

Child on Child Abuse (previously peer on peer abuse)

Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 states that Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes:

- procedures to minimise the risk of child on child abuse;
- a recognition and understanding that even if there are no reports in school, does not mean that it is not happening
- how allegations of child on child abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with;
- clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other child affected by child on child abuse will be supported;
- a clear statement that abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh' or 'part of growing up';
- recognition of the gendered nature of child on child abuse (i.e. that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators), but that all child on child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously; and
- the different forms child on child abuse can take.

The guidance also states that Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy reflects the fact that additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse and neglect in this group of children (Children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities) These can include being more prone to peer group isolation than other children.

While it is recommended that child on child abuse is associated with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with child on child abuse this separate policy guidance template has been completed to annex to High Ercall Primary School Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

At High Ercall Primary, we are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of child on child abuse and to ensure that any form of child on child abuse or sexually harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently. This will reduce the extent of harm to the young person and minimise the potential impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

All staff are aware that children can abuse other children. This can happen inside or outside of our setting and online.

All staff will be trained in our policy and procedures with regard to child-on-child abuse and the important role they have to play in preventing it and responding to where they believe a child may be at risk from it.

All staff understand that even if there are no reports in our setting it does not mean it is not happening, it maybe it is just not being reported. If staff have **any** concerns regarding child-on-child abuse, even if there are no reports in our setting, they should still speak to the DSL (or deputy).

All staff are expected to challenge inappropriate behaviours between peers, many of which are listed below, that are actually 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 children and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

This policy applies to governors and members of staff including volunteers.

Definition

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

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including online bullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying);
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse');
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an element of online 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);
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be stand-alone 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 nudes images and or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery);
- 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).

Online child on child abuse is any form of child on child abuse with a digital element, for example, sexting, online abuse, coercion and exploitation, child on child grooming, threatening language delivered via online means, the distribution of sexualised content and harassment.

There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be regarded as abusive and incidents that are more properly dealt with as bullying, sexual experimentation etc. This is a matter of professional judgement. If one child or young person causes harm to another, this should not necessarily be dealt with as abuse.

However, it may be appropriate to regard a young person's behaviour as abusive if:

- There is a large difference in power (for example age, size, ability, development) between the young people concerned; or
- The perpetrator has repeatedly tried to harm one or more other children; or
- There are concerns about the intention of the alleged young person.

If the evidence suggests that there was an intention to cause severe harm to the victim, this should be regarded as abusive whether or not severe harm was actually caused.

Vulnerabilities

As a school we will recognise any child can be vulnerable to child on child abuse including:

- Individual and situation factors can increase a child's vulnerabilities to abuse by their peers such as the sharing of an image or photograph
- Children who are socially isolated from their peers
- Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse
- Children with certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs
- Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND,

Prevention

As a school, we will minimise the risk of allegations against other pupils by:-

- In line with the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance 2019, providing a developmentally appropriate PSHE syllabus which develops pupils understanding of acceptable behaviour, keeping themselves safe, the nature of child on child abuse and what is meant by consent
- Having a robust Online and Mobile Technology safety programme which develops pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, to ensure personal safety and self-protection when using the internet and social networking
- Having robust monitoring and filtering systems in place to ensure pupils are safe and act appropriately when using information technology in school, following DFE guidance published in 2023
- Having systems in place for any pupil to raise concerns with staff, knowing that they will be listened to, believed and valued in a non-judgemental environment
- Delivering targeted work on assertiveness and keeping safe to all pupils
- When required, developing robust risk assessments & providing targeted work for pupils identified as being a potential risk to other pupils
- Creating a safe culture in school by implementing policies and procedures that address child on child abuse and harmful attitudes, promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender and sexuality

We will actively seek to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

- educating all governors, our senior leadership team, staff, students, and parents about this issue;
- educating children about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via the curriculum;
- engaging parents on these issues;
- supporting the on-going welfare of the student body by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise student mental health, and by providing in-school/college counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs;
- working with governors, senior leadership team, and all staff, students and parents 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;
- creating conditions in which our students can aspire to, and realise, safe and healthy relationships fostering a whole-school/college culture;
- responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately; and
- ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the DSL and deputies so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify students who may be in need of additional support.

Allegations against other pupils which are safeguarding issues

Occasionally, allegations may be made against pupils by other young people in the school, which are of a safeguarding nature. Safeguarding issues raised in this way may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, teenage relationship abuse and sexual exploitation, bullying, cyber bullying and sexting . It should be considered as a safeguarding allegation against a pupil if some of the following features are present.

