

STAY TRUE  
TO YOU

# Helping young people stay out of harm's way

**CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT**  
MAY 2024

**Stay True to You is a campaign – and an approach – providing a consistent resource for all those partners across the Thames Valley who have a role in supporting young people to stay safe.**

Stay True to You came from young people themselves, supported by youth practitioners, who participated in two phases of research and co-design.

When we asked how we could best communicate and change behaviours, they were clear: Make it a vibrant approach, one that reinforces their confidence to trust their instincts and make their own positive choices.

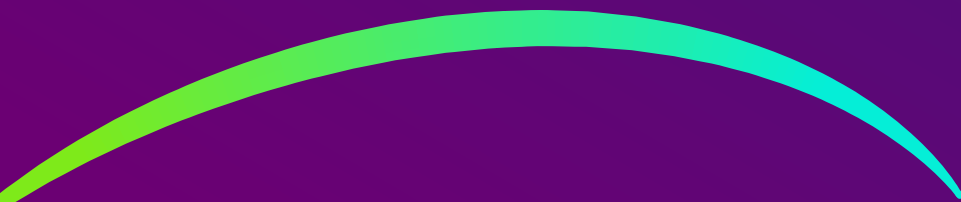
They wanted the opposite of a knife crime campaign – a positive, pro-safety campaign aimed at empowering all young people.

It was clear too that for young people, the best way to reach them was through those trusted adults around them – parents, teachers, youth workers, sports coaches, community members and volunteers. They are ultimately the best messenger to help young people both feel and stay safe.

Stay True to You is designed to support practitioners to do what they do best, starting conversations about safety and encouraging dialogue with those that look up to them. This toolkit provides an overview of this approach, and of the resources available at [StayTrueToYou.co.uk](https://StayTrueToYou.co.uk).

**Jules Bottazzi**  
Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership

Stay True to You aims to be a versatile resource for all partners within the Violence Prevention Partnership, based on evidence of what works. This toolkit is provided to help you put “Stay True to You” into practice in the best way for your organisation.





**Loyalty. Respect. Trust.**

**Before you give it to anyone else,  
first and foremost – you owe it to yourself.  
To put your best interests first.**

**Respect your beliefs, the values you hold,  
about what's right (and what's wrong).**

**Trust what you feel, in your heart,  
in your gut, follow your instincts.**

**STAY TRUE  
TO YOU**



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# How can you support Stay True to You?

This toolkit has been created to support Stay True to You partner organisations in their uptake and application of the approach in your area over the next 12 months. Unlike a lot of campaigns and toolkits where you might be asked to support a third-party campaign, **your organisation, as a member of the Violence Prevention Partnership, has directly supported the strategy and outputs of this approach, as well as in-part funded its development.**

**We hope that you will feel enthusiastic to prioritise sharing of the campaign within your area both via communications and by cascading internally to your own teams and individual staff working with young people.**

Stay True to You has three different end audiences – young people, parents/communities, and of particular importance, practitioners. As the experts, you can consider how you can reach each of these locally, to pick-and-choose from the resources provided.

- Do you have some channels more orientated towards young people, or are they better suited for adults?
- What internal channels, staff training opportunities, internal meetings?

- Do you run events – either for staff or out in your communities?
- Are there networks that could help share the approach within your local partnership?

While there is an initial launch, the Stay True to You approach will continue to evolve over the coming year with a training offer and more resources. And we are here to help you – just contact us if you need advice.

And lastly, the brand is flexible. If your organisation or local partnership has an idea as to how the “Stay True to You” brand could be used to support some local activity, please contact the Violence Prevention Partnership who can work with you on developing any new ideas.

If you need advice or have an idea for Stay True to You, contact the VPP by emailing:

[tim.wiseman@thamesvalley.police.uk](mailto:tim.wiseman@thamesvalley.police.uk)  
Senior Communications Manager



# How Stay True to You was developed

We're grateful for the time and expertise of the more than 50 young people who've contributed to this process. From October 2022 to today, we've visited 8 youth services for group sessions and interviews with 50+ young people.

We listened to their stories, were moved by their experiences and observed how they interact with their friends, their surroundings and the youth workers who sat in with us. We asked them: what causes violence? How might it be prevented? What's the role of friends, family, police, councils, youth workers, brands and celebrity influencers? How can we communicate with you and help change behaviours? What really works?

We also ran workshops with 25 youth practitioners – the dedicated youth workers who spend their days at the heart of communities with the young people we're trying to reach. What patterns do they observe in their day-to-day work, that could help us understand young people's perceptions of violence and how to prevent it? Where is – and who holds – the influence? What works?

We also consulted with professionals outside the youth services sector: experts in violence reduction, behavioural psychology, communications strategists and campaigners. Again, we asked: what really works?

