Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

Version:	3.1	
Written by:	Safeguarding Network	
Reviewed by:	ELAN Education Committee	Date: 16/07/2024
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Review:	Annually	
Next Review Due By:	July 2025	

This policy is to be read in conjunction with any school specific safeguarding/behaviour and bullying polices

Document Control
Document Information

	Information
Document Name	Child-on-Child Abuse Policy
Document Author	Safeguarding Network
Document Approval	ELAN Education Committee
Document Status	Version 3.1
Publication Date	July 2024
Review Date	July 2025
Distribution	Website/General

Version Control

Version	Issue Date	Amended by	Comments
1.0	July 2022	Safeguarding Network	New policy
1.1	Sept 2022	SE	Correction in section 6.5
2.0	July 2023	Safeguarding Network	Annual review, minor amendments to include updated hyperlinks to current guidance
3.0	July 2024	Safeguarding Network	Annual review, minor amendments to include updated hyperlinks to current guidance
3.1	Oct' 2024	SE	Correction in secton 8

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1   Context and Definition

It is essential that all our staff understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours and that children can and do abuse each other. 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. (KCSIE 24) staff who work with children are advised to maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' where safeguarding is concerned. When concerned about the welfare of a child, staff should always act in the best interests of the child.

Child-on-child abuse is behaviour by an individual or group, intending to physically, sexually or emotionally hurt others.

All staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers and staff should be aware of safeguarding issues from child-on-child abuse including:

- bullying (including online bullying)
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm
- sexual violence and sexual harassment
- sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery); and
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

This abuse can:

- Be motivated by perceived differences or protected characteristics e.g. on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other differences
- Result in significant, long lasting and traumatic isolation, emotional distress and intimidation or violence to the victim.

Children or young people who harm others may have additional or complex needs e.g.:

- Significant disruption in their own lives
- Exposure to domestic abuse or witnessing or suffering abuse
- Educational under-achievement
- Involved in crime or anti-social behaviour

Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is the priority of any education setting, but emotional bullying can sometimes be more damaging than physical. School staff, alongside their Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Deputy, have to make their own judgements about each specific case and should use this policy guidance to help.

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2   Responsibility

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), 2024 states *that 'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse and sets out how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with'.*

It also emphasises that the voice of the child must be heard.

'Governing bodies, proprietors and school or college leaders should ensure the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account when determining what action to take and what services to provide. Systems should be in place for children to express their views and give feedback. Ultimately, all system and processes should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart.'

Child-on-child abuse is referenced in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The sensitive nature and specific issues involved with child-on-child abuse necessitate separate policy guidance. Our Schools continue to ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to reduce the extent of harm to the child, with full consideration to the impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and well-being.

3   Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this policy is to explore some forms of child-on-child abuse. The policy also includes a planned and supportive response to the issues. In our schools we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- **Anti-Bullying including Online Bullying Policy**
- **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy**
- **Managing Allegations / Whistleblowing Policy**
- **Behaviour Policy**
- **Health & Safety Policy**
- **Online Safety Policy**

4   Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by the key principles of the Children's Act, 1989 that the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document is Working Together, 2018, highlighting that every assessment of a child, *'must be informed by the views of the child'*. (Working Together, 2018:21) This is echoed by Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2024 through ensuring procedures are in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

5   Abuse and harmful behaviour

It is necessary to consider:

- what abuse is and what it looks like
- how it can be managed
- what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual
- what preventative strategies may be put in place to reduce further risk of harm.

Abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'. It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

- Children are vulnerable to abuse by their peers. Such abuse should be taken as seriously as abuse by adults and should be subject to the same child protection procedures.
- Children can abuse other children. This can include (but is not limited to): abuse within intimate partner relationships; bullying (including online bullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment such as flicking bra straps, pulling down trousers or lifting skirts, the use of sexualised and derogatory language; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.
- Staff should not dismiss abusive behaviour as normal between pupils and should not develop high thresholds before taking action.
- Staff should be aware of the potential uses of information technology for bullying and abusive behaviour between pupils, which can include sexting, online grooming and coercion between peers.
- Staff should be aware of the added vulnerability of pupils who have been the victims of violent crime.

The alleged perpetrator is likely to have considerable unmet needs as well as posing a significant risk of harm to other children. Evidence suggests that such children may have suffered considerable disruption in their lives, may have witnessed or been subjected to physical, domestic or sexual abuse, may have problems in their educational development and may have committed other offences. They may therefore be suffering, or be at risk of suffering, significant harm and be in need of protection. Any long-term plan to reduce the risk posed by the alleged perpetrator must also address their needs.

