

Making spaces safer for women and girls



active
notts



active
derbyshire



What we mean by spaces

Any outdoor or indoor space in the public domain where we can be active, this could be green spaces like parks, blue spaces like canals or grey spaces like leisure centres.

Who is this for?

This guidance is for anyone involved in shaping, managing or influencing outdoor and indoor spaces where women and girls can move more safely. That includes people working in design, planning, parks, leisure, community development and frontline services, as well as anyone who can advocate for safer spaces and share this guidance with others.



Where is this insight from?

This guidance brings together insight from **Broxtowe Women's Project**, **Active Derbyshire** and **Active Notts** – established organisations with trusted expertise in supporting women affected by domestic abuse, strengthening communities and enabling people to move in a way that works for them. It is informed by our collective experience of working with women and girls, delivering services, listening to lived experience and working across systems to create safer, more inclusive spaces.

Why do we need this guidance?

By creating spaces that are psychologically safe for women and girls, we can make it easier for movement to be part of everyday life. Lots of us have a role in making this happen. Safer spaces are created by design, culture and leadership, and by ensuring women and girls are treated with dignity and respect rather than being expected to change their behaviour.

- **Over 70%** of women in the UK say they've experienced sexual harassment in public ([UN Women UK](#))
- **62% of girls** say they feel safer when they're just with girls ([Girlguiding survey](#))
- **6 in 10 women** have felt harassed in the gym by a man – [The Gym-timidation report](#)
- **9 in 10 women** report feeling unsafe walking at night - [GOV.UK](#)

1. Making activity spaces safe

- **Safe arrival and leaving** – think about how this looks and feels in the dark or evening. Consider isolated entrances/exits, hidden corners and whether people can be seen if they need help.
- **Explain the journey to the activity** - helping reduce anxiety that can come from not knowing the route or how to find the meeting point.
- **Consider how the space feels to be in:**
 - Lighting** – key considerations include varying and layering light, providing a consistency of lighting and using lighting as wayfinding and landmarks. For more information click [here](#)
 - Pathways and sightlines** – Ensure routes are well maintained and free from overgrown vegetation that can create hidden areas, obstruct sightlines, or reduce visibility - which can contribute to feelings of isolation and vulnerability, particularly in the evening or lower-light conditions.
- **Facility considerations** – make sanitary bins available in toilets (changing rooms, public toilets etc.)
- **Be clear on expectations** – provide clear guidelines and signage explaining that inappropriate conduct will not be tolerated.
- **Make support visible and easy to access** – women and girls should know who they can speak to and how they can report concerns.



2. Training and awareness

- **Active Bystander** – encourage staff and volunteers to understand their role in recognising harmful behaviour and taking action, using the 5Ds approach.
- **Domestic Abuse and VAWG training** – support staff and volunteers to respond with confidence, dignity and respect when women may be experiencing domestic abuse or violence.
- **Equip staff and volunteers with training and ongoing support** - so they can understand the impact of trauma, respond appropriately to disclosures with respect and recognise the effect of everyday sexism and harassment on women's safety, confidence and belonging.

3. Female friendly sessions

- **Clearly publicise classes that have female instructors** – some women feel more confident knowing female instructors are available.
- **Consider training female mentors to their first session** - this could be a walking group, an outdoor fitness session or a gym class. Mentors can welcome them, show them around, introduce to others, all of this can help someone feel more comfortable. For some, being on their own to start could prevent them from accessing.
- **Listen and adapt** – regularly ask women and girls what would help them feel safer more respected and able to take part.

4. Communication and signposting

- **Display information about safety and where to go for support** – women's toilets are ideal places to display information; noticeboards within parks; café's nearby parks, canals, rivers or town centres where women may be out accessing groups or walking/running/cycling for leisure.
- This could include information about domestic abuse, sexual assault or harassment services or support.
- **Use empowering language that promotes dignity and respect** – avoid messages that focus on women changing their behaviour, instead emphasise what providers are doing to create safer spaces.

Good example of safe spaces



shows us useful approaches in creating safer spaces, including a regular and predictable format, visible volunteers, a strong sense of community and an opportunity for people to take part in a way that works for them.

Resources

Active Bystander training: different training options exist in this space, one local provider is Communities Inc.

Buddle: Safety, welfare and wellbeing

Find out more about the essentials to keep your participants, volunteer and visitors safe and well.

Broxtowe Womens Project (BWP)

Provide a confidential helpline, outreach service, training courses and drop-in sessions, all aimed at empowering women and to helping them survive domestic abuse.

This Girl Can - Safer Spaces to Move Resource Hub

How to make your spaces safer for women (a guide for fitness and leisure staff)

Responding to sexual harassment and intimidation in gym. Fitness and leisure facilities: operational policies, procedures and guidance.

Make Space for Girls

Campaigning for parks and public spaces which are designed with teenage girls in mind.

Safer Parks; improving access for women and girls

Helping stakeholders understand gender-sensitive principles of safety and implement changes at varying scales and budgets.