word' is so normalised, just as much as the 'n word'."- CYP FG 2

The parents and carers shared that they believe there are huge disparities in support for different demographics, especially young Black men and boys.

Professionals also shared that a potential barrier to access in terms of support may be families and young people whose English is not their first language.

"I think the biggest thing here is communication and accessing the communication from the council. Language is a huge barrier; we have a very significant population with English not first language and we need to have this information accessible to all"- Professional FG 3

### **Young people who have been excluded or who are not in education or training.**

Professionals discussed that if a young person is out of school or unsupervised they may become more vulnerable to exploitation.

"What makes a young person the most vulnerable is if they are not at school in the daytime" - Professional FG 2

It was found that parents and carers are unclear about the effectiveness or justification for exclusion and fear hidden reasons behind the rate of exclusions.

"What is the impact of the suspensions or exclusions, do they help the child?"- Parent FG 1

Parents and carers shared their opinion that children on the edge of exclusion need more tailored support and alternative options. They disagree with young people being put in detention/

exclusion units as a solution for their behaviour and would prefer to see interventions such as behavioural therapy.

“Gaps are family support. Families can feel like it’s us against them with schools rather than working together.”- Parent FG 1 discussing children who have been excluded.

“A lot of kids who aren’t academic are good at other things.”- Parent FG 2

“At exclusion units, we need to find out what they want to aspire to be and offer them the opportunities to achieve this.”- Parent FG 2

## **Young women and girls**

The data shows that there is a gendered experience of safety. Young women in particular express heightened awareness and fear in public spaces, especially at night.

“If something happened to me on a train and I’m with a man I would feel like I can’t say anything as I would be told I’m irrational, emotional or like I’m lying.” - CYP FG 3 young female

Many young girls discussed that they do not feel safe walking home as they have had negative experiences of being cat called, and they have friends who have experienced things such as being followed home and/or sexually assaulted.

“If I see a man walking down the road, I get a little bit scared and think, where can I run to?... I shouldn’t have to think like that...”- CYP FG 3 young female

Parents and carers also expressed their concerns for young women and girls as well as boys.

“Girls are more likely to be targeted as sexually exploited, but it is happening to boys as well... boys just don’t talk about it.”- Parent FG 1

“Girls are forming their own gangs. They have to have sexual relations with the entire male gangs” - Parent FG 1

## **Social media and online safety**

A recent study led by Islington Council’s Public Health Department in March 2024 looked at the experiences and support needs of children and young people, parents and teachers in relation to online safety. The key findings were that young people and adults prioritise different online harms (Levitas, 2024):

- Young peoples’ main concerns were bullying, inability to switch off and the negative impacts on emotional and mental health.



- Adults were found to worry about the appropriateness of online content, blurring online and offline worlds and serious online crime.

Within this engagement exercise, parents and carers were also found to be concerned by the uses of social media and technology amongst young people. Parents and professionals' discussions included setting restrictions and limitations on young people's social media access. There was a strong emphasis on setting limits, for example screen time, Wi-Fi and keeping devices out of bedrooms.

