



Peer-on-peer abuse toolkit

1. Guidance on peer-on-peer abuse policy
2. Template peer-on-peer abuse policy

Toolkit 1:

Guidance on peer-on-peer abuse policy

Introduction

The Safeguarding Unit at Farrer & Co has produced the attached template peer-on-peer abuse policy (**template policy**), which encapsulates a Contextual Safeguarding approach, in collaboration with Dr Carlene Firmin, MBE – who is a leading expert on peer-on-peer abuse, and the driving force behind Contextual Safeguarding in this country. It should be noted that this is an interim version. The Safeguarding Unit and Dr Firmin will now collaborate with a number of other experts, on the template policy, a revised version of which will, for example, include a specific focus on digital behaviour.

What is peer-on-peer abuse?

Peer-on-peer 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).¹

Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including: serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), relationship abuse, domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, youth and serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or gender-based violence.²

What is Contextual Safeguarding?

In order to prevent and tackle peer-on-peer abuse, schools can adopt a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which is an approach to understanding, and responding to, children's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that children form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and children's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore children's social care practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that children are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

Here are a number of key points that schools should address in introducing, designing and implementing a peer-on-peer abuse policy:

Introducing your peer-on-peer abuse policy to the school community

Schools should give careful consideration as to how they present their peer-on-peer abuse policy to their Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff, volunteers, pupils and parents. A key message to convey is that any school that does not have such a policy in place now is failing to address peer-on-peer abuse, and that your school:

- regards the introduction of the policy as a preventative measure, and does not feel it is acceptable to merely take a reactive approach to peer-on-peer abuse in response to alleged incidents of it,
- recognises national and increasing concern about this issue, and in order to ensure that its pupils are safe, wishes to implement the policy,
- encourages parents to hold it to account on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the school so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

Schools should also secure commitment from their governing body and Senior Leadership Team to the policy, and should provide training for them on it.

Overarching policy

The policy should serve as your school's overarching policy on any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse. Schools will be aware that *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (September 2016) requires them to refer to peer-on-peer abuse in their child protection policy. As such, if your school introduces a separate peer-on-peer abuse policy, those two policies should cross-refer to each other, and appropriate cross-reference should also be made in, and consistency ensured between, other relevant policies in your school's suite of safeguarding policies. We have included an example youth

¹ Firmin, C. 2017. *Abuse Between Young People: A Contextual Account*. Oxon: Routledge (due to be published in December 2017)

² Further details are contained in the template policy

produced sexual imagery policy at Appendix C in the hope that this is helpful to schools, should they not already have one in place, and if/when considering their design and implementation of a peer-on-peer abuse policy.

Schools should consult their Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it, when responding to concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse.

Schools will also be aware of the new advice which has been issued by the Department for Education on *Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges* (December 2017) (DfE Advice). Schools should consult this, and any other advice and guidance referred to within it, as appropriate, if relevant to any concerns/allegations raised in relation to peer-on-peer abuse.

Specifically tailored

It is vital that schools tailor their peer-on-peer abuse policy according to the specific risks to which their pupils are or may be exposed – both in and outside of the school community (including on-line). They ought to develop a contextual whole-school approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse, and ensure that it is focused on all forms of peer-on-peer abuse, and across a spectrum of behaviour – including concerns/allegations of inappropriate behaviour through to those of serious sexual assault.

In order to ensure that the policy is appropriately tailored to your school's specific safeguarding context, you should conduct a comprehensive consultation on the policy, and seek input on it from key members of staff, as well as pupils and parents – for example through a steering group. This should secure a positive and enthusiastic level of 'buy-in,' particularly from pupils and parents – where the school is acting proactively, and seeking their contribution from the outset to help build an effective policy, as opposed to conducting the exercise in response to a safeguarding incident.

