

Forum Theatre for Stronger Families & Safer Schools

An Evidence-Based Approach to Violence Prevention

Merseyside Violence Prevention Conference | Ariel Trust, Merseyside



WHO IS ARIEL TRUST?

A child-centred organisation delivering creative, co-produced violence prevention programmes across Merseyside primary schools — using the power of drama to spark real change.

180+

Schools Reached

across Merseyside

7,000+

Students Engaged

and growing

44+

Years

Improving the life chances of young people



THE CHALLENGE

Children know the risks — but knowledge alone doesn't change behaviour.

Three in four parents fear their child can't make safe online privacy choices. Yet most rarely, if ever, talk to them about it. (Information Commissioner's Office, 2026)

The central problem Ariel Trust addresses: children can recite the dangers but lack the practiced skills and confidence to act differently in the moment. This is the gap that Forum Theatre is uniquely positioned to fill.

Traditional education builds awareness.
Ariel Trust builds skills.



WHAT IS FORUM THEATRE?

Developed by Augusto Boal, Forum Theatre invites participants to step into a story, stop the action at a moment of crisis, and rehearse different choices — transforming spectators into active problem-solvers.

1

Animated Story

Introduces the theme age-appropriately

2

Workshop Programme

12 weeks of skill-building via roleplay & games

3

Stop & Rewind

Children change the story's outcome

4

Parental Engagement

Families rehearse help-seeking conversations

How Ariel Trust applies it:

- **Animated scenario introduces the theme**
- **Children step into characters' lives safely**
- **Action is 'stopped and rewound' at key moments**
- **Children rehearse different, positive choices**
- **Parents & teachers drawn in as co-participants**



SOME OF THE PROGRAMMES

Grassing or Grooming?

Helps children identify & resist gang-related grooming and exploitation. Focuses on the difference between 'telling tales' and asking for help.

Send Me a Selfie

Film 1 in the healthy relationships series. Tackles the risks around sharing intimate images online, giving children age appropriate language and strategies to stay safe.



Resisting Radicalisation

Supports children to recognise and resist extremist influence, building critical thinking and resilience.

A Knock on the Door

Film 2 in the healthy relationships series. Explores sharing images and the law — helping primary school children understand the legal consequences and how to make safer choices online.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

The Parental Engagement Performance

At the end of each 12-week programme, children lead a Parental Engagement Performance — an interactive Forum Theatre session that draws parents and carers into the same reflective process.

Children Lead

Young people take ownership, building confidence and pride as they guide adults through the scenarios they've rehearsed.

Parents Participate

Adults are invited to step into roles and actively rehearse how they would respond to a child asking for help.

Community Formed

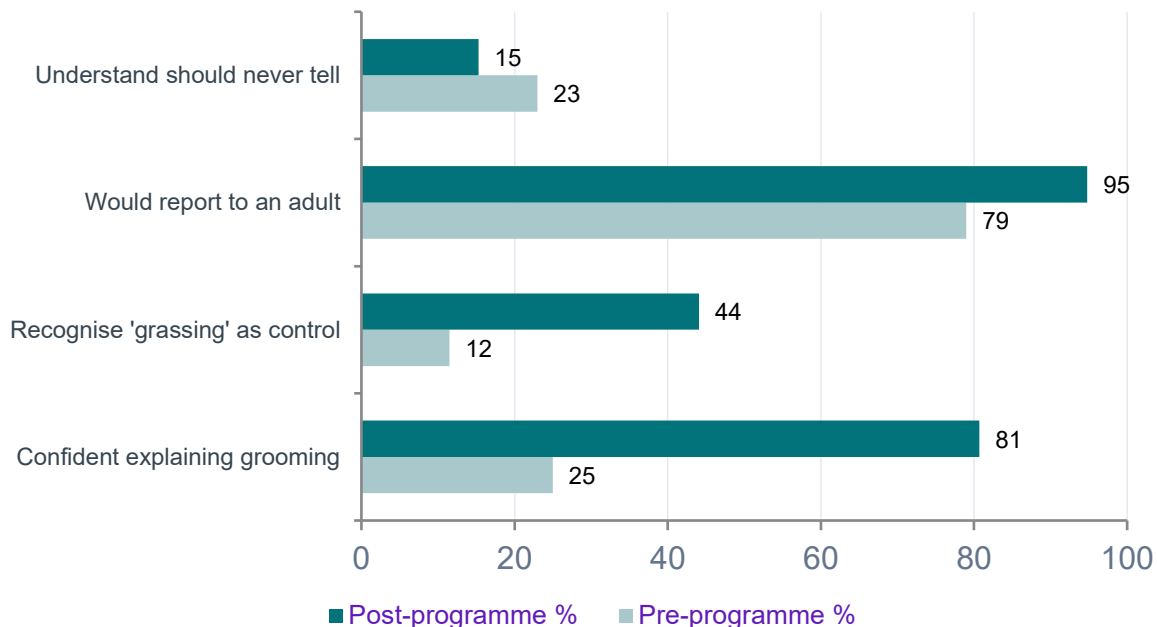
Shared experience builds trust between children, families and schools — strengthening the protective network around every child.