Our core approach rests on three key insights that has informed the launch of Stay True to You, and will form the guiding principles for it's ongoing evolution.

By implementing the campaign you are responding directly to what young people from your local area told us would help them.

For more information about the insight, please see the full insight deck available on the campaign hub.

Insight 1:  
**I'LL WALK MY OWN WAY**

Insight 2:  
**THE FEAR IS REAL. DON'T TELL ME IT'S ALL OK**

Insight 3:  
**PREVENTION STARTS WITH STAYING CALM**



# Responding to the insights

For many of our young people, they will (thankfully) never directly experience serious violence or knife crime – but this doesn't mean their world isn't a scary place and that sometimes the wrong decisions can get made.

They told us to avoid telling them what to do, negative messaging, consequences, traumatic images and stories. And instead to acknowledge their realities, treat them as equals, empower them in their own decision-making.

However, we also have to acknowledge our limitations in our ability to reach young people – and that there is a trust and engagement issue between young people and “the authorities”. Which 16-year-old is following our Facebook channel or X/Twitter account?

So while we have built some resources for you to direct to young people (for those who have channels that can reach them), this isn't really a campaign directed at them.

Instead, the focus of this work is on providing practitioners with resources and a framework to support the work they already do day in, day out – recognising they are our best channel to reach young people and change behaviours.

The intention is to think upstream – to mitigate violence before it even rears its head.



# The new Stay True to You website hub:

## [www.StayTrueToYou.co.uk](http://www.StayTrueToYou.co.uk)

We have responded to requests from our partners to put in place a new, centrally provided, standalone website which covers the whole Thames Valley area. We were asked to develop a resource that all local organisations and partnerships can signpost to, can promote to key audiences, and which would provide a single consistent approach.

Overseen by the Violence Prevention Partnership, it serves as a hub for the Stay True to You campaign and the wider approach, with the capacity to develop.

### It provides:

- A single hub covering the whole Thames Valley region
- A one-stop-shop with three separate areas for young people, parents/ community members and practitioners
- A standalone resource with vibrant branding – not part of any organisation's existing website

- Key messages and resources and has capacity to evolve over time
- Signposting to further information, national and local services

The hub will over expand over time to carry training resources, additional assets, and more.

We ask all organisations to review the website and consider how they can link to it and, vice versa, your local information and services that it signposts to.







# **Communicating about Stay True to You**

Resources for our key audiences



# Communicating with young people:

We have produced a small set of resources to reach young people directly.

## We provide:

- **Young person-facing social media assets** and pre-written messages, linking to the website
- **A short guide on communicating with young people** – informed by our research
- **A giveaway card with QR code** which directs to the website
- **Key message posters** to be used in conjunction with other activities (i.e. workshop sessions)

For free hard-copy printed versions of the resources contact: [info@staytruetoyou.co.uk](mailto:info@staytruetoyou.co.uk)

# Main messages for young people

Whether in materials aimed directly at them, or via the important work that youth practitioners do, there are three main behavioural messages that we want to convey to young people, encouraging them to stay true to themselves and seek out advice from a trusted adult.

## Main Programme Promise:

Helping you stay out of harm's way



The decisions you make now can stop a difficult situation escalating. These are your choices to make.

If things look like they could get out of hand, plan ahead. Consider how you can avoid conflict. Think about what you can control.



You know when something's gone too far. Trust yourself to do the right thing.

Walk the other way. Exit the chat. Speak out.



Sharing your concerns with someone else helps you stay in control and keeps you and others safe.

Find a trusted adult. Talk things through. Share how you're feeling.

If you don't know who you can speak to, we can point you in the right direction.

# Social media assets for young people

You can use any of the following copy to quickly and easily create posts on your social media channels for young person-facing posts. Feel free to edit or expand and be creative.

When it comes to staying safe, you probably already know the right thing to do. But for the times you're not sure, find an adult you can speak to.

If you don't have one, we can help. Visit [StayTrueToYou.co.uk](http://StayTrueToYou.co.uk)

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Respect the values you have about what's right. Follow your own path.

If you're worried about keeping yourself safe, we can help you find a trusted adult to talk to.

Visit [StayTrueToYou.co.uk](http://StayTrueToYou.co.uk)



# Communicating with parents, family members and the wider community:

For many organisations, particularly public sector organisations such as local authorities, your channels will have the broadest reach with adults within your communities.

You may wish to prioritise using messages aimed at parents, family members and those in the wider community.

## We provide:

- **An animation** that sets out the problem and the response – with adults as the key audience – which directs to the website
- **Insights pack** – what young people told us would work for them
- **Parent/community-facing social media assets** with key messages and to direct to the website
- **Key messages/advice** for parents on the website under the TRUE approach
- **The website** area will carry training resources, videos and signposting to other services/information
- **A community event/display stand** resource (contact us)

For free hard-copy printed versions of the resources contact: [info@staytrueto you.co.uk](mailto:info@staytrueto you.co.uk)





We know parents want to keep their children safe, and at the same time that conversations with young people about safety can be difficult.

