



Schools of Sanctuary

Communications Toolkit

Practical guidance for all school staff and local groups on communicating with confidence, staying safe online, and responding to misinformation, hostility, and community unrest.

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Why This Toolkit Is Needed

We are aware of the ongoing targeting of people and organisations working around diversity, inclusion, welcome, and belonging, as well as those supporting and standing in solidarity with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. This includes the continued scrutiny, misrepresentation, and intimidation of City of Sanctuary networks by bad-faith actors, including Schools of Sanctuary.

Schools increasingly find themselves at the centre of misinformation campaigns, often because they are trusted community institutions, highly visible, and closely linked to children's wellbeing. False narratives can spread rapidly through social media, local WhatsApp groups, and community networks, escalating tensions and undermining trust.

Equally, recent years have seen an increase in unrest within communities, as well as rallies and protests connected to migration and asylum. The likelihood of these disturbances increases during summer months and around election periods. Understanding this context helps schools respond with confidence rather than defensiveness.

This toolkit collates advice and language for members of our network to help keep individual members and our network as a whole safe, both pre-emptively and proactively, as well as in response to particular events or challenges.

Core Principles

A. Stay anchored in values and statutory responsibilities

- Reaffirm the school's/ organisation's commitment to inclusion and safeguarding, and ground all activities and communication in your organisational values instead
- Use clear, consistent language that aligns with statutory guidance and local authority advice.
- Avoid amplifying false claims. Respond to the underlying concern, not the rumour itself. Repeating a myth, even to refute it, can give it more airtime.

B. Prioritise relationships over rapid rebuttals

- Misinformation thrives where trust is thin. Strengthening relationships with families and community partners is the most powerful long-term defence.
- Use existing channels, including parent forums, pastoral teams, and community leaders, to sense-check emerging concerns early.
- Look for ways to engage parents, carers, and community members in the planning, development, and delivery of activities from the outset.

When responding, always aim for three qualities

Clarity

Short, factual, jargon-free explanations.
Say what you can say and no more.

Calmness

Avoid defensive or emotive language.
Calm responses reduce escalation;
defensive ones fuel it.

Consistency

All staff should use the same key messages. One voice, one message, across the whole school or organisation.

How to use this toolkit

You do not need to read this from start to finish. Go to the section most relevant to you right now. The quick reference card near the end is designed to be printed separately and shared with all staff, including reception.

1 Take Action: Preparation

A. Develop an organisation-wide plan

Raise awareness amongst all staff, including reception staff, about the current climate and agree on a shared approach before any incident occurs.

01 Agree your spokesperson

Decide who is authorised to speak publicly. Usually the headteacher or a designated senior leader. Everyone else should direct enquiries to that person and not comment publicly.

02 Set standard responses for all staff

"Thank you for raising this. Could we arrange a time to speak with the headteacher?" or "I'm not able to answer these questions but can you email them so I can forward them on?"

03 Assign social media monitoring

Agree who monitors your social channels and who drafts and signs off any responses. Especially important during summer when staff are on leave and online unrest is more likely.

04 Know your local contacts

Identify who in the local authority or police is responsible for monitoring local tensions. They may be able to give advance notice of potential incidents and offer support.

B. Practise scenario planning as a team

Before an incident happens, walk through these scenarios together as a staff team. What would your school do if:

- A parent or carer complains about a topic related to refugees or migration being studied in class.
- A viral rumour about children being at risk at your school affects attendance.
- There is local unrest or protests related to asylum accommodation over a weekend.
- Your school is named in a hostile social media post or campaign.
- A local councillor raises a hostile motion and your school is mentioned.
- A journalist contacts the school asking for comment on a story you knew nothing about.