THE EVIDENCE BASE

Independent evaluation by LJMU Public Health Institute (WHO Collaborating Centre for Violence Prevention) for the MVRP, 2022–2025

Grassing or Grooming – Pre/Post Survey Results (LJMU, 2023)



55.7pp

increase in grooming awareness

25% → 80.7%

32.6pp

rise in recognising 'grassing' as control tactic

11.5% → 44.1%

15.8pp

more students would report to an adult

79% → 94.8%

LJMU RESEARCH: FURTHER FINDINGS

Send Me a Selfie / Healthy Relationships

Understand what consent means

Pre: 46.4% → Post: 76.4% ▲

Comfortable asking an adult for help

Pre: 75.2% → Post: 82.8% ▲

Think there's no harm in sending a selfie to someone you 'trust'

Pre: 42.4% → Post: 28.2% ▼

Believe they should always keep a secret

Pre: 60.3% → Post: 35.7% ▼



Changes in Help-Seeking Behaviour

Parents / carers: **84.5% → 91.3% ▲**

Trusted adult: **37.3% → 39.2% ▲**

Helpline or website: **21.4% → 26.2% ▲**

Changes in Student Leadership Skills

See themselves as a leader: **34.1% → 54.1% ▲**

See themselves as a role model: **44.3% → 69.2% ▲**

Feel responsibility to set an example: **65.0% → 69.5% ▲**

VOICES FROM SCHOOLS

"The Ariel Trust's Grassing and Grooming Project has had a profound impact on pupils at Rock Ferry, significantly increasing their awareness of online grooming risks."

— Sara Radley, Headteacher, Rock Ferry Primary

"The resources created by the Ariel Trust are brilliant at giving pupils the words and language to use in a way that is age-appropriate and really resonates with our young people."

— SENCO Lead, wirral

"I thought the resources were excellent, it will really help to support the package of transition that we are providing for our Y6 pupils as they transition to secondary school".

— KS2 Teacher, Knowsley

SAFER SCHOOLS IN PRACTICE

A Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

Ariel Trust's model aligns with the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership's whole-system, public health approach — treating violence as a preventable condition, not an inevitable outcome.

Universal Access

Free to all schools across Merseyside — no school left behind

Skills Not Just Awareness

Rehearsed communication & help-seeking embedded in muscle memory

Whole-Community

Children, families, teachers & practitioners all part of one learning system

Teacher Empowered

Online/in-person training, resources & practitioner support enable sustainable delivery



SCALE & REPLICATION

Making Forum Theatre scalable – without losing its power

Online/In person Teacher Training

Step-by-step video training lets teachers deliver Forum Theatre in their own classrooms, documented as best practice for every Year 5/6 teacher on Merseyside.

Free Resources for Merseyside schools

All programme materials — animations, lesson plans, roleplay guides — made freely available to every commissioning school.

Practitioner Support

Schools new to Forum Theatre receive in-person support from an Ariel Trust practitioner, building confidence before independent delivery.

Ongoing Evaluation

LJMU evaluation running 2022–2025 feeds evidence back into programme design, ensuring continuous improvement and accountability.

KEY LEARNING & TRANSFERABILITY

What the violence prevention field can take from this model:

01

Practice beats awareness

Children need to rehearse protective behaviours, not just learn about risks. Embodied learning through Forum Theatre creates responses that are accessible under pressure.

02

Families are essential, not optional

Engaging parents as participants — not audiences — extends the protective environment beyond school walls and into home.

03

Safe spaces enable honest exploration

Animated characters and fictional framing allow children to explore difficult themes without stigma or disclosure anxiety.

04

Evidence drives improvement

Independent evaluation aligned to outcomes (not just outputs) allows genuine accountability and iterative design.

FIND OUT MORE

Drama, done well, is evidence-based prevention.



Ariel Trust has demonstrated that Forum Theatre, rigorously delivered and independently evaluated, can measurably improve help-seeking, reduce vulnerability, and build safer communities around children.



arieltrust.com/portal



LJMU Evaluation Reports: ljamu.ac.uk (search Ariel Trust)



Merseyside VRP: merseysidevrp.com/resources/education-resources/



Contact via The Florence Institute, 377 Mill St, Liverpool L8 4RF

Thank you – questions welcome