OFG Education

CHILD ON CHILD ABUSE POLICY & GUIDANCE

Penny Tree School

CHILD ON CHILD ABUSE POLICY

Contents **Page No.**

1.0 Policy Statement 3
2.0 What is Child-on-Child Abuse? 4
3.0 Recognising child-on-child abuse 7
4.0 Responding to Alleged Incidents and Concerns 10
5.0 After the outcome/conclusion of the incident 15
6.0 Support for Students Affected by HSB, Sexual Harassment or Violence 16
7.0 Prevention strategies 17
Annex A: Helplines and support for children and young people 19
Annex B: Help and Support for children and young people that have health needs 19
Annex C: Useful toolkits, publications and websites 20

Terminology

- "Our teams" and" "team member/s" include everyone working in Outcomes First Group's settings and services in a paid or unpaid capacity, including employees, consultants, agency staff, trainees and contractors. For Blenheim schools, volunteers are included in this definition.

- "Parents and carers" refer to the person or -people with legal parental responsibility for the child/young person

- "Students" refers to all children and young people being educated and supported at the setting or service

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

All team members working directly or indirectly with children and young people have a duty to safeguard and promote their welfare. The following people have specific additional responsibilities with regard to safeguarding students at Penny Tree School and will work together to ensure a consistent approach across the setting:

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL): **Luke Bell**

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: **Andrea Muhlbauer-Mbarek**

Safeguarding Governor: **Natalie Deen**

1.0 Policy Statement

We put the safety of the students we support as the highest priority and are committed to ensuring they are effectively safeguarded in all our services at all times.

We recognise that children can be capable of abusing other children of similar and different ages or stages of development and can be vulnerable to abuse by other children. Such abuse is taken as seriously as abuse perpetrated by an adult and will not be tolerated. We have a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and will take all concerns and reports seriously.

A contextual safeguarding approach will be taken to understand, and respond to, any occurrences of child-on-child abuse, recognising that students who display harmful behaviours must be seen as vulnerable themselves.

We are committed to ensuring the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse. Where such abuse is identified, child protection procedures must be followed. All students who have been affected by the situation will be supported, with wider risks being considered and addressed.

Child-on-child abuse is referenced in the setting's ***Safeguarding Policy***. However, the specific issues and sensitive nature of child-on-child abuse requires this additional guidance, which is written in line with the statutory guidance contained within:

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) (England)

Working Together to Safeguard Children (England)

Keeping Learners Safe (Wales)

National Guidance Child Protection (Scotland)

Our ***Harmful Sexual Behaviour Guidance*** must also be read and understood alongside this policy by team members working with students.

This Policy should also be read and applied alongside the following:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Group Safeguarding Statement
- Anti-bullying policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Child Exploitation policy
- Mobile and Smart Technology Policy
- Protecting Children from Radicalisation policy
- Data Protection policy
- Staying Safe Online policy
- Web Filtering & Monitoring policy
- Searching, Screening and Confiscation policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Complaints policy
- Serious Incident Notification Policy
- Suspension and Exclusion Policy
- Job description and guidance of the role of the DSL and their deputies

2.0 What is Child-on-Child Abuse?

Child-on-child abuse is any form of physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or financial abuse, or coercive control exercised between children, and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate), friendships, and wider associations.

This policy applies to students who demonstrate such behaviour and other behaviours that may give cause for concern (this includes but is not exclusive to abusive behaviours).

Local Safeguarding Procedures must be followed, and any incidents of sexual violence will be reported to the police.

- In England and Wales, referrals for children and young people under 18 will be dealt with under the Children's Safeguarding Arrangements, whereas those 18 and above will be dealt with under the Adult Safeguarding Arrangements.
- In Scotland, referrals for children and young people under 16 will be dealt with under the Children's safeguarding arrangements and those over 18 will be dealt with under the Adult's safeguarding arrangements. For those aged between 16 and 18, as per the National Guidance, the Head of Service, in collaboration with other relevant services, will have to decide which legal framework best fits each person's needs and circumstances.

All team members should understand that even if there are no reports in their setting it does not mean it is not happening; it may be the case that it is just not being reported. As such, it is important if team members have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse, they should speak to their DSL or deputy.

It is essential that all team members understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between students, many of which are listed below, that are abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as "just banter", "just having a laugh", "part of growing up" or "boys being boys" can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for students, and in worst case scenarios, a culture that normalises abuse leading to students accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it. Team members are advised to maintain an attitude of **'it could happen here.'**

All team members should be aware that children and young people can abuse other children and young people, and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college, in the home environment, in the community, both online and offline. It is important to understand that boys can abuse other girls and boys, and girls can abuse other girls and boys, and. Team members should always remain open to all possibilities and not let assumptions distract them from seeing what is really happening.