Identify a number of questions to ask at the start of the policy's design, to ensure that it is specifically tailored, which could, by way of example, include:

- Do we have a clear and full understanding of what constitutes peer-on-peer abuse?
- What have we experienced as a school community in the past in terms of peer-on-peer abuse, and have we learned from it? If so, how?
- Do we take a contextual whole-school approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse?
- Do we have any concerns about existing peer-on-peer relationships?
- Do we have relationships and sex education? If so, is it effective and designed in such a way that our pupils engage positively with it?
- Do we know of any physical locations which may be particularly vulnerable to being used by pupils to threaten or inflict abuse on other pupils? One practical approach to this question could, for example, be to walk around your school, and talk to pupils and ask them about their physical space, and any potential concerns they may have about it, and to ask pupils to map out "hot and cold zones."

Risk Assessment

Schools should conduct a risk assessment to determine the nature and level of risk affecting their pupils, and:

- (1) assess and monitor the risks to which their pupils are or may be exposed. This should involve conducting a risk assessment which looks at (a) the nature and level of risk of the different variants of peer-on-peer abuse within the school; (b) which pupils are affected or are more at risk of being affected by peer-on-peer abuse; (c) any trends; and (d) the various socio-cultural contexts to which those pupils are associated including, for example, their peer group (both within and outside the school), family, the school environment, their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community, and their online presence - which may impact on their behaviour, and engagement in, school. The outcome of the risk assessment should inform the policy; and
- (2) put in place action plans to address any identified risks and keep these under regular review.

Appropriate approach and language

Identify and handle cases sensitively, appropriately and promptly. Ensure your school has effective practice and procedures in place to prevent, identify and appropriately respond to cases of peer-on-peer abuse. Robust safeguarding policies and procedures which are effectively implemented, and training for staff (see further below) on identifying and managing cases are key. Ensure that your school adopts a zero tolerance policy towards all forms of peer-on-peer abuse and that no forms of such abuse (no matter how low level they may appear) are ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing.

In order to provide an appropriate response to peer-on-peer abuse, schools should pose themselves a number of questions on gender and other equality issues that can help to inform the nature of the phenomena. In order to respond

appropriately to peer-on-peer abuse, schools may need to consider gender and other equality issues – including, for example to what extent girls access STEM subjects (if the school is a mixed provision), or to what extent aggressive behaviours are displayed by boys and boys are responded to differently. How much of your wider equalities approach supports this policy?

Schools ought to take a safeguarding approach to all children involved in allegations of or concerns about peer-on-peer abuse, including those who have allegedly experienced abuse, and those who have allegedly been responsible for it, in addition to any sanctioning work that may also be required for the latter. Therefore it may be helpful to see individuals involved as children first – who may have been victimised and/or displayed harmful behaviours, rather than using the term 'victim' and/or 'perpetrator' in your policy, and in any other documents in your safeguarding suite of policies. Research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of peer-on-peer abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of, for example, peers. Examples of support and intervention services can be found in Appendix A to the template peer-on-peer abuse policy, and in Annex A to the DfE's Advice.

The template peer-on-peer abuse policy states that schools have chosen not to restrict their approach to peer-on-peer abuse to just children (defined as being those under the age of 18), but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of their safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to pupils, regardless of their age. Although the starting point is that a school's response to peer-on-peer abuse should be the same for all pupils, regardless of age, there may be some additional considerations in relation to a pupil aged 18 or over in terms of how local agencies and/or partners respond.³

Local authority and agencies response and external engagement

The response from local authorities and agencies to peer-on-peer abuse can vary depending on the geographical area. Again, schools should consult their LSCB's Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures, and any Practice Guidance which may be relevant. We have, for example, included reference in the template policy to the London Safeguarding Children Board's London Child Protection Procedures and section on Children Harming Others, which provides some very helpful guidance on the subject.

Schools should ask for confirmation of what their LSCB's response is to peer-on-peer abuse, at the outset of designing their policy, and ensure that it is aligned with that, and should know what is expected on their part in advance of a potential future concern/allegation of peer-on-peer abuse.

Where schools implement a peer-on-peer abuse policy based on the attached template, they may, in due course, need to amend reference from LSCB to local safeguarding partnership in their policy, in accordance with potential changes introduced by the forthcoming revised version of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.

