

POLICY

For

Child-on-Child Abuse

New January 2017	September 2020	September 2022
September 2018	April 2021	September 2023
September 2019	September 2021	September 2024
September 2025		

Striving for excellence, caring for all
Within a loving and caring Christian environment.

We are a community in which everyone is offered the opportunity to fulfil their full potential, to understand themselves and be valued for who they are. Through a stimulating and challenging learning environment, we pursue academic excellence and seek the flourishing of all. This is because we know we are all God's children.

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."

John Wesley

As a RRS (Rights Respecting School – UNICEF) this upholds the following articles from the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child):
Article 3 The best interests of the child must be as top priority in all actions concerning children.
Article 19 Children must be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and mistreatment.
Article 28 Every child has the right to an education**.**

Updates to this policy have taken into account Keeping Children Safe In Education (KCSIE), September 2025.

Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

Children may be harmful to one another in a number of ways which would be classified as 'child-on-child abuse.'

Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in schools and settings and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed and what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual and 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'. Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender specific e.g. girls being sexually touched/assaulted and boys being subject to initiation/hazing type violence. We recognise that children with SEND or who are LGBT are at greater risk. It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex, from primary through to secondary stage and into colleges. It can occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap; they can occur online and face to face (both physically and verbally) and are never acceptable.

Whilst any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment should be taken seriously, staff should be aware it is more likely that girls will be the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys.

We recognise the importance that partner agencies such as police or children's social care will have in cases of sexual violence or harassment but we also note the support offered by other agencies such as NSPCC, Childline and Thinkuknow (see pages 156 -162 of KCSIE 2023).

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Behaviour and Bullying and Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policies.

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.

Sexual violence/sexual harassment

Sexual abuse may include rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault, causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent.

Sexual harassment means ‘unwanted conduct of a sexual nature’. This can occur both online and offline and both inside and outside of school. It 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. It can include sexual comments, sexual ‘jokes’ or taunting or physical behaviour such as deliberately interfering with someone’s clothing.

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 child has engaged in such behaviour, including accidently, before considering the action or consequence to be undertaken.

Harmful sexual behaviour/sexual abuse e.g. (inappropriate sexual language, touching, sexual assault etc.)

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental change. It should be considered in a child protection content. The ages and stages of the child are critical factors. Sexual behaviour may be considered harmful if one of the children is much older, particularly if there is more than 2 years difference or if one child is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child may abuse an older child, particularly if they have some form of power over them e.g. if the older child is disabled or smaller in stature. It is recognised that children displaying HSB have often experienced their own abuse or trauma.

Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic etc.)

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, gender, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or 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 cyberbullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 under section 1 which states that electronic communications which are indecent or grossly offensive, convey a threat or false information or demonstrate that there is an intention to cause distress or anxiety to the victim would be deemed to be criminal. This is also supported by 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 also be deemed to be criminal behaviour.

If the behaviour involves the use of taking or distributing indecent images of children under the age of 18 then this is also a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Outside of the immediate support children may require in these instances, the school will have no choice but to involve the police to investigate these situations.

Youth Produced Sexual Imagery (Sexting)

Youth produced sexual imagery (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, whatever 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, children and 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.

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 idea behind this practice is that it 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.

Upskirting

Upskirting is where a picture is taken under another person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of obtaining sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm.

Prejudiced Behaviour

The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised, and which is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – in particular, prejudices to do with 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 (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual).

Children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities or Medical Conditions

It is important to recognise that pupils with SEND (Special Educational Needs or Disabilities) or certain medical or physical health conditions can face additional challenges both online and offline. These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's condition without further exploration
- these children being more prone to peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children
- the potential for children with SEND or certain medical conditions being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs, and
- communication barriers and difficulties in managing or reporting these challenges
- cognitive understanding – being unable to understand the difference between fact and fiction in online content and then repeating the content/behaviours in schools or colleges or the consequences of doing so.

Therefore, any reported concerns for these children will require close liaison between the DSL or DDSL and SENCO.

Expected action taken from all staff

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and initiator of the harm, these simple steps can help clarify the situation and establish the facts before deciding the consequences for those involved in perpetrating harm.

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 around what has occurred as soon after the child(ren) may have forgotten. It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and the parents when they become involved. For example; do not use the word perpetrator, this can quickly create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled. Children are encouraged to share their worries and talk to people on their 'Safe Hand', but the importance of providing opportunities for children to share any worried in a confidential manner should not be under-estimated. A calm, considered and appropriate response should be made to reported incidents. Any victim should be reassured that they are being taken seriously, they

will be supported and kept safe. If staff have **any** concerns about a child's welfare, they should act on them immediately.

Staff should not be prejudiced, judgemental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

Through safeguarding training, all staff will be trained to manage a report. The general response to a child raising a concern (outlined in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy) should be followed. This includes guidance on how to listen, respond to requests for confidentiality and who to pass concerns onto. Staff who go on to deal with the investigation of such incidents will receive appropriate training and, if possible, two members of staff should be present with at least one of these being a designated safeguarding lead or deputy.

Gather the Facts

Speak to all the children involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use consistent language and open questions for each account. The easiest way to do this is not to have a line of questioning but to ask the children to tell you what happened. Only interrupt the children from this to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?). All victims are to be reassured that they are being taken seriously regardless of how long it has taken them to come forward and that they will be supported and kept safe. A written record of what the child has said will be made.