Some examples of how this can manifest itself in different behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying);
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers;
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens, and/or encourages physical abuse);
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens, and/or encourages sexual violence), inappropriate touching;
- sexual harassment such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes, and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party;
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery), including where AI-generated. Please see: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: Advice for education settings working with children and young people
- up skirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm; and
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).
- emotional abuse, psychological abuse, coercive control and/ or financial abuse

Some of these behaviours will need to be handled with reference to other policies, such as the ***Behaviour, Anti-bullying, Safeguarding, Suspension and Exclusion and Staying Safe Online Policy***. School and colleges must ensure their ***Mobile and Smart Technology Policy*** is followed during the school day.

All team members must be aware and alert to signs of child-on-child abuse, that may occur offline and online, and should be clear as to the setting's and Group's policies and procedures, ensuring they are followed as part of their everyday practice.

Team members must ensure that students know:

- how to report any concerns and feel confident that they will be listened to and supported.
- They can also report any concerns by emailing tellus@ofgl.co.uk, which is monitored by the Group's Quality Team.
- Are aware of the NSPCC dedicated helpline 0800 136 663 and how to contact Childline

2.1 Use of language

The following terms are used in line with the DfE guidance KCSiE 2026, team members should always be mindful of the impact language can have on students, especially those who are vulnerable or have suffered trauma.

The term *victim* is a widely recognised and understood term. It is important that all our settings recognise that not everyone who has been subjected to abuse considers themselves a victim or would want to be described in this way. Team members should be conscious of this when managing any incident and be prepared to use terms with which the individual student is most comfortable.

Alleged *perpetrator(s)* and, where appropriate, *perpetrator(s)* are widely used and recognised terms. However, team members should think very carefully about terminology, especially when speaking in front of students, not least because in some cases the abusive behaviour will have been harmful to the perpetrator as well. Team members should always be aware that a perpetrator may also be a victim of abuse. As above, the use of appropriate terminology will be for team members to determine, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis.

Boy(s), Girl(s): refers to a child or young person whose biological sex is male and female respectively, as well as trans boys and trans girls, whose gender identity will be different from their biological sex. It is acknowledged that there will also be some children and young people who identify as non-binary or gender fluid and who will not recognise the term boy or girl in respect to themselves.

Please see the following helpful resources:
Language Matters: Use of language in child sexual abuse & exploitation practice Barnardo's
Making Words Matter: A Practice Knowledge Briefing NWG Network
Challenging victim blaming language and behaviours UK Council for Internet Safety

2.2 Vulnerable groups

It is important to always be aware that any student can be at risk of child-on-child abuse and that abusers can be younger or older than their victims. Research suggests some groups may be more at risk. The Safeguarding Network identifies the following as particularly vulnerable:

- Being aged 10 and upwards (although victims can be younger)
- Being a girl or a young woman
- Having special educational needs and/or disabilities
- Having intra-familial abuse in family history and or living with domestic abuse.
- Being a Looked After Child
- Experiencing or having experienced bereavement following loss of a parent, sibling or friend
- Being or being perceived to be, LGBTQ+
- Attending boarding school or other residential institutions

Black and minority ethnic children often under identified as having been harmed and over-identified as having harmed others.

Team members must be vigilant in monitoring those who are more vulnerable. Any concerns must be reported immediately to the DSL or deputy and documented on the electronic recording system.

The school/college will work to reduce barriers to reporting, provide trusted adults, and respond in line with statutory guidance, equality duties and safeguarding principles.

The fact that a student may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, queer, questioning or ace (LGBTQ+) is not in itself an inherent risk factor for harm. However, a student may be targeted because of actual or perceived sexual orientation or because they are questioning their gender. Risks can be compounded where students who are LGBTQ+ lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that team members endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns and challenge prejudice-based or discriminatory abuse.

Please note: We use the term 'LGBTQ+', because this abbreviation appears to be most inclusive and commonly used by the community.

It is recognised that both boys and girls experience child-on-child abuse. Boys are less likely to report intimate relationship abuse and may display other behaviour, such as antisocial behaviour. Boys report high levels of victimisation in areas where they are affected by gangs. Please see the ***Child Exploitation Policy*** for further information.

Research has also shown that bullying victimisation is a prevalent concern for neurodivergent (e.g., autistic, ADHD) youth. A neurodivergent young person may be more likely to be perceived as different by their peers and therefore may be more likely to be bullied/abused for this difference. In addition, a neurodivergent young person may be less likely to fully understand that another person does not have their best interests at heart and therefore may not interpret certain actions as abuse. Therefore, they may be less likely to speak up/report about the abuse. Individuals who are non-speaking may need additional augmentative alternative methods of communication to support any disclosures. For further information please see: What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication and how can it benefit autistic people? (autism.org.uk)

It should also be recognised that some neurodivergent students may engage in behaviours which could be considered as abusive to another student, however due their cognitive ability or emotional literacy, they may not understand the consequences of their actions. Even when there is no malice or premeditation, any incidents of child-on-child abuse will be taken seriously.