As a matter of best practice, if an incident of peer-on-peer abuse requires referral to and action by children's social care and a strategy meeting is convened, then schools should hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response, including themselves, to both the child who has experienced the abuse, and the child who was responsible for it, and the contexts to which the abuse was associated - as opposed to potentially just going along, in a passive sense, with the direction of travel.

Ensure that your school actively engages with its local partners in relation to peer-on-peer abuse. The relationships that schools build with their local partners are essential to ensuring that they are able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse. They should help schools (a) to develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in their local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist; (b) to ensure that their pupils are able to access the range of services and support they need quickly; (c) to support and help inform their local community's response to peer-on-peer abuse; (d) to increase their awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in their local area to enable them to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by their pupils. A key point to raise here is that peer-on-peer abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist. It is often not appropriate for one single agency (where the incident cannot be managed internally) to try to address the issue alone – it requires effective partnership working.

³ Further details are contained in the template policy

Ongoing proactive work/training

Your school's response to concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse should be part of ongoing proactive work by it to embed best practice and take a contextual whole-school approach to such abuse. As such, the school's response can become part of its wider prevention work. If introduced, your school should review its peer-on-peer abuse policy as a constant work in progress, which it should regularly review to ensure that it continually identifies and addresses the level and nature of risk to which its pupils are or may be exposed. Use your pupils' input in the round as a baseline against which to measure the impact of this policy on an ongoing basis.

Ensure that your school actively promotes gender equality, positive values and healthy relationships, and incorporates work on peer-on-peer abuse into its curriculum. The AVA Prevention Platform has, for example, produced guidance for schools on how to develop pupils' understanding and skills to prevent violence against women and girls.⁴

In terms of staff training, there are questions that your school should pose itself – including, for example, do we think our staff have a good awareness and understanding of peer-on-peer abuse? Training staff should be straightforward once a peer-on-peer abuse policy is in place. We suggest that staff themselves develop relevant and engaging case studies. Training on peer-on-peer abuse should also be incorporated into wider safeguarding training, and schools should give careful consideration as to how to include key messages and principles applicable to their peer-on-peer abuse policy.

Parental engagement is key, and could be sought, for example, by providing a standalone session on peer-on-peer abuse at a parents' evening or another appropriate event.

⁴ Further details are contained in the template policy

Toolkit 2:

Template peer-on-peer abuse policy

I The school's responsibilities

"Sometimes the people that you chill with want you to do certain things that you don't want to do, but you have to do it because you're part of that crew, you're part of it." (participant, 13 years old)¹

Introduction

The Governors, Senior Leadership Team, and all staff and volunteers at [name of school] (**the School**) are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the School.

In particular, we:

- believe that in order to protect children, all schools should (a) be aware of the level and nature of risk to which their [pupils/students] are or may be exposed, and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to their specific safeguarding context; and (b) take a contextual whole-school approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse;
- regard the introduction of this policy as a preventative measure, and do not feel it is acceptable merely to take a reactive approach to peer-on-peer abuse in response to alleged incidents of it;
- recognise national and increasing concern about this issue, and wish to implement this policy in order to ensure that our [pupils/students] are safe; and
- encourage parents to hold us to account on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the School so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

This policy

This policy:

- sets out our strategy for preventing, identifying and appropriately managing peer-on-peer abuse. It is the product of a comprehensive consultation - which has involved [pupils/students], staff and parents, and a risk assessment. In producing this policy we have [insert list of steps taken];
- applies to all [Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff, volunteers, contractors etc.]² It is reviewed annually, and updated in the interim, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which [pupils/students] are or may be exposed. A number of staff and [pupils/students] are involved in each annual review, which involves and is informed by an assessment of the impact and effectiveness of this policy over the previous year;
- is the School's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the School's child protection policy and any other relevant policies including, but not limited to, bullying (including cyber-bullying), youth produced sexual imagery, online safety, children missing in education, [pupil/student] behaviour and discipline, and exclusions;

¹ Firmin, C. (2011). *This is it. This is my life...Female Voice in Violence Final Report*. London: ROTA

² This should mirror the application of the School's child protection policy. The definition should be as wide as possible