"We need to lock screen time and have parental controls." - Parent FG 2

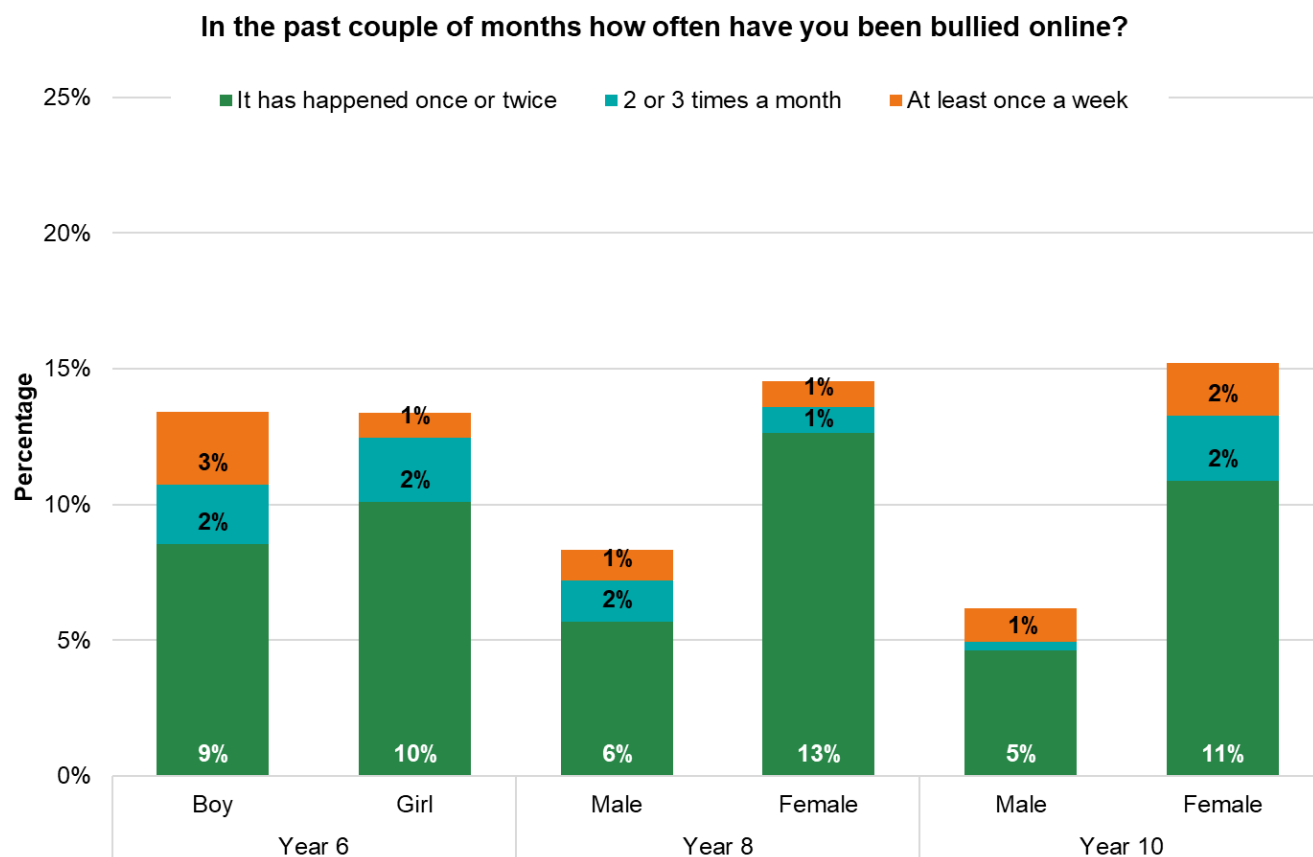
Young people were also equally concerned about social media but viewed it more as a gateway to exploitation and put less emphasis on restrictions and more on education.

"Most of the things I am scared of is because of social media." - CYP FG 5

"I think about like social media and online safety, I see a lot of stories about boys about my age who are tricked online by scams, and then I also see something about them committing suicide." - CYP FG 2

In the latest HRBQ findings (**Figure 15**), young women and girls reported being bullied online 'once or twice' at a higher rate than their male classmates. For example, amongst Year 8 pupils 13% of females reported that they have been bullied 'once or twice' compared to only 6% of Year 8 males.

**Figure 26. The percentage of responses from Year 6, 8 and 10 males and females in the HRBQ 2025 for how often they have been bullied online in the past couple of months.**



**Note:** 120 primary students and 316 secondary students did not answer this question

**Source:** Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire 2025

## Youth Crime and Exploitation

During the engagement when discussing crime, the motivation behind a young person's getting involved, in crime, was discussed by all focus group cohorts. The young people spoken to including those as young as 9 were incredibly aware of the theft, drugs offences and physical violence that takes place within the borough.

### Social capital and peer pressure

Participation in gangs or in risky behaviours was discussed as being a way to gain friends and popularity. It was suggested that it has become normalised amongst young people.

"A lot of people want to be involved in gangs, not to be harmed but they think it's cool. A lot more people want to be in gangs than the people who are in gangs."- CYP FG 2

Within all focus groups, peer pressure was discussed as potential reason as to why a young person may partake in criminal behaviour and the idea of conforming to fit in was a theme.

### **Financial gain**

When discussing potentially vulnerable young people to exploitation and criminal activity, young people recognised that living in deprivation may force one to seek alternative solutions to support themselves and/or their family.

“A lot of the time, people don’t have jobs, so it’s an easy way to get rich...”  
- CYP FG 2 discussing reasoning for joining gangs

### **Theft**

Young people have shared that theft and robberies around schools appears to be a large problem within the borough.