6   Types of abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between peers and this list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse or prejudiced behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

6.1 Physical abuse

This may include hitting, kicking, nipping/pinching, 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 child has engaged in such behaviour, including accidently before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

6.2 Sexual violence and sexual harassment

This must always be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead. The DSL will follow the guidance laid out in the most recent KCSIE publication.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

Sexually harmful behaviour from children is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a child engages in sexually harmful behaviour, and it may be just as distressing to the child who instigates it as to the child it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may include

- inappropriate sexual language including jokes or taunts
- inappropriate role play
- sexual touching
- sexual assault/abuse online or in person.
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual coercion to share images or perform acts
- Flicking bra straps
- Pulling up skirts or pulling down trousers
- Sexualised derogatory language

Staff should be aware of the importance of:

- making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up
- not tolerating or dismissing sexual violence or sexual harassment as "banter", "part of growing up", "just having a laugh" or "boys being boys"; and
- challenging behaviours (potentially criminal in nature), such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and genitalia, flicking bras and liftingup skirts. Dismissing or tolerating such behaviours risks normalising them
- Up-skirting: where someone takes a picture under a person's clothing (not necessarily a skirt) without permission and or knowledge, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks (with or without underwear) to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is a criminal offence. Anyone of any gender, can be a victim. Additionally, it is important to remember that any child under the age of 13 cannot legally consent to any form of sexual activity, and this will always trigger a referral to Children's Services for child protection.

6.3 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 children who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be aggressive in either language or actions and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Children 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.
- Repetitive and targeted: 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, gender, sexual orientation, race or disability and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

6.4 Online Bullying

Online Bullying is the use of technology (social networking, messaging, text messages, e-mail, chat rooms etc.) to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above. Online bullying can take many forms:

- Abusive or threatening texts, emails or messages
- Posting abusive comments on social media sites
- Sharing humiliating videos or photos of someone else
- Stealing someone's online identity or creating false online accounts
- Spreading rumours online
- Trolling – sending someone menacing or upsetting messages through social networks, chatrooms or games
- Developing hate sites about another person
- Prank calls or messages
- Group bullying or exclusion online
- Anonymous messaging
- Encouraging a child to self-harm
- Pressuring children to send sexual messages or engaging in sexual conversations

6.5 Sexting / sharing nude or indecent imagery

The term 'sexting' relates to the sending of indecent images, videos and/or written messages with sexually explicit content; these are created and sent electronically. They are often 'shared' via social networking sites and instant messaging services.

Up-skirting: typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is a criminal offence. Anyone of any gender, can be a victim. This must always be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, DSL who will follow the UKCIS: Sexting in schools and colleges 2016 guidance. Importantly for staff to remain safe they should under no circumstances view any material of this description and should confiscate the device and pass it on to the Police.

6.6 Initiation/Hazing

Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation such as a private school, sports team etc. There are a number of different forms, from relatively mild rituals to severe and sometimes violent ceremonies. The ceremony welcomes newcomers by subjecting them to a series of trials which promote a bond between them. After the hazing is over, the newcomers also have something in common with older members of the organisation, because they all experienced it as part of a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment.

6.7 Prejudiced Behaviour

The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of harmful behaviours, physical or emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised. It is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – for example disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class) and sexual identity.

6.8 Teenage relationship abuse

Teenage relationship abuse is 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, sexual abuse and financial or controlling behaviour. The abusive teen 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. This abuse may be child sexual exploitation.

7   Expected staff action

Staff will respond positively and with sensitivity when they become aware of any form of 'child-on-child' abuse. Staff will always ensure that the Designated Safeguarding Lead is immediately made aware to ensure that necessary actions take place and record on CPOMS the specific incident and actions taken.

A designated person will lead on gathering information and ensuring that this information is shared with relevant individuals and professional to reduce the distress of repeating their accounts.

8   Recognising child-on-child abuse

An assessment of an incident between peers should be completed and consider:

- Chronological and developmental ages of everyone involved

- Difference in their power or authority in relation to age, race, gender, physical, emotional or intellectual vulnerability
- All alleged physical and verbal aspects of the behaviour and incident
- Whether the behaviour involved inappropriate sexual knowledge or motivation
- What was the degree of physical aggression, intimidation, threatening behaviour or bribery?
- The effect on all involved
- Any attempts to ensure the behaviour and incident is kept a secret
- The child's motivation or reason for the behaviour, if they admit that it occurred
- Whether this was a one-off incident, or longer in duration

It is important to deal with a situation of child-on-child abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts. It is equally important to think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and the parents when they become involved. Avoid language that may create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled. Staff will talk to the children in a calm and consistent manner. Staff will not be prejudiced, judgmental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

8.1 Taking Action
- Always take complaints seriously

- Gain an account of facts from the pupil(s)

- Assess needs of all the children involved

- Communicate and involve parents and carers in discussions around the situation

- Consider referral to Police or Social Care

- Contribute to multi-agency assessments

- Convene a risk management meeting

- Record all incidents and all actions taken and if no action taken record why

8.2 Recording sexualised behaviour
- Be clear, explicit and non-avoidant, and avoid vague statements or euphemisms
- Record as soon as possible, as you can quickly forget or confuse detail
- If appropriate use the body map on CPOMS to indicate where touch took place
- Use proper names for body parts but record exactly any language or vocabulary used by the child. Use the child's exact words in quotation marks. Always check with the child their understanding of the word used to ensure we have understood the child's meaning correctly.
- Note where and when the incident happened and whether anyone else was around.