But with the right support and advice from the adults they trust, young people show us time and again that they want to, and do, make the right choices.

You can help them see past their fears and build their confidence in what is the right thing to do, so they can trust their instincts to make their own positive decisions and know that there is always someone they can turn to.

So we're not here to tell you how to parent. Just to share the approaches young people and youth workers have told us work best when having difficult conversations.



## **Talk (T) messages:**

Create open and honest dialogue with your child and their friends. Build respectful relationships.

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They may not always want to share with you out of fear of judgement or consequence, but you can overcome this.

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Don't dwell on their futures – they're living in the here and now. But try to explore the consequences, in all their forms, to help build young people's confidence and inform their own positive choices.



## **Recognise reality (R) messages:**

Their feelings of safety are shaped by many influences, in the real world and online. How safe they feel can change their behaviours and choices.

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Spot the signs –withdrawing, spending time away from home, negative peer groups. If you're concerned, act upon it, talk to them.

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Acknowledge what's happening and recognise their feelings and fears, but without adding more.

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Help them see past myths or influences by offering facts and information.



## **Understand (U) messages:**

Demonstrate you're trying to understand by truly listening to their experiences.

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Give them space to talk freely with no judgement or instruction.



## **Empower (E) messages:**

Help them understand their own capabilities to avoid conflict and stay safe.

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Help them recognise the things they can positively do for themselves, and encourage them when they make the right choice.

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Always make them feel safe to ask for help.

And if not you, who else can they talk to who you both trust? Help them see there is always someone there for them.

# Social media assets for parent/ community-facing posts:

For many partners - particularly public sector organisations such as local authorities - our channels predominantly reach adults in our community. As such, you may choose to prioritise these messages which are aimed at parents and adults in the wider community.

You can use any of the following copy to quickly and easily create posts on your social media channels. Feel free to edit or expand and be creative.

Stay True to You is a new approach to help you have better conversations about safety and making positive choices, with the young people that look up to you.

For free resources and more information, visit [StayTrueToYou.co.uk](http://StayTrueToYou.co.uk)

Youth workers, community leaders, and anyone working with young people have an essential role to play in keeping young people safe. We've worked with youth workers and young people across Thames Valley to develop TRUE – a new approach to talking about safety and positive choices with young people.

For more information and free resources, visit [StayTrueToYou.co.uk](http://StayTrueToYou.co.uk)

We're proud to support Stay True to You, a new evidence based campaign to start better conversations and empower young people to be safe. If you're working with young people across the Thames Valley, get more information, free resources and get involved at [StayTrueToYou.co.uk](http://StayTrueToYou.co.uk)



# Communicating with practitioners:

Key to the approach is how we engage those who are working with young people, helping empower them in their roles, encouraging them to have good conversations about safety and to be those trusted adults young people need.

We have produced some practical resources to help all practitioners adopt and implement some of Stay True to You principles alongside their work.

- **An animation** that sets out the problem and the response, for adults. Directs to the website
- **Insights pack** – what young people told us would work for them
- **The TRUE approach** – providing a simple process to help inform the way they work, encouraging them to start good conversations about safety with young people
- **TRUE flashcards** which help with short small group or 1-2-1 conversations with young people about safety
- **A structured workshop guide**, deliverable in 45mins to 1hr, able to be delivered by any practitioner with a group / class
- **TRUE approach posters** – for use in staff rooms and to promote engagement with the approach and training offer
- **We are offering training** to organisations and individual practitioners in how to use the Stay True to You approach. Check the website for more information or contact [info@staytruetoyou.co.uk](mailto:info@staytruetoyou.co.uk)

For free hard-copy printed versions of the resources contact: [info@staytruetoyou.co.uk](mailto:info@staytruetoyou.co.uk)

# Main messages for practitioners and parents 14

A core principle of Stay True to You is that youth practitioners already know what they are doing, and are the most valuable asset for encouraging young people to talk about violence and make good decisions.

For many young people, youth workers are their trusted adult, someone they can speak to for advice or to share a concern that they may not talk to anyone else about.

We are asking practitioners to combine their skills with the TRUE approach to create an overarching methodology for engaging with young people about staying safe.

## Key Programme Promise

Helping young people stay out of harm's way

## Secondary Message

You have a role in helping a young people stay safe – and the best way to do so is to stay TRUE. The TRUE principles are a way of thinking about conversations with young people to ensure they are positive and empowering.



### Talk (T)

Create open and honest dialogue with young people.