“In my school, it’s pretty popular to like go into the changing rooms and go into empty classrooms and just dig through all the bags and find stuff.”-  
CYP FG 2

“But we’ve had at least 10 people, that’s the number that I’ve been given but it could be more, and they’ve been like mugged and stuff, in broad daylight.”- CYP FG 2 discussing theft at school

### **Substance use**

When young people discussed drug use it is often what they are seeing and what substances they perceive other young people to be taking.

“You can smell it everywhere, you go outside, and you can smell people doing drugs.”- CYP FG 2

“I’d say how normalised it is for young people to be doing drugs... smart whip... THC etc.”- CYP FG 2

Parents and carers are equally as aware and concerned about drug use within the borough.

“I am concerned about drug and alcohol use. It keeps young people numb to the crimes they commit.” - Parent FG 1

“Young people are not getting any help when it comes to drugs, the focus is on needle injectors.” - Parent FG 1

## Knife Crime

Parents and carers expressed a great concern for youth safety, and particularly the rise in knife crime. They feel there have been minimal changes or safety precautions put in place to prevent these from occurring.

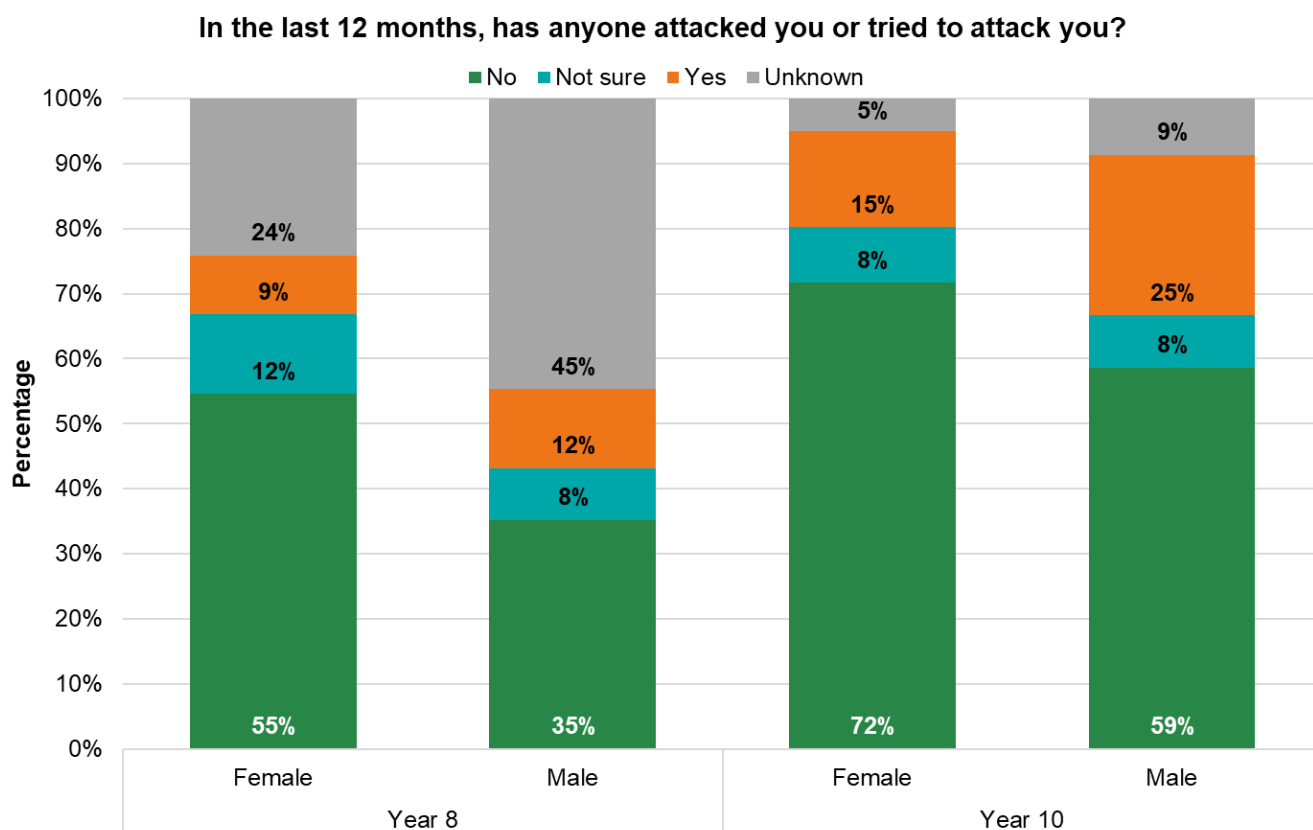
“Knife crime- I lost my son to knife crime 10 years ago. They say things have changed but as a parent they haven’t. Nothing one bit changed. We have to come together for things to change. Each organisation is working separately.”- Parent FG 1