8.3 Gather the Facts
Speak to all the pupils involved separately to:

- gain a statement of facts from them
- Ask the pupils to tell you what happened.

This should be done by:
- using consistent language and open questions for each account.
- using open questions, (T.E.D) Tell me, Explain to me, Describe to me or 'where, when, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?).
- <u>It is very important to not interrogate or ask leading questions.</u>

8.4 Next course of action
Report the incident to the Designated Safeguarding Lead immediately; they will follow the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. If other professionals need to be involved, they may ask to interview the pupils in school or they may ask for parents to come to school to be spoken to. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. On all occasions record as soon as possible on CPOMS: the incident, any questions you asked with responses and what actions you took.

8.5 Informing parents/carers
The best way to inform parents/carers is face to face. Although this may be time consuming, the nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a child may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents/carers whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another.

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the school should encourage the pupil to share the information with their parent/carer (they may be scared to tell parents/carers that they are being harmed in any way).

9 Points to consider

9.1 What is the age of the children involved?
How old are the children involved in the incident and is there any age difference between those involved? In relation to sexual exploration, children under the age of 5, in particular 1-4 year olds who are learning toileting skills may show a particular interest in exploration at around this stage. This, however, should not be overlooked.

9.2 Where did the incident or incidents take place?
Was the incident in an open, visible place to others? If so, was it observed? If not, is more supervision required within this particular area?

9.3 What was the explanation by all children involved of what occurred?
Can each of the children give the same explanation of the incident and also what is the effect on the children involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying

for example, in which case regular and repetitive? Is the version of one child different from another and why?

9.4 What is each of the children's own understanding of what occurred?

Do the children know/understand what they are doing? E.g. do they have knowledge of body parts, of privacy and that it is inappropriate to touch? Is the child's explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the child have understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person?

9.5 Repetition and targeting

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered has the behaviour persisted to an individual after the issue has already been discussed or dealt with and appropriately resolved?

10 Next Steps

Once the outcome of the incident(s) has been established it is necessary to ensure future incidents of abuse do not occur again and consider the support and intervention required for those involved.

10.1 For the child who has been harmed

What support they require depends on the individual child. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or one to one support via a mentor. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with support of family and friends; in which case it is necessary that this child continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the child may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other children, or some restorative justice work with all those involved may be required.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group for example a speaker on online bullying, relationship abuse etc.

10.2 For the child who has displayed harmful behaviour

It is important to find out why the child has behaved in such a way. It may be that the child is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have been harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases support such as one to one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary.

Particular support from identified services may be necessary through and a consideration as to the most appropriate referral (Family Wellbeing/Youth Inclusion Support Project/Specialist services for Harmful Sexual Behaviours. Also the child may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the child has been met, it is important that the child receives a consequence for their behaviour. This

may be in the form of restorative justice e.g. making amends with the child they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. In the cases of sexually harmful behaviour it may be a requirement for the child to engage in one to one work with a particular service or agency (if a crime has been committed this may be through the police or youth offending service). If there is any form of criminal investigation ongoing it may be that this child cannot be educated on site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the child will need to be provided with appropriate support and education elsewhere.

It may be that the behaviour that the child has displayed may continue to pose a risk to others, in which case an individual risk assessment may be required. This should be completed via a multi- agency response to ensure that the needs of the child and the risks towards others are measured by all of those agencies involved including the child and their parents. This may mean additional supervision of the child or protective strategies if the child feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

In line with the school's behaviour policy a consequence such as suspension or internal suspension/inclusion/seclusion for a period of time to allow the child to reflect on their behaviour may be considered as appropriate. In addition to this it may be the incident becomes a Police/Children's Services investigation and school will need to be mindful of the stage at which this investigation is.

10.3 After care
It is important that following the incident the child involved continue to feel supported and receive help even if they have stated that they are managing the incident. Sometimes the feelings of remorse, regret or unhappiness may occur at a much later stage than the incident. It is important to ensure that the child does not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). For this reason, regular reviews with the child following the incident(s) are imperative.

11 Preventative Strategies
Child-on-child abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most robust policies and support processes. It is important to develop appropriate strategies to proactively prevent child-on-child abuse. Each of our schools have an open environment where pupils feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. There is a strong and positive PSHE/RSHE curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one on one opportunities to be harmful to one another. The school makes sure that 'support and report' signposting is available to pupils. Staff will not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. Staff will consider each issue and each individual in their own right before taking action. Pupils are part of changing their circumstances and, through school council and pupil voice for example, we encourage pupils to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour'. We involve pupils in the positive ethos in school; one where all pupils understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

12 Where to go to for further information

- [Working together to Safeguard Children](#)
- [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023](#)
- [Preventing and Tackling Bullying](#)
- [Cyberbullying- advice for Headteachers and Staff](#)
- [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes- how to respond to an incident](#)