C. Complete your crisis contacts now

School crisis contacts (fill in before you need them)

Designated spokesperson	Name: _____	Tel: _____
Backup spokesperson	Name: _____	Tel: _____
Social media lead	Name: _____	Tel: _____
Local authority comms contact	Name: _____	Tel: _____
COS local lead	Name: _____	Tel: _____
Schools of Sanctuary UK	schools@uk.cityofsanctuary.org • reporting@uk.cityofsanctuary.org	
IMIX crisis comms support	media@imix.org.uk	
Police (non-emergency / emergency)	101 • 999	

2 Review Your Online Content and Social Media

Many attacks draw on content that bad-faith actors find online, often misrepresenting activities or statements with the goal of making content go viral. Reviewing your online presence before an incident is one of the most effective preventive steps your school can take.

- Review security settings on all social channels, including restricting public views of content to help avoid targeting of your school.
- Consider carefully the content you post related to Schools of Sanctuary. One member's activities can reflect on other members and the network as a whole.
- Review your website and social media for historic blogs or posts that could be misrepresented, and consider removing them.
- Use an AI search tool to check what information appears about your school online. This can help identify content you thought had been removed, and is an approach increasingly used by bad-faith actors.
- Consider whether your school is still using X (formerly Twitter). City of Sanctuary UK has made the decision to no longer use X as they believe it is no longer a safe online space.

If you are an awarded School of Sanctuary

Add a dedicated page to your website explaining what the award means, why it matters in your school context, and clear examples of what it has involved. Include a link to the Schools of Sanctuary FAQ page at schools.cityofsanctuary.org/home/faqs. This can pre-empt enquiries and be shared directly with anyone who contacts you.

3 Proactive Communications: Telling Your Story First

The strongest protection against hostile campaigns is the trust your school builds before anything happens. When talking about your Schools of Sanctuary work, start with what you and your audience share: community, safety, belonging, and fairness. Values open the door. Information can follow once that door is open.

The Storytelling Triangle: building any message

Use this when preparing a newsletter, a parent evening talk, a social media post, or any external response. It ensures your message leads with values, not defensiveness.

- 1 **Problem**
Name what is happening or the challenge, backed by a grounded fact or your school's own experience.
- 2 **Impact**
Bring it to life with a real, specific human story or example from your school community, shared with appropriate consent.
- 3 **Solution**
Land on a values-driven vision: what your school stands for, what you are working towards, and what you want your community to know.

Involve parents and carers from the start

Where possible, involve parents and carers in the planning and delivery of Schools of Sanctuary activities. People who have been part of something are far less likely to be hostile to it. Use parent forums and pastoral teams to sense-check emerging concerns early and build the kind of relationships that make misinformation harder to take hold.

4 Take Action: Responding to Hostility

A. When to respond and when not to

Sometimes it is best not to respond at all. Poor or rushed responses can exacerbate the initial situation or go viral. We recommend not replying to hateful messages on social media unless it is a legitimate question from a known person such as a parent or carer. Even then, take the conversation offline as quickly as possible.

Is the content hateful, abusive, or designed to intimidate?

YES

Do not respond. Block the user. Screenshot and document everything with timestamps. Report to the social media platform. If threatening, contact police immediately. Notify your COS local lead and email reporting@uk.cityofsanctuary.org

NO

Is it a legitimate question from a known person such as a parent, carer, or journalist? If yes, acknowledge briefly and take it offline. Offer a direct conversation rather than a public reply. If no, consider whether any response is needed at all.

B. Reporting incidents

- If someone comments with hate on social media, block them immediately.
- If your school is misrepresented online in relation to Schools of Sanctuary, notify your local COS lead and email schools@uk.cityofsanctuary.org and reporting@uk.cityofsanctuary.org. Reporting helps COS monitor the frequency and severity of attacks across the network.
- If at any time you feel in danger or threatened, contact the police immediately.

C. Use the ABC bridging technique when you do respond

The ABC Bridging Technique

Use this in any interaction: in person, by phone, or in writing. It keeps you calm, in control, and on message.