“For young people they are so used to it, carrying a knife is nothing.”- Parent FG 2

“Shifting perspective from criminalising children to carrying knives, to safeguarding.”- Professional FG 2

The latest HRBQ echoes these findings, with 15% of Year 10 females and 25% of Year 10 males self-reporting that in the last 12 months someone has attacked or tried to attack them (**Figure 16**) (Islington Council, 2025). There is a significant increase in ‘Yes’ responses from Year 8 pupils to Year 10 pupils when answering this question (Islington Council, 2025). When looking at the ethnicity of respondents to this question, White Other (26%) and Asian (24%) Year 10 pupils were the highest responding group to ‘Yes’ (**Figure 17**) (Islington Council, 2025).

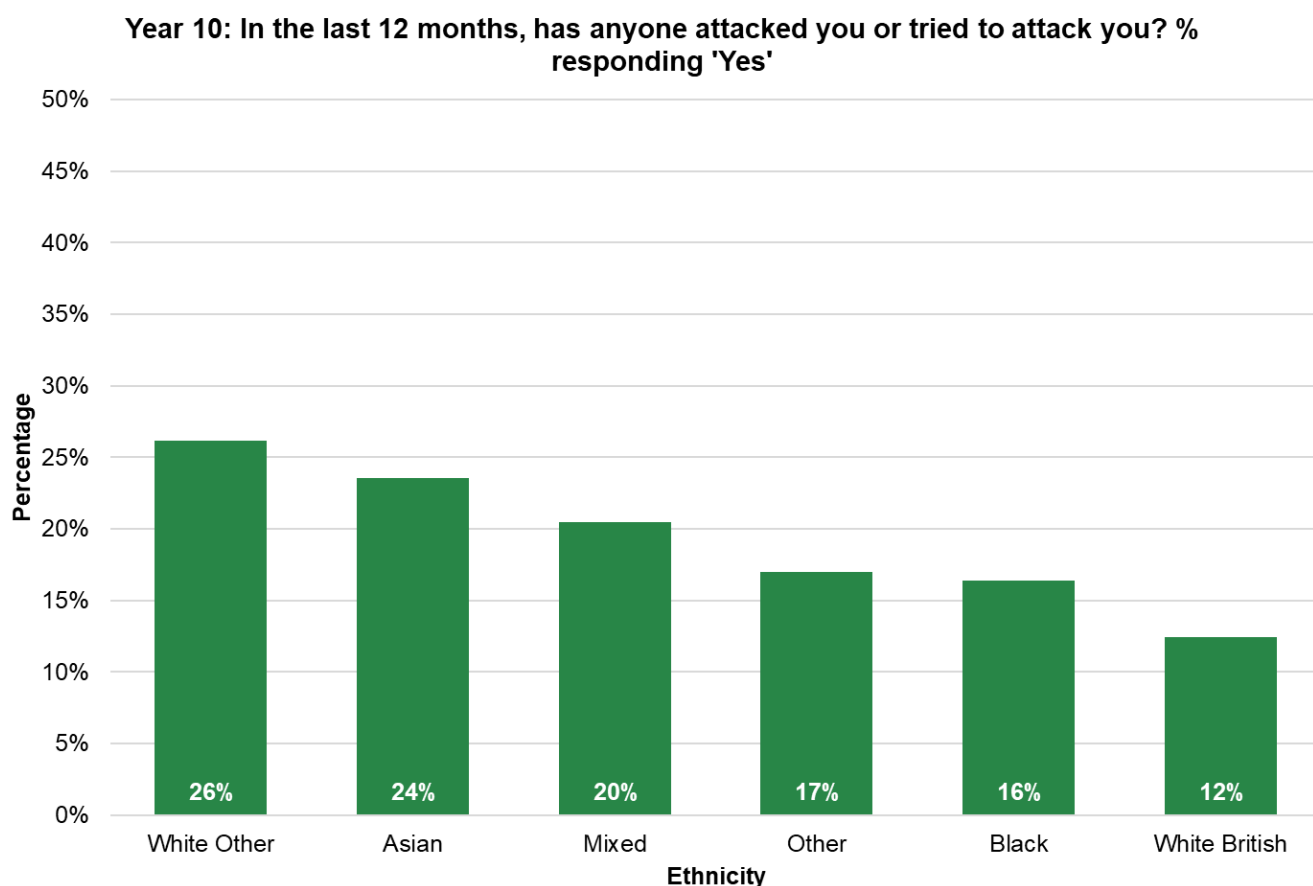
**Figure 27. Percentage of Year 8 and Year 10 pupils surveyed in the latest HRBQ 2025 responses to if anyone has attacked or tried to attack them in the last 12 months for both males and females.**