The allegation:-

- Is made against an older pupil and refers to their behaviour towards a younger pupil or a more vulnerable pupil
- Is of a serious nature, possibly including a criminal offence
- Raises risk factors for other pupils in the school
- Indicates that other pupils may have been affected by this student
- Indicates that young people outside the school may be affected by this student

Examples of safeguarding issues against a pupil could include (but are not limited to):

Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

Sexual Violence

Children can, and sometimes do, abuse their peers in a sexually violent way. Sexual violence refers to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003¹⁰⁵ as described as:

Rape: A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

Assault by Penetration: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

Sexual Assault: A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching and A does not reasonably believe that B consents

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may include, hitting, kicking, nipping, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm to another person. There may be many reasons why a child harms another and it is important to understand why a young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally, before considering the action or sanctions to be undertaken.

Sexual Harassment

Child on child Sexual Harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that can occur online and offline. Sexual harassment is likely to: violate a child's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.

Sexual harassment can include:

- sexual comments, such as: telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance and calling someone sexualised names;
- sexual "jokes" or taunting;
- physical behaviour, such as: deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes (schools and colleges should be considering when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence - it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim) and displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature; and
- online sexual harassment. This may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence. It may include:
 - non-consensual sharing of sexual images and videos;
 - sexualised online bullying;
 - unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media; and
 - sexual exploitation; coercion and threats

Bullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be aggressive and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Young people who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally or for a particular reason e. g. size, hair colour, race, gender, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Cyber or online bullying

Cyber bullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or any social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to harass threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above. It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Communications Act 2003, Section 127 which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another could be deemed to be criminal behaviour. If the behaviour involves the taking, sharing or distributing indecent images of young people under the age of 18, then this is also a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Outside of the immediate support young people may require in these instances, if a child is 10 and above, the school will have no choice but to involve the police to investigate these situations.

Sexting (also known as trading nudes, dirties, pic for pic)

Sexting is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video. This includes sending 'nude pics', 'rude pics' or 'nude selfies'. Pressuring someone into sending a nude picture can happen in any relationship and to anyone, regardless of their age, gender or sexual preference. However, once the image is taken and sent, the sender has lost control of the image and these images could end up anywhere. By having in their possession, or distributing, indecent images of a person under 18 on to someone else, young people are not even aware that they could be breaking the law as stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Emotional Abuse

Can include blackmail or extortion and may also includes threats and intimidation. This harmful behaviour can have a significant impact on the mental health and emotional well-being of the victim and can lead to self harm.

Sexual Abuse and Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse. . It can also include indecent exposure, indecent touching /serious sexual assaults or forcing others to watch pornography or take part in sexting.

Teenage Relationship Abuse

Teenage relationship abuse is defined as a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent (between the ages of 13 and 18) against a current or former partner. Abuse may include insults, coercion, social sabotage, sexual harassment, threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse. The abusive teenager uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour, in a heterosexual or same gender relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner.

Sexual Exploitation

This can include encouraging other young people to engage in inappropriate sexual behaviour or grooming and recruiting members of the peer group into being sexually exploited by other young people or adults. It can also include photographing or videoing other children performing indecent acts.

Upskirting

This typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their buttocks or genitals to obtain sexual gratification or cause the victim humiliation, distress or harm.

Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals

Hazing or initiation ceremonies refers to the practice of rituals, challenges, and other activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group. Hazing is seen in many different types of social groups, including gangs, sports teams and school groups. The initiation rites can range from relatively benign pranks, to protracted patterns of behaviour that rise to the level of abuse or criminal misconduct. Hazing may include physical or psychological abuse. It may also include nudity or sexual assault. Staff need to be alert to such behaviour and act in line with their child protection and behaviour policies.

Identifying a child who is being abused by their peers

The school will recognise that the signs that a child may be suffering from peer-on peer abuse can also overlap with signs indicating other types of abuse and can include:

- failing to attend school, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected,
- physical injuries,
- experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing,
- becoming withdrawn and/or shy; experiencing headaches, stomach aches, anxiety and/or panic attacks; suffering from nightmares or lack of sleep or sleeping too much,
- broader changes in behaviour including alcohol or substance misuse,
- changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age
- abusive behaviour towards others

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is not exhaustive, and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that children present with will depend on the context of their circumstances.

Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for his/her age, the school will consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour including, whether the child is being harmed or abused by their peers).

Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Child on child Abuse

When an allegation is made by a pupil against another student, or about a child on child incident they have witnessed or been a part of, members of staff should consider whether the complaint raises a safeguarding concern. If there is a safeguarding concern the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) should be informed.

For all allegations, there are four options available to the DSL to manage the concern:

1. Internal – follow the school Behaviour Policy and school procedures following any allegation. Consider pastoral and behavioural support required. DSL, SENDCO, Class teacher, Mental Health Lead may be involved as required. Parental involvement is imperative to ensure they are well informed.
2. Early Help – Consider outside agencies which could support both the victim and the perpetrator and make referrals as required. Consider in particular any children with SEND (whether victim or perpetrator) and how their needs should be supported.
3. Social Care – Make a referral through Family Connect for social care involvement as required.
4. Police – If a potential criminal offence has been committed, then a referral to the police is required. This can be made directly or through Family Connect.