- A** Acknowledge
Show you have heard the concern without amplifying it or repeating the misinformation. "I understand you have seen something online that concerns you about our school."
- B** Bridge
Calmly redirect toward your message. "What I can tell you is..." or "What's important to understand is..." or "I suppose I see things a little differently..."
- C** Communicate
Deliver your key message, grounded in your organisational values. Keep it short, clear, and calm. Come back to what your organisation or school stand for.

"I hear what you're saying. What I can tell you is..."

"I understand your concern. Let me explain what we actually do..."

"I suppose I see things a little differently..."

"We're all here because we want every child to thrive."

"I'd be happy to connect you with our headteacher to discuss this."

"Can I take your details and come back to you directly?"

5 Issuing Statements and Classroom Conversations

A. Public statement structure

WHEN A PUBLIC RESPONSE IS NEEDED

- 1 Acknowledge
"We are aware of claims circulating about our school's involvement in the Schools of Sanctuary programme."
- 2 Clarify
"To clarify: [accurate description]. These activities are age-appropriate, teacher-led, and fully in line with our safeguarding policies."
- 3 Affirm your values
"Our focus remains on creating a school where every child and family feels safe, valued, and supported to thrive."
- 4 Direct
"If you have questions, please contact us at [email]. More information is at schools@cityofsanctuary.org"

HOLDING STATEMENT (WHEN YOU DO NOT YET HAVE ALL THE FACTS)

"We are aware of [issue] and are taking it seriously. We are reviewing the situation carefully and will share a full update as soon as possible. In the meantime, our focus remains on the safety and wellbeing of every child and family in our school. If you have concerns, please contact [name/email] directly."

B. Responding to local events, unrest, and misinformation in the classroom

When there is unrest in the community or misinformation affecting your school, children will often already know about it. Facilitating values-led conversations helps learners navigate what they are seeing and reinforces their sense of safety.

- Firmly ground the conversation in school values and set clear expectations about behaviour before beginning.
- Introduce the theme by asking what learners know about what has happened. Listen before sharing your own perspective.
- If misinformation is shared, ask learners where they heard it and encourage them to reflect on its trustworthiness. "That's interesting, although I sometimes worry that not all information online is correct. Shall we research this together?"
- Centre the individuals affected by events to humanise the discussion. Emphasise that whatever someone's perspective, we should treat one another with kindness and respect.
- Return to shared values to reframe the conversation: "everyone should feel safe in our community" or "everyone should have a safe and clean place to call home".

C. Debrief and prioritise staff wellbeing

After any difficult incident or conversation

Organise a debrief with staff involved or affected, and with any learners or parents and carers where appropriate. Discuss what went well and what could be improved.

Check in on staff wellbeing and offer space to recover. Staff monitoring hostile social media should not be doing this alone and should be given time away from screens when needed.

See also: Challenging conversations in a changing world (Philosophy for Children) at p4c.com

The following language can be used when talking about your involvement in Schools of Sanctuary. Tailor it to your school's context and community, explaining how it relates to your statutory responsibilities and inviting everyone to get involved.

A. AWARDED SCHOOLS OF SANCTUARY

We are incredibly proud to be an awarded School of Sanctuary. This means we have been recognised for our commitment and efforts to make sure every child and family feels welcomed, safe, and supported to thrive. This has involved embedding inclusive policies and practices, including how we welcome and support new arrivals to our community, making sure every learner feels represented and valued in our school displays, books, and curriculum, and the support we can offer to families.

To achieve the School of Sanctuary award, we have also demonstrated how we have helped learners develop their understanding of topics like migration, diversity, and belonging. Whatever a person's opinion, the Schools of Sanctuary award encourages children and adults alike to lead with kindness and humanity, to help build communities where everyone treats one another with respect.

We are proud to be a school where every child feels safe, where we try to understand and meet every child's individual needs, and where we equip our pupils to be kind and thoughtful members of our communities. You can learn more at <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/home/faqs>

B. NETWORK MEMBERS (WORKING TOWARDS THE AWARD)

We are proud to have joined the City of Sanctuary movement of welcome for all and to be a member of the Schools of Sanctuary network, currently working towards achieving the School of Sanctuary Award.