**Note:** 270 students did not answer this question

**Source:** Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire 2025

**Figure 28. Percentage of Year 10 pupils surveyed in the latest HRBQ 2025 responding 'Yes' to if anyone has attacked or tried to attack them by ethnicity.**



**Note:** 55 students did not answer this question

**Source:** Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire 2025

## Sense of belonging

### Community

Familiarity and collective experience were discussed in the context of feeling safe. Most young people shared that they feel the safest where they live and in areas that they know.

“The problem now is there’s no community anywhere.”- CYP FG 3

“I’ve always wanted to know everyone in my community and be able to say hello to them on the morning on the walk to school, but of course you don’t really because there’s so many people.”- CYP FG 4

There were also discussions about what may impact a community and sense of belonging as a community following incident such as those related to knife crime.

“It affects the whole community”- Parent FG 2 talking about knife crime

Sense of belonging and the importance of community, was also discussed in Alexander and Streng-Lazerini’s (2023) research. One of the staff members who attended a training session stated:

“What we need is a community approach, if you know one of your friends is in need or you see your neighbour in need, help them; everyone on here can do that. This is how we build a community.” – Professional who attended the VRU parenting project training

## Solutions

This section compiles the solutions proposed across all the focus groups to improving youth safety across the borough.

### Law enforcement

A consistent theme that came up in the research was around the police and relationships with law enforcement. Younger aged children expressed that their solution to safety and issues within the borough was for police to be more visible in communities and this was also expressed by the migrant and refugee young people who participated in the focus groups. Professionals also highlighted this as a solution.

“I think more police officers near parks because I know Crossfield, you're not allowed to go in there if you don't have a child ... I feel like if there's someone there to stop people going in, it might be more beneficial for children.” - CYP FG 2

“I feel like more police around would make the environment safer.”- CYP FG 4

“Criminalisation of young people, parents are telling us police are treating their children as criminals...we never do enough to tackle people who are doing the exploiting [perpetrators].”- Professional FG 2

Older aged children indicated that there was a distrust with the police due to either a negative encounter with them themselves or knowing someone who has.

“I don't feel safe around police.”- CYP FG 3

“I had someone shot in front of me, the police took 15 mins to come.”- CYP FG 6

“Law enforcement needs to wake up. Response is very slow.”- CYP FG 6

This finding was also found in the Alexander et al.'s 2025 evaluation of Islington's TYS detached youth offer.

"If it is something minor like being robbed, I don't think the police will care about it, so there is no point going to them, you just deal with it with your friends and obviously we are from the ends, so this has happened." - Islington Young Person part of the TYS detached youth offer

## **Education**

Education emerged as a strong theme across all focus groups as a solution to improving safety within Islington. The idea of early intervention and prevention through engaging with young people to teach them about risks and right from wrong was a frequent discussion point. This was raised not only by professionals, but also by young people and parents.

"Education in schools for parents and professionals. everything is changing all the time, so we need to make sure we know what is going on."- Professional FG 2 on social media

It was found that parents and carers in particular want to understand the issues that young people may experience and how best to support their children, particularly on social media and in the online world.

"We need more awareness courses so that parents can engage and understand social media."- Parent FG 2

A notable comparison between the parent and carer focus group findings and the HRBQ findings was that 51% of primary pupils said that their parents know what they are doing online all the time (Islington Council, 2025). Young people's perceptions of their parents' awareness contrasted with the shared experiences of the parents and carers.