- does not use the term 'victim' and/or 'perpetrator'. This is because our School takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in allegations of or concerns about peer-on-peer abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused and those who are alleged to have abused their peers, in addition to any sanctioning work that may also be required for the latter. Research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of peer-on-peer abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers;³
- uses the terms 'child' and 'children', which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18.⁴ We have nonetheless chosen not to restrict our approach to peer-on-peer abuse under this policy to children but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of our safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all [pupils/students], regardless of age. Although the starting point is that the School's response to peer-on-peer abuse should be the same for all [pupils/students], regardless of age, there may be some additional considerations in relation to a [pupil/student] aged 18 or over in terms of how local agencies and/or partners respond. This, for example, is likely to be different on the part of local authorities, given that their safeguarding duties are limited, in the case of children's social care services - save for a number of specific exceptions⁵ - to children and, in the case of adult social care services, to adults with care and support needs. Similarly, the School's response to incidents involving the exchange of youth produced sexual imagery will need to differ depending on the age of the [pupils/students] involved – see Appendix C for further information. There is also likely to be a more significant criminal justice response in relation to any [pupil/student] responsible for abuse who is aged 18 or over;
- is compliant with the statutory guidance on peer-on-peer abuse as set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (September 2016);⁶
- should, if relevant according to the concerns/allegations raised, be read in conjunction with the DfE's advice on *Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges (DfE's Advice)* (December, 2017), and any other advice and guidance referred to within it, as appropriate;⁷
- should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

II Understanding peer-on-peer abuse

What is peer-on-peer abuse?

"I beat them with words. This is most hurtful." (boy, 18)⁸

"Initially I thought it [him calling to ask where I was and wanting details of who I met and what I was doing] was ok... I even kind of liked it, you know... I thought it was a sign he really cared for me." (girl, 15)⁹

For these purposes, peer-on-peer 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).¹⁰

³ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/child-abuse-neglect-uk-today-research-report.pdf> (see, in particular, Section 5)

⁴ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (ratified by the UK in 1991); the Children Act (1989); and Department for Education, *Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges* (September 2016) all define "child" as a person aged under 18

⁵ For example, young people aged 18 or over who are eligible for care leaving services

⁶ Paragraphs 42; 76; 77; 78 and 80

⁷ Department for Education, *Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges: Advice for Governing Bodies, Proprietors, Head Teachers, Principals, Senior Leadership Teams and Designated Safeguarding Leads*, (December, 2017), page 4

⁸ Daphne II European Commission, *Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships (STIR)*, Briefing Paper 5: Children's Perspectives on Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationships

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Firmin, C. 2017. *Abuse Between Young People: A Contextual Account*. Oxon: Routledge (due to be published in December 2017)

Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including: serious bullying (including cyber-bullying),¹¹ relationship abuse,¹² domestic violence,¹³ child sexual exploitation,¹⁴ youth and serious youth violence,¹⁵ harmful sexual behaviour,¹⁶ and/or gender-based violence.¹⁷

These types of abuse rarely take place in isolation and often indicate wider safeguarding concerns. For example, a teenage girl may be in a sexually exploitative relationship with a teenage boy who is himself being physically abused by a family member or by older boys. Equally, sexual bullying in schools and other settings can result in the sexual exploitation of children by their peers. For 16 and 17 year olds who are in abusive relationships, what may appear to be a case of domestic violence may also involve sexual exploitation. Children's experiences of abuse and violence are rarely isolated events, and they can often be linked to other things that are happening in their lives and spaces in which they spend their time. Any response to peer-on-peer abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of peer-on-peer abuse set out above and capture the full context of children's experiences.¹⁸ This can be done by adopting a Contextual Safeguarding approach and by ensuring that our response to incidents of peer-on-peer abuse takes into account any potential complexity.

What is Contextual Safeguarding?

This policy encapsulates a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which:

- is an approach to safeguarding children that recognises their experiences of significant harm in extra-familial contexts, and seeks to include these contexts within prevention, identification, assessment and intervention safeguarding activities;
- recognises that as children enter adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time outside of the home in public environments (including on the internet) within which they may experience abuse; and
- considers interventions to change the systems or social conditions of the environments in which abuse has occurred. For example, rather than move a child from a school, professionals could work with the school leadership and student body to challenge harmful, gendered school cultures, thus improving the pre-existing school environment.¹⁹

How prevalent is peer-on-peer abuse?