3.0 Recognising child-on-child abuse

The Safeguarding Network identifies the following signs that a child or young person may be suffering from child-on-child abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse and can include, but are not limited to:

- Absence from school or lack of interest in activities at the education setting
- Rumours or ‘coded’ talk among students that suggest concerning interactions or coercion is occurring.
- Physical injuries
- Mental or emotional ill-health
- Becoming withdrawn
- Poor self-esteem
- Tiredness
- Alcohol or other substance misuse
- Changes in behaviour
- Unexpected behaviour for their age and stage of development
- Displaying harmful behaviour towards others
- Enacting harmful behaviour towards others.

This list is not exhaustive, and if a student displays these signs, it does not necessarily indicate abuse. Team members must be alert to behaviour that might cause concern and think about what the behaviour might signify. Students should be encouraged to share any underlying reasons for their behaviour and, where appropriate, team members might need to engage parents or carers to understand the context more fully. It may be helpful to seek support from the Clinical Team to help the student identify the reasons and communicate effectively.

Where a student exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or inappropriate for their age or stage of development, team members should always consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour and, if so, what the concern is and how the student can be supported going forwards.

For students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), and multiple complex co-occurring needs, it can be difficult to distinguish between signs of abuse and behaviour that is part of the student's condition. Team members should be alert to ***changes*** in their behaviour and always consider all possible causes of this.

3.1 Understanding harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence

Team members must also read the *Harmful Sexual Behaviour Guidance*

Please also see and the NSPCC's Problematic and Harmful Sexual Behaviour

In line with Part Five of KCSiE 2026, we recognise harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) exists on a continuum and may escalate into sexual harassment or sexual violence and may include misogyny/misandry. It can occur online or face-to-face (both physically and verbally) and is never acceptable.

HSB can occur between two children and young people of any age and sex, from primary through to secondary stage and into colleges. It can occur through a group of children or young people sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or young person or a group of children and young people. Early identification and a proportionate response to inappropriate, problematic, abusive or violent behaviour are essential to prevent escalation and safeguard all those involved.

We recognise that sexist, misogynistic or misandrist language, attitudes or behaviours may be indicators of a culture in which harmful sexual behaviour, harassment or violence can develop. Team members must challenge and report such behaviour, including where it occurs online. Leaders will consider whether wider preventative education, pastoral intervention or safeguarding action is required

Any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment should be taken seriously, KCSiE 2026 highlights that it is more likely that girls will be victims of sexual violence and harassment and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys. However, it is important to understand that girls can abuse other girls and boys, and boys can abuse other boys and girls. Team members should not let assumptions distract them from seeing what is really happening and must always remain open to all possibilities.

The importance of distinguishing between behaviour that is developmentally typical and problematic and HSB is recognised. Understanding where a student's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it. Please see the ***Harmful Sexual Behaviour Guidance.***

The **Brook Traffic Light Tool** helps team members to identify, assess and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours. **As a minimum, DSLs and their deputies should complete the:** Brook e-learning: Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light tool

3.2 Physical Abuse

Physical assaults and initiation violence and rituals can also be a form of child-on-child abuse. Such behaviour will not be tolerated and if it is believed that a crime has been committed, it will be reported to the police.

The principles from the ***Anti-bullying Policy*** will be applied in these cases, with recognition that any police investigation will need to take priority.

Hackett's continuum model can also be referred to in this context to assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and to decide how to respond. This could include, for example, considering whether the behaviour:

- is socially acceptable or is socially acceptable within the peer group
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is problematic and concerning
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning or misuse of power
- involves a power imbalance between the student and student allegedly responsible for the behaviour

3.3 Online Behaviour

Many forms of child-on-child abuse have an element of online behaviour. Online child-on-child abuse is any form of child-on-child with a digital element. For example, consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and/or video, online abuse, coercion and exploitation, child-on-child grooming, threatening language delivered via online means, distribution of sexualised content and harassment.

All incidents involving the making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes, including images or videos that are self-generated, altered, manipulated or generated using artificial intelligence, must receive a safeguarding response. This applies whether the incident appears to be consensual or non-consensual. Team members must not view, forward, copy, print, share, store or delete such images unless specifically directed by the DSL and only where this is unavoidable and in line with statutory guidance.

Online incidents can be complex and may involve multiple platforms, repeated victimisation, image-based abuse, coercion, anonymous accounts, group chats or rapid sharing across peer networks. The DSL must consider online and offline risks together and liaise with parents/carers, IT Support, police and social care as appropriate.

Concerns identified through filtering and monitoring systems, including attempted access to harmful content, searches linked to self-generated imagery, harmful sexual behaviour, harassment, bullying, coercion, exploitation or violence, must be treated as potential safeguarding concerns and referred to the DSL in line with the ***Safeguarding Policy*** and ***Web Filtering and Monitoring Policy***.