Young people want realistic and relatable education on safety, morality and life skills delivered by people with lived experiences.

"Teach them wrong from right when they're in schools."- CYP FG 3

"I saw myself in my teacher so I would listen to them more."- CYP FG 3

"It was always tiptoed around. Like no one gave any real experiences, there was no one coming in saying, "This happened to me." - CYP FG 3 talking about knife crime

"You need to teach people a lot earlier about dangers of social media"- CYP FG 3



When talking about knife crime and serious youth violence, the parents and carers raised that there should be a focus on raising awareness amongst parents by upskilling and educating them on knife crime.

“A lot of parents and adults don’t know what’s happening, so how do we expect our children to know what’s going on. Like where they can go if they’re frightened.” - Parent FG 2

### **Role Models and Support Services**

Role models and support services were proposed as way of showing young people there is an alternative route to partaking in risky or criminal activity. This topic was mentioned more by professionals and parents/carers, and it was discussed that particularly for young Black males meeting with someone like themselves from a similar background in a positive way ensures representation and positive role modelling.

“I think role models are a good way....” - CYP FG 3

“Parents need to role model not palm them off on social media.” - Parent FG 1

“We need youth workers who are relatable to our children and who they trust.” - Parent FG 2

The findings highlight young people’s appreciation for youth clubs and how safe they feel there. Young people view youth hubs as a safe space with trusted adults that they can speak to and meet with young people from different backgrounds.

“Youth clubs bring people together and I don’t feel like there’s enough of them.” - CYP FG 1

“There’s a lot of youth clubs in Islington and they all do a good job of encouraging anyone, making sure everyone has fun.” - CYP FG 2

“Also, youth clubs can be like safe places where you can open up and speak to people, or you can meet other people who are more like you, you relate more to.” - CYP FG 2

“[...] Nothing can happen in youth clubs, because the staff are trained to be able to manage situations.” - CYP FG 1

The praise for the current youth provision within the borough was also mirrored in the parent and carer focus groups. Despite challenges, they shared that specific organisations such as LIFT and Arsenal are seen as invaluable.

“Youth clubs are a strength; LIFT in particular is the best.”- Parent FG 1

“Youth outreach type services who are relatable and in the community are a strength.”- Parent FG 2

Within Alexander et al.’s (2025), review of the detached youth work offers; the professionals engaged with also recognised the benefit of youth hubs and how they can help to facilitate supporting young people.

“But yeah, for me, if you’ve got a hub where you can bring young people, it’s a lot easier and you can build relationships quicker.”- Professional from TYS programme

The professionals recognised that there is a lot of support and services available within Islington however not everyone knows about each other, and they suggested more joined up working and information sharing across the system.

“The challenge is not what services are available, but it is how well they are connected.”- Professional FG 2

There is a strong demand for systemic change, particularly around inclusion in schools and early intervention for children with SEND.

“It’s time for action and to come together.”- Parent FG 1

Within the parent and carer focus group, there was a frustration that local authority actions often appear reactive rather than impactful.

“A lot of the actions of the local authority feel very cosmetic.”- Parent FG 1

Parents and carers discussed the need for investments into improving young people services in general including for emotional and mental health.

“We need to focus on what is going to benefit the children and not just about funding.”- Parent FG 1

## **Transitions**

Supporting young people through different transitions whether they are in between schools, years or services was identified as an important solution. Professionals and young people both identified younger aged children to be more vulnerable to exploitation and therefore interventions and additional support is needed to prevent this from occurring.

“There is a cut-off age for 25 and then support stops.”- Parent FG 2 discussing CYP with SEND

“Young people slipping through the net at transition age between primary and secondary school.”- Professional FG 2

“Once you are not a child, you go into adult services and that’s even less. There’s a massive gap.”- Professional FG 1

Alexander and Streng-Lazerini’s (2023) review into Islington’s Violence Reduction Unit Funded Parenting Project which supported two cohorts of children moving from Year 6 to Year 7. The report highlighted the importance of supporting young people through transitional changes. Parents noted the value of the Transitions Practitioners:

“[The transitions worker] has taken a lot of the burden off me by helping communicate with the school because the communication has broken down...”- Parent involved in the VRU Funded Parenting Project

### **Visible safety measures**

There is a strong call and need for visible safety measures such as more staff, more street lighting and better CCTV especially in transport settings.