Initial procedure for any allegation:

- The member of staff will listen to the disclosure, using open language and demonstrate understanding without judgement.
- Take account of the wider context in which the alleged incident(s) of child on child abuse took place, for example the physical environment of the school; route/travel to and from school; online environment and gender norms
- A factual record should be made of the allegation on CPOMS, but no attempt at this stage should be made to investigate the circumstances.
- When completing a CPOMS disclosure, we will refer to the 'child who is alleged to have...' and 'the child who is alleged to have suffered...' rather than recording 'victim and perpetrator'.
- CPOMS will alert the DSL to the case – if they are not yet aware.
- The DSL will make a decision as to which of the 4 options above is necessary and record this clearly.

Further agency involvement:

- The Designated Safeguarding Lead may contact Family Connect to discuss the case. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will follow through the outcomes of the discussion and make a referral where appropriate.
- A decision will be made about any further support to be given within school through our Mental Health Lead, or through the Early Help offer within the Local Authority.
- An Early Help Assessment will be completed if it is deemed that it will support either the victim or the perpetrator. A referral may be made to other support agencies including Behaviour Support, Educational Psychology, CAMHS, BEAM, the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel, as required.
- If the allegation involves a pupil with SEND, then the school SENCO will be involved (Headteacher)
- If the allegation indicates that a potential criminal offence has taken place, through the Family Connect, the police will become involved.
- Parents, of both/all the student/s concerned with the disclosure/allegation and the alleged victim/s, should be informed and kept updated on the progress of the referral.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead will make a record of the concern, the discussion and any outcome and keep a copy in the Secure Safeguarding Records on CPOMs

Risk assessment:

A risk assessment may be drawn up to reflect the type of abuse. Because of the varied nature of child on child abuse a different assessment will need to be made to meet the needs of all concerned, including the wider pupil body. Measures would be put in place to reduce risk to the victim and could include: removal of contact with the perpetrator; additional support through staff; additional cyber support through parents or removal of devices. This is all dependent on the nature of the incident.

- If the allegation highlights a potential risk to the school and the pupil, the school will follow the school's Behaviour Policy and procedures and take appropriate action.
- In situations where the school considers a safeguarding risk is present, a risk assessment should be prepared along with a preventative, supervision plan.
- The plan should be monitored and a date set for a follow-up evaluation with everyone concerned.
- A risk assessment plan may draw upon the support of other professionals
- Where a disclosure or allegation indicates that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL will consider what line of action is to be taken in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy including informing Family Connect and the police as required.

Risk assessment for Sexual Violence and sexual harassment

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719902/Sexual_violence_and_sexual_harassment_between_children_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf

The school has a written risk assessment for sexual violence and sexual harassment. This is updated annually and shared with all staff.

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should make an immediate risk and needs assessment. Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The risk and needs assessment should consider:

- the victim, especially their protection and support;
- the alleged perpetrator;
- all the other children (and, if appropriate, adult students and staff) at the school especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them.

Risk assessments should be recorded (written or electronic) and should be kept under review. At all times, the school or college should be actively considering the risks posed to all their pupils and students and putting adequate measures in place to protect them and keep them safe.

The designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should ensure they are engaging with children's social care and specialist services as required. Where there has been a report of sexual violence, it is likely that professional risk assessments by social workers and or sexual violence specialists will be required.

The risk assessment is not intended to replace the detailed assessments of expert professionals. Any such professional assessments should be used to inform the schools or college's approach to supporting and protecting their pupils and students and updating their own risk assessment.

Risk assessment which may include the removal of alleged perpetrators from school

National Guidance: exclusion from maintained schools – September 2017

See also Exclusions Policy - following LA guidelines

In completing a risk assessment, actions such as exclusion will be considered in line with statutory guidance. An exclusion must be lawful, reasonable and fair. Permanent exclusion would only be used as a last resort, in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school. A fixed period exclusion, including at lunchtime could be considered as part of a risk assessment process. This would only be if all other options are not feasible or in the best interest of the child – both the victim and the perpetrator.

All other options would be considered prior to any exclusion, however there are certain circumstances where this is the only option, particularly in the cases of sexual violence, sexually harmful behaviour and repeated physical abuse. Each case will be considered on the basis of the evidence and advice of other agencies. Parents will be fully informed of any decisions made, and their rights with regards to this.

Staff training

As part of ongoing safeguarding training, all staff receive at least annual training with regards to all aspects of safeguarding including Child on child abuse.

All staff have read and understood the Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory document, particularly Part 1, Part 5 and Annex A.

All staff have read and understood this policy.

As part of weekly safeguarding updates, specific training is timetabled to support staff with identifying children who may be victim to child on child abuse and ensuring all staff know the protocol to follow.