To achieve the award, we have to evidence how we ensure every child feels safe, valued, and supported in school, including those who are new to our school and community. We also explore our community's links to the wider world, and understand how and why people move from one place to another. As part of our award journey, we will also seek to work with a range of local partners to collaborate and expand the support available to families. If you have any questions, suggestions, or want to get involved, please get in touch.

C. LOCAL DELIVERY PARTNERS AND LOCAL LEADS

We are incredibly proud to be the licensed local partner for Schools of Sanctuary, supporting and advising schools to ensure every child and family feels safe and supported in school and in our community. The School of Sanctuary programme is voluntary and self-led by the school. The award process helps strengthen whole-school practice and schools' fulfilment of their statutory responsibilities, including around safeguarding, children's rights, and preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. The Schools of Sanctuary programme is politically impartial and free for schools.

D. RESPONDING TO ENQUIRIES ABOUT THE VALENTINE'S DAY MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

Thank you for raising this. The claims you have seen are not true. The Charity Commission investigated and confirmed they were part of a misinformation campaign, finding no evidence of any wrongdoing whatsoever.

The activity in question involved pupils in only some schools writing short, anonymised messages to show kindness, support, and solidarity, such as "Welcome to our town" or "We hope you feel safe here." The vast majority of these messages were displayed within the classroom. In a very small number of cases, schools gave them to a local refugee support group. No personal information was shared, and the activity was age-appropriate, teacher-led, and in line with rigorous school safeguarding policies.

You can learn more at: schools.cityofsanctuary.org/home/faqs

7 Media Enquiries and Further Resources

A. Responding to media enquiries

- Never respond on the spot. Take the journalist's name, outlet, deadline, and specific questions, then call back once you have prepared.
- Only your designated spokesperson should speak to media. Everyone else should direct enquiries to that person.
- Before any interview, agree your three key messages. Keep them simple and grounded in your values.
- Use the ABC bridging technique (Section 4) if questions stray into territory you are not comfortable with.
- Set any conditions in writing before agreeing to an interview, including what topics you will and will not discuss.
- If you are unsure, contact your City of Sanctuary local lead or IMIX before responding. You do not have to respond immediately.

Quick Reference: At-a-Glance Reminders for All Staff

If a parent complains in person

Listen calmly. Do not argue or give a personal opinion. Take their details and confirm the headteacher will follow up. Do not make any commitments.

If a journalist calls

Take their name, outlet, and deadline. Do not comment. Say someone will be in touch and alert your spokesperson immediately.

If a child raises something difficult in class

Listen without dismissing. Ground the conversation in school values. Do not repeat or amplify misinformation. Contact your PSHE or safeguarding lead if needed.

If you see hostile content about the school online

Screenshot and document it with the date and time. Do not engage or share. Report to your social media lead and notify reporting@uk.cityofsanctuary.org

If there is unrest in the local area

Alert your headteacher immediately. Check on the safety of any pupils or families who may be affected. Follow existing safeguarding protocols.

If you are unsure what to do

Pause. Do not post, comment, or respond publicly. Contact your designated spokesperson or headteacher before taking any action.

B. Further resources

FAQs and programme information: schools.cityofsanctuary.org/home/faqs

Courageous conversations about refugee rights: cityofsanctuary.org/2025/03/25/22280

The Facts about Sanctuary: cityofsanctuary.org/2026/01/29/the-facts-about-sanctuary

Talking about migration online: cityofsanctuary.org/2026/03/04/talking-about-migration-online

Crisis Communications Action Plan: imix.org.uk/app/uploads/2025/11/Crisis-Communications-Plan-IMIX-2.html

Speaking Out, Staying Safe guide: imix.org.uk

Challenging conversations in a changing world: p4c.com/challenging-conversations-in-a-changing-world

IMIX communications support

IMIX works with City of Sanctuary networks to provide crisis communications support, media training, and capacity building. If your school or local COS group would like support, contact media@imix.org.uk