“Maybe they should put people there at night.”- CYP FG 3 talking about public transport

“More CCTV too, more on trains.” - CYP FG 3

“We’re in a generation where technology is evolving so much, I don’t understand why CCTV is so bad now.”- CYP FG 3

Many young people in, this research reference how being outside at night/ when it is dark as a contributing factor to not feeling safe. This was also discussed in the Alexander et al.’s 2025 evaluation of the detached youth work offer in Islington. The evaluation shared that young people and some practitioners suggested that the detached youth worker session start at the end of school time period, particularly during winter months.

Both parents and carers and young people highlighted the need for amnesty boxes and knife bins. Parents and carers shared that the infrastructure around knife bins should be clearly marketed and accessible to both young people and higher authorities.

“They are probably not going to use the knife bins if they think it [knife bins] belongs to the police...” – Parent FG 2

“They have knife bins if they don’t want to go to the police station.”- Parent FG 2

“I live on the border and never see anything on the Islington side [knife bins]”- Parent FG 2

## Limitations

While this report draws on valuable insights from children, young people, parents, carers, professionals and volunteers within Islington through online surveys and in-person focus groups, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may have influenced the findings and their interpretation and analysis.

### Wording

Despite a deliberate effort to adopt a Public Health approach to youth safety focusing on the wider determinants and needs and not solely on knife crime and serious youth violence, these two themes emerged strongly in both the survey data and the focus groups. Communications around this specific engagement work was referred to as ‘youth safety’ which may be associated more with knife crime and violence, and this may have skewed the results. A key piece of learning from this research would be that coaching the language of the engagement as ‘safety’ in general may promote more conversations and thought on wider issues such as road safety, healthy relationships, drugs and alcohol, etc.

### Sampling

This engagement was subject to sampling and self-selection bias, as participants were more likely to be individuals with access to digital platforms and the time and interest to engage in focus groups. Both the surveys and the focus groups were voluntary and not randomly selected. It is acknowledged that the people who chose to participate may have had stronger opinions or experiences related to youth safety that may have potentially skewed findings. Some groups, such as younger children, non-English speakers and those from under-represented communities who may have more marginalised experiences and views may have been less likely to participate.

A further limitation is the demographic coverage of this work. Despite efforts to include a wide range of voices, certain groups may have been underrepresented due to barriers such as language, digital access, mistrust of services, location, or awareness of the engagement activities. This affects the overall inclusiveness of the engagement and should be considered when generalising findings to wider populations. However, we have triangulated the findings with other local research where possible to provide greater context and to increase the accuracy of our findings.

The wide promotion of the surveys was intended to ensure the capturing of a broad range of participants. Furthermore, the use of both purposive and convenience sampling for the focus groups was hoped to counteract this limitation. It is also noted that there were successful efforts to engage with children from more marginalised groups, such as younger children, girls, children

with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), children in alternative provision, and migrant and refugee children in Islington.

### **Online surveys**

In terms of data collection methods, online surveys while efficient and accessible, have inherent limitations. They do not allow for follow-up questions or clarifications, which means responses may lack depth or context. Participants may also interpret questions differently, especially younger children or those with SEND and varying levels of literacy or digital confidence. The two-pronged approach of using both online surveys and focus groups was intended to ensure that contextual information could be ascertained from participants and to fill in any gaps from the online surveys.

### **Group dynamics in focus groups**

In-person focus groups provided richer, qualitative data, but they also had constraints. The nature of group discussions can influence individual contributions. Some participants may have felt reluctant to speak openly, particularly on sensitive issues, while others may have led the conversations. This can skew the balance of perspectives captured. Additionally, the presence of peers or authority figures (such as adults in children's focus groups or managers in professional groups) may lead to social desirability bias, where participants modify their responses to align with what they believe is expected or acceptable, rather than sharing their genuine views. These factors were mitigated by having well trained focus groups facilitators and stressing confidentiality and anonymisation at the beginning of each session.

Every effort was made to ensure there was accurate recording of the discussions from each focus group. While each focus group had a note-taker, in some cases multiple, and groups had transcribed audio recordings. It is also acknowledged that note keeping and some audio from the transcripts was also lost due to background noise (from talking, children and accents).

### **Understanding and subjectivity**

Perception of safety is subjective particularly amongst young people and due to the increasing influence of social media it may be influenced and impacted by the information people are seeing online. This needs to be considered when implementing the recommendations findings from this research.