LGFL's 'Undressed' provides advice about how to teach young children and young people about being tricked into getting undressed online in a fun way without scaring them or explaining the motives of sex offenders.

Please also see the **Staying Safe Online Policy, Anti-bullying Policy** and Safeguarding Policy.

4.0 Responding to Alleged Incidents and Concerns

Team members must follow the setting's ***Safeguarding Policy*** if a student is at risk of harm, is in immediate danger, or has been harmed. Consideration must be given to the proportionality of the response on a case-by-case basis.

When making decisions about how to deal with allegations, the age and understanding of the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour must be taken into consideration, as well as any relevant personal circumstances and how this relates to their behaviour. Consideration must be given to any disparity in age and development between the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour and the victim, the impact the behaviour has had on the victim, and any element of coercion or violence.

Repeated low-level incidents involving the same student or peer group should be viewed collectively rather than in isolation. Emerging patterns may indicate escalating risk and require safeguarding intervention.

Where any student involved has SEND, communication needs, trauma history, neurodivergence, mental health needs or other vulnerabilities, the DSL must ensure that the response, recording, risk and needs assessment, questioning, support planning and any disciplinary process are adapted appropriately. The student's voice must be sought using suitable communication methods and with specialist support where required.

Team members must act immediately and report any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse to the DSL or their deputies, within one working day, and document this on the electronic recording system.

Where a safeguarding concern is raised in a **residential school setting**, the DSL must ensure that all relevant areas of the setting are informed and that the concern is recorded on the school's electronic safeguarding recording system. Where separate DSLs are responsible for the residential provision and the day school, they must ensure that information is shared promptly between them and that both areas maintain a written record of the concern on the child's file.

The DSL must deal with any concerns of child-on-child abuse immediately and sensitively. As much information as possible must be gathered from the victim and the young person who has allegedly displayed harmful behaviour in order to gain the facts of what has happened.

The language used must be sensitive, non-judgemental and must not blame the victim. Victims must be supported and reassured that their safety and welfare within the school/college is the priority. Risk and needs assessments must be implemented where necessary.

Where the DSL Lead believes that there has been significant harm caused to a student, a referral must be made to the Local Authority immediately. It is important that schools, and colleges provide as much information as possible as part of the referral process. This will allow any assessment to consider all the available evidence and enable a contextual approach to address such harm. In agreement with the Local Authority, parents and carers, must be informed. Where possible, this should be done face-to-face.

If the Local Authority does not believe it meets their threshold for further action, and the DSL is not in agreement this must be challenged with the Local Authority.

4.1 The immediate response to a report

How team members respond to a report can encourage or undermine the confidence of future victims of HSB, sexual violence and sexual harassment to report or come forward. A supportive, respectful and empathetic response is essential. Team members must recognise the significance of being chosen as a trusted adult, listen carefully, avoid victim-blaming language, reassure the student that they are being taken seriously, and explain that information will be shared only with those who need to know in order to safeguard them and others.

Team members must:

- Report any concerns about a student's welfare immediately to the DSL rather than waiting to be told. The DSL will support the team member to report the information to other agencies as appropriate e.g., the police, placing authority (where applicable)
- Be able to reassure victims that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. A victim should never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting abuse, sexual violence, or sexual harassment. All team members will be trained to manage a report.
- Explain, in such a way that avoids alarming or distressing students, that the law is in place to protect them rather than criminalise them.
- Listen, ask open questions, and write down as much as possible. Language must be used that is not victim-blaming or judgemental and reassure the student that they have not caused a problem by disclosing.
- Be aware that students may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful. For example, they may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or being threatened.
- Be aware that students with learning difficulties, particularly those with multiple complex needs may not the communication skills or understanding to tell someone. This should not prevent team members from having a professional curiosity and speaking to the DSL if they have concerns about a student. It is also important that team members determine how best to build trusted relationships with students which facilitate communication.
- Understand that victims may not talk about the whole picture immediately. They may be more comfortable providing information on a piecemeal basis. It is essential that dialogue is kept open and encouraged.
- When it is clear that ongoing support will be required, the victim should be asked if they would find it helpful to have a designated trusted adult to talk to about their needs. The choice of any such adult should be the victims, as far as reasonably possible; their choice it should be respected and supported.
- Not promise confidentiality as the concern will need to be shared further (for example, with the DSL or social care). Team members will only share the report with those people who are necessary to progress it. Information can be legally shared even if the student states they do not want it to be.
- Produce a written report as soon after the interview as possible, recording the facts as presented by the student. These may be used as part of a statutory assessment if the case is escalated later.
- If the concern involves online abuse, be aware of the DfE advice about Searching, Screening and Confiscation and Sharing nudes and semi-nudes. This provides more details on what to do when viewing an image is unavoidable. **Team members must not view or forward illegal images of a student.** In some cases, it may be more appropriate to confiscate devices to preserve evidence and hand them to the police for inspection.