Consider the Intent

The wishes of the victim, although it is highly unlikely that concerns reported in a primary school setting would not be acted upon and shared

- The nature of the alleged incidents and whether a crime has been committed and/or whether HSB has been displayed
- The ages of the children involved - how old are the children involved in the incident and is there any age difference between those involved? 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 an understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person?
- 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 child's different from another and why?
- The developmental stages of the children involved
- Any power imbalance between the children - is this a one-off incident or a sustained pattern of abuse
- Consideration of any potential intra-familial harms and support for siblings
- Ongoing risks to victim, other children or adults in school
- Any links to the wider context e.g. is this linked to child sexual or criminal exploitation?
- Has this been a deliberate or contrived situation for a child to be able to harm another – where did the incident(s) take place?

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) will make an immediate risk and needs assessment. This will be considered on a case by case basis and will consider:

- The victim, especially their protection and support
- Whether there may have been other victims
- The alleged perpetrator(s)
- All the other children (and if appropriate, adult students and staff) at the school or college, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them from the alleged perpetrator(s), or from future harm.
- The time and location of the incident, and any action required to make that location safer

Risk assessments will be recorded (written or electronically) and will be kept under review. At all times the school will be actively considering the risks posed to all pupils and which measures to put into place to protect and keep them safe.

Decide on your next course of action

School should not delay in protecting the victim and other children in school by waiting for the outcome of a referral to CSC.

There are 4 likely outcomes when considering action.

1. Manage internally using the school's behaviour policy. Parents of both victim and alleged perpetrator will normally be informed about the incident
2. Consider early help for the children involved. Parents of both victim and alleged perpetrator will normally be informed about the incident
3. Referral to children's social care by the DSL or DDSL through the Customer Care Centre (CSC) on 01522 782111 where from the information that you gather you believe any child to be at risk of significant harm. At this stage parents will normally be informed unless to do so would place a child at greater risk of harm.
4. Where a crime has been committed, the incident will be reported to the police in parallel to a referral to CSC. Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, this should be referred to the police, even when the alleged perpetrator is under the age of criminal responsibility which is ten. The school should consult with them about what information can be disclosed to staff and others, including the alleged perpetrator(s) and their parents or carers and how to protect the victim and their anonymity. At this stage parents/carers will generally be informed, unless there are compelling reasons not to e.g. to do so would place the child at additional risk.

If social care and the police intend to pursue this further, they may ask to interview the children in school or they may ask for parents/carers to come to school to be spoken to also. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. Whatever action they police decide to take to manage the risk of assessed harm, school will need to consider what additional measures need to be taken to manage any assessed risk that may arise. This should include consideration of increased stress and trauma to the victim, the potential for the alleged perpetrator to intimidate the victim or witness, that any risk assessment strikes a balance between management of risk and the rights of an unconvicted person. Continued discussion with the police should help to develop a balanced set of arrangements.

It may also be that social care feel that it does not meet their criteria in which case you may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager. If on discussion however, you agree with the decision, you may then be left to inform parents/carers.

If the police indicate that they will not take any further action, the school should continue to engage with specialist support for the victim and alleged perpetrator(s).

Unsubstantiated, Unfounded, False or Malicious Reports

Where a report is found to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious, the needs of the child who made the allegation should be considered, including whether they themselves have been abused. If there is evidence of harm or risk of harm, a referral to Children's Social Care should be made. If the report is found to be malicious, actions in line with the school's behaviour policy should be taken.

Informing Parents/Carers

Given the age and stage of development of the children in our care, it would be unlikely that a child would request that information is not shared with their parents/carers, but if a child is deemed to be 'Gillick Competent' following the 'Fraser' guidelines and does not wish you to share the information with parents/carers, then the school must consider this. In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the school should encourage the child to share the information with their parent/carer or even with them (they may be scared to tell parents/carers that they are being harmed in any way). Where school can evidence they are acting in the best interests of the young person they would not be criticised, however this would be the case if they actively breached the rights and choices of the child.

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.

Supporting the Victim

The support required depends on the individual child. Their wishes should be paramount and factors such as age and stage of development should be considered. Due to the age and stage of development of primary age pupils, the wishes and views of parents should also be considered. The priority should be to make the victim's daily experience as normal as possible so that school remains a safe space for them. Support should be tailored to and proportionate to the specific incident.

Where patterns of behaviour are identified, other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group for example a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PHSE and SMSC that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

Ongoing support for the victim could take the form of a risk assessment to address issues such as contact between the victim and alleged perpetrator, emotional support such as the provision of a named adult ~~to~~ talk to, support strategies for managing future issues and identified services to offer additional support. It should always be remembered that not all victims disclose the whole picture immediately and so adults should be ready to respond to further disclosure.

For the Child who has Displayed Harmful Behaviour

In this circumstance it is important to find out why the child has behaved in such a way. It may be that the young person 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 or family members may be necessary.

Even following the conclusion of any investigation 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/carers. This may mean additional supervision of the child or protective strategies if there is risk of further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

Support and sanctions should be considered on a case-by-case basis and should take the school's safeguarding, behaviour and suspension and exclusion policies into account.

Safeguarding Other Children

School should consider the needs of any other children who may have witnessed sexual violence and be ready to ensure that the victim and alleged perpetrators, and any witness, are not being bullied or harassed. School should be ready to respond to reports of harassment or abuse whether this is in person or online.

Preventative Strategies for Schools and Settings

It is important to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of child-on-child abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way.

It is useful to ensure that children are part of changing their circumstances and that of the procedures within schools. Having a school council and pupil voice and encouraging children to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' will go far in helping to create a positive ethos in school and one where children understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

This can be supported by ensuring that each school/setting has an open environment where children feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This can be strengthened through a strong and positive PHSE/SMSC 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.

To enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure the whole workforce feels confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of children including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, it is necessary for whole staff training and CPD around abusive behaviours and talking to children in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice. It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. It is necessary that staff consider each issue and each individual in their own right before taking action. If staff minimise the concerns raised it may result in a child seeking no further help or advice. Children will be made aware of other organisations they can contact to share their worries e.g. NSPCC and Childline.