

HOLYHEAD SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

March 2026

OUR SAFEGUARDING TEAM



At Holyhead School we endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. We believe that all children should feel safe and be able to approach someone if they have a concern. The safety and wellbeing of our students is the most important aspect of our work as a school. If you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing or safety, or want to report a concern about another child, please ask to speak to one of the Designated Safeguarding Team.

In this month's issue we look at:

- County Lines Intensification Week 2026
- What are County Lines?
- Safer Internet Day 2026 at Holyhead School
- Children's Mental Health Week 2026 at Holyhead school

Who to contact if you are concerned about a student at Holyhead school:

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Telephone the school on 0121 523 1960 to speak to any of the safeguarding team.

The 2026 **County Lines Intensification Week** is scheduled to take place from **Monday 2nd March to Monday 9th March 2026**.

This national "week of action," coordinated by the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) and the [National County Lines Coordination Centre \(NCLCC\)](#), focuses on disrupting organised drug networks and safeguarding vulnerable individuals

Core Objectives of the Week

- **Enforcement:** Executing warrants, making arrests, and closing down active drug "deal lines".
- **Safeguarding:** Identifying and protecting children and vulnerable adults who have been "cuckooed" or coerced into criminal exploitation.
- **Community Engagement:** Police teams, such as the West Midlands Police, will visit schools and community hubs to raise awareness of the signs of exploitation.
- **Intelligence Gathering:** Using operations like [Automatic Number Plate Recognition \(ANPR\)](#) to track the movement of drugs and cash

Context and Recent Performance

The 2026 campaign follows a period of significant activity. For example, the December 2024 intensification week led to:

- **1,660 arrests** and **261 lines** closed.
- Seizure of over **£3m** in drugs and **£1.98m** in cash.
- **1,434 people safeguarded**, nearly half of whom were children

How to Report Concerns

If you suspect county lines activity or exploitation in your area, you can report it via the following official channels:

- **Police:** Call **101** for non-emergencies or use local police online reporting tools. Always call **999** in an emergency.
- **Crimestoppers:** Provide information 100% anonymously by calling **0800 555 111** or using the Crimestoppers Online Form.
- **Fearless:** A service specifically for young people to report crime anonymously at [Fearless.org](#).

What are County Lines?

County Lines is a criminal model where [organised crime groups \(OCGs\)](#) from large urban areas (like London, Birmingham, or Liverpool) expand their drug-dealing operations into smaller towns and rural locations.

The name comes from the "**deal line**"—a dedicated mobile phone number used by the gang to receive orders and coordinate drug distribution across [county boundaries](#)

Key Features

- **Exploitation:** OCGs groom and coerce **children** (some as young as seven) and **vulnerable adults** to act as "runners". These victims transport drugs and cash, taking the highest risks while the gang leaders stay [detached from the street-level activity](#).
- **Cuckooing:** Gangs often take over the home of a vulnerable person (such as someone with mental health issues or addiction) by force or manipulation to use it as a local base—or "**trap house**"—for their operations.
- **Violence:** To maintain control and drive out local competition, these networks frequently use [extreme violence](#), intimidation, and weapons.

Terminology to Know

- **The Line:** The mobile phone number used to take drug orders.
- **Running a Line / Going Country:** Phrases used to describe travelling to another area to [sell drugs](#).
- **Debt Bondage:** A tactic where gangs claim a victim "owes" them money (often for "stolen" or "lost" drugs) to force them into [continued criminal acts](#).
- **Plugging:** The internal concealment of drugs inside a [bodily orifice](#) to avoid police detection during transport.

Common Signs of Involvement

- Possession of **multiple mobile phones** (often "burner" phones).
- Regularly **going missing** from home or school and being found in [unfamiliar locations](#).
- Unexplained **money, expensive clothes, or gifts**.
- Changes in mood, secretive behaviour, or [unexplained injuries](#).

If you are concerned about someone, you can contact [Crimestoppers](#) anonymously at 0800 555 111 or call the police on 101. Alternatively contact a DSL at Holyhead and we can support you

Last month was Safer Internet Day and during form time students at Holyhead did a lot of work around using AI and how to stay safe.

Here is a reminder of the importance of staying safe when using AI.