4.2 Considerations by the School/College

The school/college will consider:

- The wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed. This is especially important in the context of sexual violence and sexual harassment;
- The nature of the alleged incident(s), including whether a crime may have been committed and consideration of harmful sexual behaviour;
- The ages and developmental stages of the students involved;
- Any power imbalance between the students. For example, is the alleged perpetrator significantly older, more mature, or more confident? Does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty?
- If the alleged incident is a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse; (sexual abuse can be accompanied by other forms of abuse and a sustained pattern may not just be of a sexual nature);
- that sexual violence and harassment can take place within intimate personal relationships between peers;
- other related issues and wider context, including any links to child sexual or criminal exploitation;
- any intra familial harms and any necessary support for siblings following incidents.

4.3 Students sharing a classroom

Whilst the DSL establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with social care and the police:

- the perpetrator will be removed from any classes they share with the victim.
- the school/college will assess how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator a reasonable distance apart on the premises in lessons, during unstructured times, on transport, during off-site activities and in any online learning spaces. These arrangements are protective and should not be treated as a judgement on the alleged perpetrator.

4.4 Response to the alleged perpetrator

Any allegation is likely to be traumatic for the alleged perpetrator. In cases of child-on-child abuse the alleged perpetrator must also be treated as vulnerable and may require specialist support, which should be organised by the DSL. Team members must be aware that the perpetrator may have suffered or be suffering abuse and/or trauma.

The DSL must ensure that the alleged perpetrators age, cognitive and emotional understanding is taken into account, as well as trying to understand the reasons why the alleged perpetrator may have harmed another student. A risk and needs assessment must be completed **immediately** which should balance the proportionality of the allegation alongside the needs of the victim and the alleged perpetrator's right to continue to be educated.

It is good practice for the DSL to meet with the parents/carers to explain the situation and what measures will be put in place to support their child. The DSL must be led by the police regarding what information can be shared with the alleged perpetrator and their family.

If the alleged perpetrator moves school or college, the DSL must ensure that all safeguarding information is shared in advance with the new setting. Schools must also inform their Local Authority of all deletions from their admission register when a child of compulsory school age is taken off roll. The DSL must liaise with the Police and Social Care should they wish to take disciplinary action prior to the conclusion of a Police/Social Care investigation. Other professionals investigating an incident

does not in itself prevent a setting from coming to its own conclusion, on the balance of probabilities, about what happened, and imposing a penalty accordingly.

Team members must be alert to possible bullying of the alleged perpetrator either within the setting or online. Arrangements must be made to safeguard them. Team members must promote a culture where bullying is not tolerated.

4.5 Local Procedures

The DSL will be familiar with the local referral procedures for safeguarding and child protection concerns and safeguarding procedures for adults. They must also be familiar with local responses to sexual violence and harassment, and these must shape their own responses. They will also ensure that team members are aware and understand the local processes and that they are familiar with local support services.

Where statutory assessments are appropriate, the DSL will work alongside the relevant lead social worker. Collaborative working will help ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and, where appropriate, the alleged perpetrator and any students that require support.

Where relevant, the placing authority **must** be notified immediately where it has been identified that there are immediate safeguarding concerns. It is recommended as best practice that steps are taken to convene a multi-agency professional meeting to review any potential risks and agree actions to be taken to safeguard the young person/young people. The DSL is responsible for this.

The setting should be part of discussions with statutory safeguarding partners to agree the levels for the different types of assessment and services to be commissioned and delivered, as part of the local arrangements. Safeguarding partners should publish a local threshold document which includes the process for the local community based Early Help assessment and the type and level of services to be provided, and DSLs (and their deputies) will need to familiarise themselves with this document.

Where emerging concerns are identified, even if threshold for statutory intervention is not met, the DSL will consider whether Early Help support is required to prevent escalation. This may include work with families, targeted pastoral support, therapeutic intervention, mentoring or multi-agency planning.

Where behaviour may constitute a criminal offence, repeated violence, exploitation risk, harmful sexual behaviour, or indicate wider contextual safeguarding concerns, the DSL should consider consultation with relevant specialist agencies. This may include Children's Social Care, Youth Justice Services, Exploitation Teams, Violence Reduction Units, Community Safety Partnerships, Clinical Services, and other local safeguarding partners.

4.6 Reporting to the Police

Where a crime has been committed the DSL must immediately contact the police.

Whilst the age of criminal responsibility is ten, if the alleged perpetrator is under ten, the starting principle of reporting to the police remains. The police will take a welfare approach rather than a criminal justice one.

Where a report has been made to the police, the setting will consult the police and agree what information can be disclosed to team members and others, the alleged perpetrator and their parents or carers. They will also discuss the best way to protect the victim and their anonymity.