Help them build respectful relationships where they are treated as equals.



### Recognise reality (R)

Acknowledge what's happening and recognise their feelings and fears, without adding more. Offer up the facts and share information about the consequences, in all their forms.



### Understand (U)

Demonstrate you're trying to understand by truly listening to their experiences.

Give them space to talk freely with no judgement or instruction.



### Empower (E)

Help young people understand their own capabilities. Help them recognise the things they can positively do for themselves, and help them consider who they trust to ask for help.

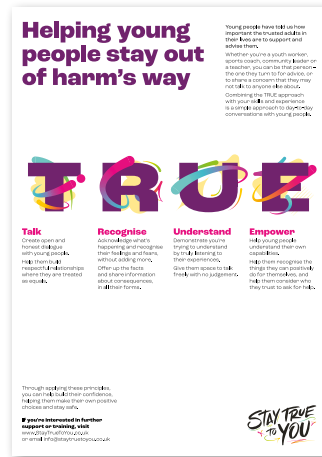
There are four core materials available for practitioners, to support them have positive conversations with their young people. These are available on the Stay True to You website or for free printed copies contact: [info@staytruetoyou.co.uk](mailto:info@staytruetoyou.co.uk).



## Insight pack

A short summary of what young people think causes and prevents violence, and how best to communicate with them.

These insights underpin the whole TRUE approach and we hope you'll take the time to read these first.



## Poster

The TRUE poster reiterates the core principles of the Stay True to You approach, and can be shared digitally or printed for easy reference.



## Flashcards

We've heard from many practitioners that sometimes they need or want to have important conversations with a young person (or several) about violence and staying safe, but may be short on time or feel unsure of what to say.

These TRUE flashcards have been designed with this in mind.



## Workshop Guide

This resource contains a set of exercises and discussion prompts for use in group situations with young people. It's full of best practice we've seen from youth workers across the region.

It's designed for youth workers, teachers, community leaders – anyone working directly with young people (aged 13–18) who may benefit from talking about this subject.



# What does success look like?

We know that this is perhaps not a normal campaign – and not a normal toolkit!

**We have three very different audiences and we are working through you and your organisations, your staff, your communities to reach them.**

**We hope you can use your own expertise to decide how this could work best for you, your organisation and the audiences you can reach.**

**We'll know we are succeeding when:**

- We can raise awareness of the approach and encourage organisations to adopt it and use the resources offered
- We can support practitioners – in all roles – to feel comfortable and supported in holding conversations and in guiding those young people who look to them

- We can engage and support parents, family and the wider community and build their confidence
- We can reach young people – either directly through our channels, or more likely through the power of those practitioners and trusted adults around them

Ultimately, we want to help young people stay safe. Let's help them build their own skills, their confidence and ability to make their own positive choices to stay safe.

The best advice we can give a young person is first and foremost, stay true to you.

**We look forward to developing the Stay True to You resources over the coming months.**

**If you need any advice, contact us:**  
[info@staytruetoyou.co.uk](mailto:info@staytruetoyou.co.uk)

**And thank you for all your support.**



## **Why has this work been commissioned?**

This campaign isn't directly aimed at addressing knife crime. We recognise that for many of our young people, they will (thankfully) never experience this type of violence – but this doesn't mean their world isn't a scary place and that sometimes the wrong decisions can get made.

This work was commissioned to understand how young people feel about their world, and create a new approach to addressing their concerns – to build resilience, emotional maturity and confidence at the root, encouraging young people to make their own decisions in a positive way.

## **Who is the approach aimed at?**

1. Youth practitioners in the Thames Valley region via a set of core practical resources used to start conversations with young people
2. Parents supporting young people via insight and information, some of whom want to adopt some of the principles themselves with their own children
3. Young people themselves via the work done by their trusted adults, three key behavioural messages via campaign collateral, and signposting to sources of more information

## **How is the campaign different to previous efforts?**

Stay True to You is built on an evidence base formulated by speaking with young people and their trusted adults. It isn't really a campaign directed at young people – we aren't telling them what to do. Instead, the focus of this work is on providing practitioners with resources and a framework to support the work they already do day in, day out – recognising they are our best asset and the best channel to reach young people and change behaviours. The intention is to think upstream – to mitigate violence before it even rears its head.

## **What do you hope the campaign will achieve?**

Ultimately, we want to start conversations, to give young people the space and time to explore their feelings and make their own decisions. Young people told us time and time again that they must do what feels right for them – Stay True to You simply provides a framework to discuss and decide on what that is. We also want youth practitioners to feel comfortable and supported holding these conversations and guiding the young people that look up to them. And where young people may not have a trusted adult, we want to help them find the person who can be there for them.

Produced by the Thames Valley Violence  
Prevention Partnership, supported by  
Claremont Communications