For children in particular, variations in age, maturity, and communication skills may have influenced the level of insight they were able to offer. While creative and age-appropriate methods were used where possible, some younger participants may have struggled to understand certain questions or express complex thoughts about safety, which could limit the depth of their input.

### **Time scales**

There were also practical and ethical constraints. Time and resource limitations meant that the number and geographic spread of consultation activities were restricted. In some cases, there may not have been sufficient time to build trust or create safe, comfortable spaces for open

discussion, particularly in focus groups. These factors could have constrained the richness and honesty of the feedback received.

## Conclusion

This research has highlighted the importance of youth safety across the borough expressed by the children and young people themselves, their parents and carers and the professionals and volunteers who work with them. Youth safety is a complex issue, and the engagement has highlighted the many determinants that can influence how safe a young person feels and the systems that support this. The findings from this work and related existing research that has taken place in the borough, indicate that young people are incredibly aware and primarily concerned about crime and exploitation.

The proposed solutions outlined above and expanded upon in the recommendations below, show that there is an appetite across the borough to understand and learn more about how to keep young people safe, as well as being able to see visible measures implemented to improve safety. The relationships that young people have with those around them as well as the physical spaces that they are in, can contribute to improving safety and preventing youth crime and exploitation.

While all of those who participated in the research consistently identified that parents, carers and trusted adult family members as being the most responsible for keeping children and young people safe, it was evident throughout that there is a need for genuine and purposeful multi-agency collaboration to increase youth safety in Islington. The importance of the role of police, schools, (mental) health professionals and the local youth offer (such as youth clubs and community partners) was emphasised, by all those who participated in the engagement, as being key contributors to positive youth safety outcomes.

It is also important to note that the need for early, accessible and relevant education and training offers for children, parents/carers and professionals/volunteers was highlighted.

Finally, there was a common theme throughout the engagement activities about the value of establishing a shared sense of community and belonging in Islington, which could be achieved by providing opportunities and spaces for residents to meet, share and connect. It is important that the views and shared experiences of all those spoken to during this engagement be heard and included in the new Youth Safety Strategy 2025-2030, to shape the future ambitions within the borough.

## Recommendations

A large number of Islington children, young people, parents, carers, professionals and volunteers from diverse backgrounds engaged with this research. The insight gathered provides a rich understanding of their priorities and solutions for making Islington safer for young people and has been used to shape the recommendations set out below. These should be used to guide future work in this area and inform the development of the new Youth Safety Strategy 2025-2030.

1. Provide more visible safety measures such as streetlights and cameras in areas that are poorly lit.
2. Implement increased police presence in areas and times such as dark or late evenings that are known to have increased anti-social behaviour. There would be value in improving the relationship between communities and police to increase trust, confidence and reliance.
3. Provide more education for young people at a young age in schools and in community settings on safety with a particular focus on prevention and building resilience. It is also important to cover topics that are important to young people such as the dangers and risks of exploitation, drug use, criminal activity, how to stay safe online, and how to travel safely.
4. Provide more education and skills development for parents and carers on how best to support and protect their children particularly online and on the streets. The findings from both the surveys and focus groups revealed that young people feel the safest at home and therefore support should be given to families to help them to create a safe home environment for young people.
5. Ensure that primary schools, secondary schools and colleges provide safe and inclusive environments that meet the needs of children and young people, specifically those with SEND, and equitably balance behaviour management policies with student retention efforts.
6. Create a more joined up system of working between organisations to ensure consistency and promotion of the local offer available and to share information between them.
7. Provide more youth clubs and activities available to young people. Young people and parents and carers praised the youth club provision in the borough and believed accessible activities and opportunities for young people to be a solution to deter them from criminal behaviour. There was a focus on the provision of physical activity opportunities for children and young people, and a call for gender specific offers.
8. Communicate messages to young people about harm and the dangers in accurate and age-appropriate ways. Young people, professionals and parents and carers do want to understand what is happening, but this is often influenced by the content they are viewing on social media. Young people need to be taught how to understand and interpret this information.
9. Use local data and intelligence to inform targeted work and to listen to young people's views and experiences, for example, if theft is taking place outside certain schools, using that insight to shape local measures and interventions address it.

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# Appendix

## Appendices 1

The local Youth Safety definition wheel that takes a Public Health approach to safety.



## Appendices 2

The full survey findings are available upon request.

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