Where there is a criminal investigation, the setting will work closely with the relevant agencies to support all children and young people involved (including potential witnesses). Where required, advice from the police will be sought in order to help manage the situation sensitively. Team members must be aware of the requirement for children and vulnerable adults to have an Appropriate Adult with them if they are interviewed or detained by the police (See PACE Code C 2019), and the DFE Guidance, Searching, Screening and Confiscation.

Whilst protecting children and young people and/or taking any disciplinary measures against the alleged perpetrator, the setting will work closely with the police (and other agencies as required), to ensure any actions the setting take do not jeopardise the police investigation.

The DSL must inform the Headteacher, Principal or equivalent, Chair of Governors, Regional Director/Operations Director and Director of Safeguarding/Safeguarding Adviser.

4.7 Action following a report of HSB, sexual harassment and/or sexual violence

If a student alleges that they have been raped, assaulted by penetration, or sexually assaulted, this must be reported to the Police and Social Care immediately. The student's parents/carers should normally be informed unless this creates a greater risk of harm.

Team members must ensure that their response to sexual violence, harassment, or harmful behaviours between children and young people of the same sex is equally robust as it is for between those of different sexes.

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the DSL will make an immediate risk and needs assessment which will be recorded **within one working day** and recorded on the electronic recording system. The risk and needs assessment should consider:

- The victim, especially their protection and support;
- whether there may have been other victims,
- The alleged perpetrator(s); and
- All the other students(and, if appropriate, team members) at the setting, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them.

The risk and needs assessment must be shared with the police (where requested), local authority, Head Teacher, Principal or equivalent, Chair of Governors and the Regional Director/ Operational Director, and the Director of Safeguarding/Safeguarding Adviser. Consideration must be given to informing the Group's Corporate Affairs/Commercial Director in case of media interest.
Risk and needs assessments will be kept under review by the DSL. Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, a risk and needs assessment should also be completed.

5.0 After the outcome/conclusion of the incident

The school/college must:

- take a contextual safeguarding approach;
- take all necessary action to learn from the incident and prevent future incidents from occurring, such as through targeted education around specific types of child-on-child abuse;
- offer support for the victim and ensure it is provided wherever possible. Appropriate risk and needs assessments must be implemented to provide reassurance and safety for the victim;
- ensure that they **do not** adopt a victim blaming approach; complete an investigation into the incident, carried out by the DSL. The investigation must consider the occurrence of the incident itself, whether it is an isolated incident, and the personal circumstances of the student who is alleged to have displayed harmful behaviour;
- if necessary, make appropriate referrals to support services for the student who has displayed harmful behaviours;
- complete and implement a risk and needs assessment for the student who has displayed harmful behaviours in order to safeguard them and other students.
- consider multi-agency planning meetings where there is evidence of repeated concerning behaviour, escalation in severity, significant contextual safeguarding risks, or concern that a child may be progressing towards offending behaviour.

5.1 The end of the criminal process

If a student is convicted or receives a caution for a sexual offence, the school/college will update its risk and needs assessment and ensure relevant protections are in place for all children and young people. The school/college will consider any suitable action in line with its ***Behaviour Policy***.

If the perpetrator remains in the school/college expectations regarding the perpetrator will be clearly set out if they have been convicted or cautioned. This could include expectations regarding their behaviour and any restrictions the setting thinks are reasonable and proportionate about the perpetrator's timetable.

Any conviction (even with legal anonymity reporting restrictions) is potentially going to generate interest among other students. The school/college will take measures to protect all children and young people involved, especially from any bullying or harassment offline and online.

Where cases are classified as "no further action" (NFA'd) by the police or Crown Prosecution Service, or where there is a not guilty verdict, the school/college will continue to offer support to the victim and the alleged perpetrator for as long as is necessary. A not guilty verdict or a decision not to progress with their case will likely be traumatic for the victim. The fact that an allegation cannot be substantiated does not necessarily mean that it was unfounded. The setting will continue to support all parties in this instance.

5.2 Unsubstantiated, unfounded, false, or malicious reports

All concerns, discussions and decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions, should be recorded in writing. Records should be reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified, and addressed.

If a report is determined to be unsubstantiated, unfounded or false, the DSL should consider whether the student and/or the person who has made the allegation is in need of help or may have been abused by someone else and this is a cry for help. In such circumstances, a referral to social care may be appropriate.

If a report is shown to be deliberately invented, the school/college should consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the individual who made it as per their ***Behaviour Policy***.

6.0 Support for Students Affected by Harmful Sexual Behaviour, Sexual Harassment or Sexual Violence

Where there is a criminal investigation, the alleged perpetrator will be removed from any shared classes and activities with the victim and consideration will be given as to how best to keep them a reasonable distance apart on the school/college premises or on transport to and from the setting.