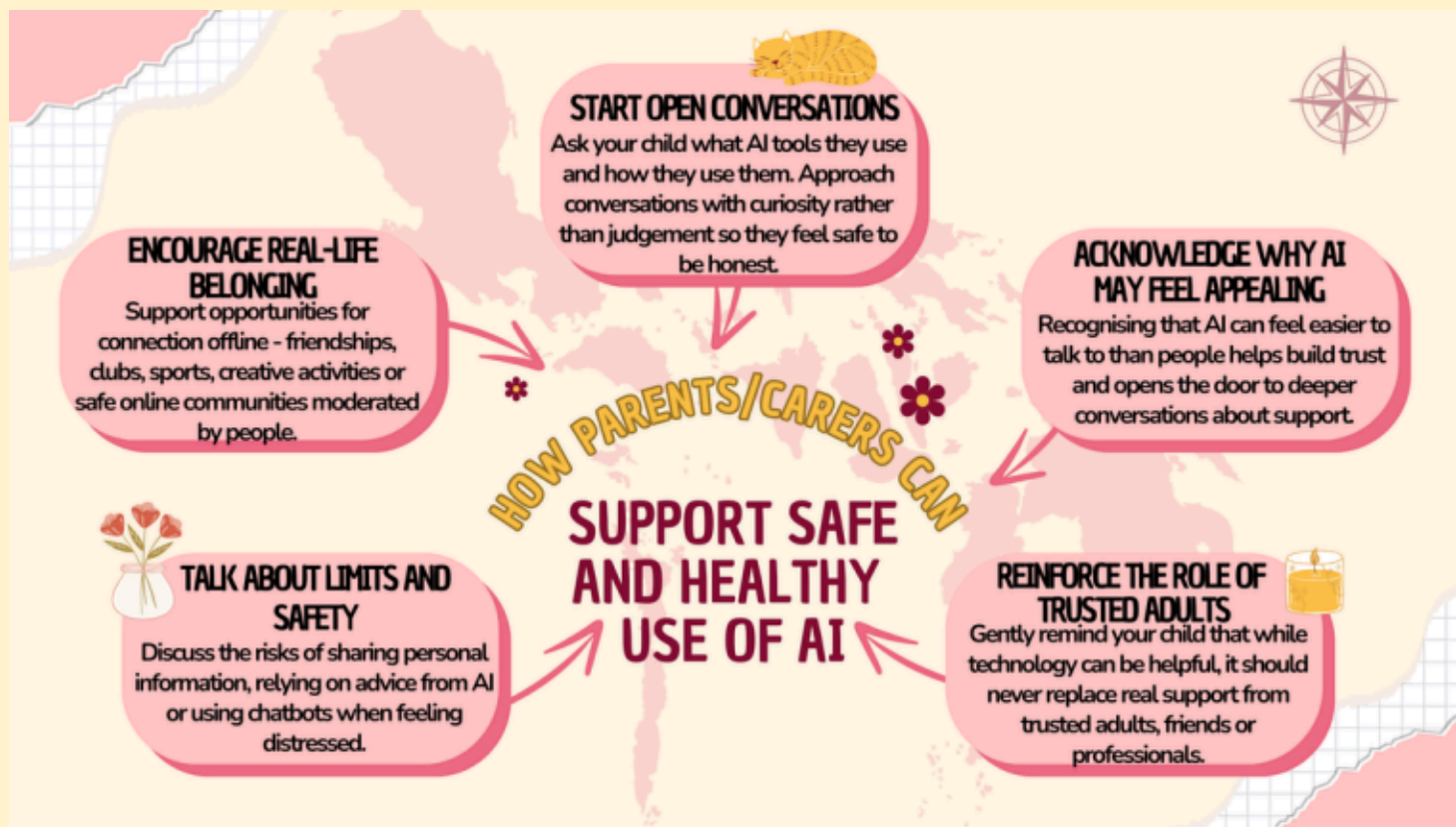
AI chatbots and digital assistants are becoming

AI Chatbots, mental health and belonging

AI chatbots can feel safe and appealing to teenagers. They are always available, nonjudgemental and easy to talk to. For some young people, especially those experiencing loneliness, anxiety or low mood, these tools may feel like a place where they belong or where they can express difficult feelings. There can be positives to this. AI tools may help young people put their thoughts into words, feel less alone in the moment or take a first step towards recognising they need support. However, there are also important risks parents should be aware of. AI chatbots are not people. They

spaces where they feel listened to, understood or supported, particularly when they are struggling with their mental health or finding it difficult to talk to people around them. Adolescence is a time when young people are exploring who they are and where they fit and some may turn to online spaces or AI tools to find a sense of connection.

cannot fully understand emotions, provide appropriate safeguarding responses or offer real emotional care. Some may give inaccurate, inappropriate or harmful advice, particularly around mental health. There is also a risk that young people begin to rely on AI for emotional support instead of seeking help from trusted adults or peers, which can increase isolation rather than reduce it. In some cases, these tools may collect personal data or encourage continued interaction without recognising when a young person is at risk.



Children's Mental Health Week: This Is My Place

This year's Children's Mental Health Week was held between 9 -15 February and this year's theme was 'This Is My Place', highlighting the importance of belonging for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

As young people grow, they begin to explore their identity, values, friendships and independence. Feeling accepted and understood by peers, within school, at home and in wider communities, plays a vital role in protecting their mental health. When teenagers feel they belong, they are more likely to develop confidence, resilience and a positive sense of self.

Young people who feel disconnected, isolated or misunderstood may be more vulnerable to emotional distress or risky situations. Feeling listened to and supported by trusted adults helps teenagers feel safe enough to speak up when something isn't right.

This year, during Children's Mental Health Week Holyhead encouraged students to think about how we can create inclusive, supportive environments where young people feel valued and respected - both offline and online.

Belonging in online spaces: Opportunities and risks

For many teenagers, the internet plays a significant role in helping them find a sense of belonging. Online communities, social media, gaming platforms and forums can allow young people to connect with others who share similar interests, identities or experiences. For some, especially those who feel different or isolated, these spaces can offer reassurance, understanding and friendship. However, online spaces also carry risks. Not everyone online is who they claim to be and some communities may encourage harmful behaviours, unrealistic expectations or unhealthy relationships. Young people may be exposed to inappropriate content, pressured to share personal information or influenced by views that negatively affect their wellbeing. When online connections begin to replace real-life relationships or secrecy increases, this can increase vulnerability.



Supporting your child to navigate both the positives and risks of online belonging is an important part of keeping them safe and promoting good mental health.