This is in the best interests of the student concerned and should not be perceived to be a judgement of guilt before any legal proceedings. The school/college will work closely with the police.
Where a criminal investigation into a rape or assault by penetration leads to a conviction or caution, the school/college will take suitable action. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, the rape or assault is likely to constitute a serious breach of discipline and lead to the view that allowing the perpetrator to remain in the same setting would seriously harm the education or welfare of the victim (and potentially other students).

Where a criminal investigation into sexual assault leads to a conviction or caution, the school/college will consider any suitable sanctions using the relevant policies, including consideration of permanent exclusion, where applicable.

Where the perpetrator is going to remain at the setting, the principle would be to continue keeping the victim and perpetrator in separate classes/areas and continue to consider the most appropriate way to manage potential contact on the premises and transport. The nature of the conviction or caution and wishes of the victim will be especially important in determining how to proceed in such cases.

Sexual assault can result in a range of health needs, including physical, mental, and sexual health problems and unwanted pregnancy. Students that have a health need arising from sexual assault or abuse can access specialist NHS support from Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).

The victim should be given all the necessary support to remain in their school/college, however, if the trauma results in the victim being unable to do this, alternative provision or a move to another setting should be considered to enable them to continue to receive suitable education and care. This should only be at the request of the victim and following discussion with their parents or carers/those with parental responsibility.
If the victim does move for any reason, the DSL must ensure that the new setting is aware of any ongoing support needs and should discuss with the victim and their parents/carers the most suitable way of doing this. The DSL must transfer the child protection file.

All the above will be considered with the needs and wishes of the victim at the heart of the process (supported by parents/carers as required). Any arrangements should be kept under review.

Further support for victims of sexual assault is available from a variety of agencies (see Annexes B and C).

7.0 Prevention strategies

Throughout the setting we actively raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

- Educating governors, senior leaders, team members, students, parents and carers about this issue, including on the nature, prevalence, and impact of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it and challenge attitudes that underly such abuse.
- Taking appropriate action to ensure that students learn about appropriate relationships with adults, online safety, as well as sex and healthy relationships. RSE lessons, Relationships Education, and Relationships and Sex Education will focus on important age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate issues in line with Government guidance – ***please see the RSHE Policy***
- Supporting students to understand what abuse is and the impact it can have on those who experience it.
- Creating a culture in which our students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment and have them listened to.
- Ensuring our students are clear about how to report abuse or any concerns about possible abuse or harmful behaviour. This includes being able to access in private, relevant websites or help lines, such as Childline and the NSPCC, to seek advice and help.
- Recognising that some students are more vulnerable by virtue of their complex health or behavioural needs, or disabilities. All team members have a responsibility to be the 'eyes and ears,' and report all concerns to the DSL. Consideration will be given as to whether additional support for students with protected characteristics is required.
- Engaging with parents/carers on this issue by:
  - Talking with parents/carers about it and asking them what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the school/college address those risks;
  - Involving them in the review of the school/college's policies and lesson plans; and encouraging them to hold the school/college to account on this issue.
  - Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the Headteacher, Principal or equivalent and DSL, so they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify students who may need additional support.
  - Working with governors, senior leaders, all team members, students and parents and carers to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the school/college community.
  - Working with partners agencies to further understand and address child-on-child abuse and reduce its occurrence.

7.1 Risk and Needs Assessment

Schools and colleges will complete a comprehensive risk and needs assessment to determine the risks to which their students are, or may be exposed, and will assess and monitor those risks. This is a proactive assessment of the risks facing students and distinct from the assessments that must be conducted following concerns or allegations.

The risk and needs assessment may include:

- the composition of the student population, including specific characteristics that affect their vulnerability to child-on-child abuse for example, gender, age, special educational needs and/or disabilities, sexual orientation, and/or religious belief.
- Which students are more at risk of being affected by child-on-child abuse?
- Any relevant trends in behaviour.
- Environmental factors and local awareness, for example, high levels of gang activity.
- Online activities and vulnerabilities.

This should be reviewed and updated at least annually and reviewed after any incident of child-on-child abuse.

Annex A: Helplines and support for children and young people

Childline

NSPCC Helpline

Barnardo's

Safeline - provides an A-Z directory listing detail of national and local services offering specialist support, advice and resources for children and young people, families, and professionals on a broad range of needs, concerns and topics.

Report Remove is a free tool from Childline and IWF, for children and young people to report nude or sexual images and/or videos of themselves that they think might have been shared online.

Mind - Useful contacts for 11-18 year olds

Annex B: Help and Support for children and young people that have health needs arising from sexual assault or abuse

The NHS provides a range of advice, help and support including advice about the risk of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STI), reporting to the police and forensics.

Rape Crisis

The Survivors Trust

The Male Survivors Partnership

Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Services vary depending on local authority. Most CAHMS have their own website, which will have information about access, referrals and contact numbers.

Internet Watch Foundation works internationally to remove child sexual abuse online images and videos and offers a place for the public to report them anonymously.

Annex C: Useful toolkits, publications and websites

NICE guidance: Harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has developed a HSB Toolkit which provides support, advice and information on how to prevent it, links to organisations and helplines, resources about HSB by children, internet safety, sexual development and preventing child sexual abuse.

In collaboration with the Home Office, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation has also developed Shore Space, an online resource which works to prevent HSB, offering a confidential chat service supporting young people who are concerned about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts and behaviour.

The NSPCC provides free and independent advice about HSB: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour and HSB framework and audit

Beyond Referrals - Contextual Safeguarding provides a school self-assessment toolkit and guidance for addressing HSB in schools.

Stop It Now - provides a guide for parents, carers, and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe, they also run a free confidential helpline.

The NSPCC provides free and independent advice about HSB: NSPCC Learning: NSPCC Learning: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour and NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework

Safeguarding Network: Child-on-Child Abuse

NSPCC - Online Safety

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/

https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/

Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges - Ofsted

Relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education DFE Guidance

UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people (updated March 2024)

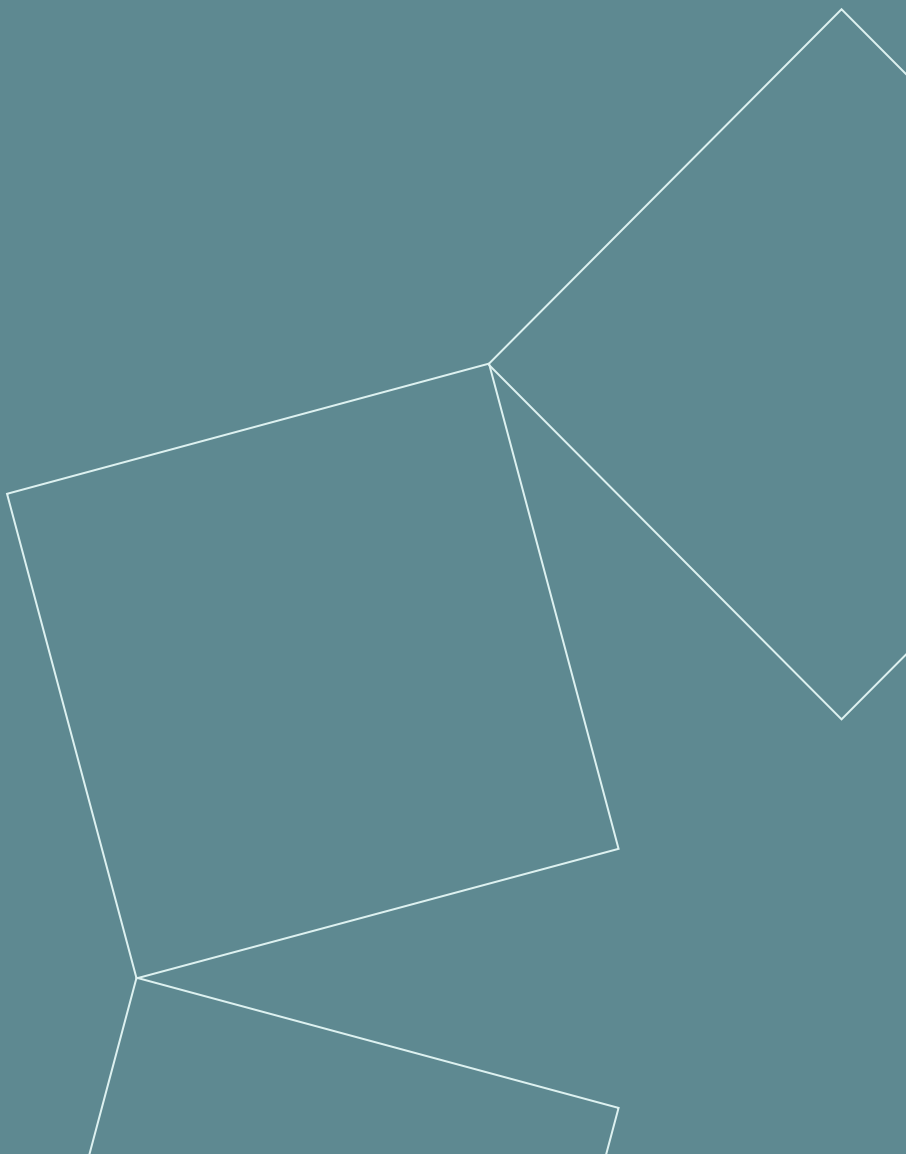
Farrer & Co Guidance Addressing child-on-child abuse: A Resource for schools and colleges

Sexual bullying: developing effective anti-bullying practice- A guide for school staff and other professionals

Anti-Bullying Alliance

It's Just Everywhere- a study on sexism in schools –and how we tackle it - National Education Union and UK Feminista

Addressing child-on-child-abuse in a residential setting The Therapeutic Care Journal

NSPCC Learning: Talk relationships

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