"There is [sic] some boys in the school that like keep asking me to have sex with them and I am just like "no", like on a daily basis... like they will walk around the school and try dragging me into corners and feel me up and everything and it's just irritating because they don't understand." ²⁰

Research suggests that peer-on-peer abuse is one of the most common forms of abuse affecting children in the UK.²¹ For example, [more than four in ten teenage schoolgirls aged between 13 and 17 in England have experienced sexual coercion (Barter et al 2015). Two thirds of contact sexual abuse experienced by children aged 17 or under was committed by someone who was also aged 17 or under (Radford et al 2011)].²²

¹¹ Please see the School's anti-bullying policy

¹² <https://www.disrespectnobody.co.uk/relationship-abuse/what-is-relationship-abuse/>

¹³ This type of abuse relates to abuse between children aged 16 and 17 who are or have been intimate partners or family members. The abuse includes but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional

¹⁴ This is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or children (under the age of 18) into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the child/children need(s) or want(s), and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the individual responsible for/facilitating the abuse. The child/children may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. [CSE] does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology

¹⁵ See definition on page 4

¹⁶ This is any sexual behaviour by a child or child which is outside of developmentally "normative" parameters. This can (but does not always) include abusive behaviour such as sexual assaults

¹⁷ The term "gender-based violence" refers to violence that is directed against one gender as a result of their gender or that affects one gender disproportionately

¹⁸ Carlene Firmin and George Curtis, MsUnderstood Partnership (2015), *Practitioner Briefing #1: What is peer-on-peer abuse?* (MSU 2015)

¹⁹ Firmin, C. 2017 *Contextual Safeguarding: An overview of the operational, strategic and conceptual framework* Luton: University of Bedfordshire

²⁰ Barter C, M McCarry, D Berridge and K Evans, *Partner Exploitation and Violence in Teenage Intimate Relationships*, London: NSPCC, 2009 et al. 2009:110

²¹ Carlene Firmin and George Curtis, MsUnderstood Partnership (2015), *Practitioner Briefing #1: What is peer-on-peer abuse?*

²² Schools should research and choose their own statistics. Schools may want to look at the sources listed in Appendix A in doing so

When does behaviour become problematic or abusive?²³

"I just think that you guys see me as a big target because you guys are always leaving me out and stuff, never paying attention to what I say, I just want you to see me for me and try to be my friend, I want to be your friend but you don't want to be mine and that makes me feel really kind of bad that you guys don't really want to know me. I see you guys laughing over there. I just really wanted to come up here and tell you guys that that's how I feel." (anonymous)²⁴

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

Sexual behaviours

As the NSPCC explains "children's sexual behaviours exist on a wide continuum, from normal and developmentally expected to highly abnormal and abusive. [Staff] should recognise the importance of distinguishing between problematic and abusive sexual behaviour... As both problematic and abusive sexual behaviours are developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage, a useful umbrella term is harmful sexual behaviours or HSB." This term has been adopted widely in the field, and is used throughout the NSPCC's and Research in Practice's Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework, as well as this policy.²⁵

For the purpose of the NSPCC's and Research in Practice's Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework, and as adopted in this policy, harmful sexual behaviours are defined as "Sexual behaviours expressed by children... that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child... or adult."²⁶

Simon Hackett has proposed the following continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children, which may be helpful when seeking to understand a [pupil's/student's] sexual behaviour and deciding how to respond to it.²⁷

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmentally expected • Socially acceptable • Consensual, mutual, reciprocal • Shared decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour • Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group • Context for behaviour may be inappropriate • Generally consensual and reciprocal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problematic and concerning behaviour • Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected • No overt elements of victimisation • Consent issues may be unclear • May lack reciprocity or equal power • May include levels of compulsivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victimising intent or outcome • Includes misuse of power • Coercion and force to ensure compliance • Intrusive • Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given • May include elements of expressive violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically violent sexual abuse • Highly intrusive • Instrumental violence which is psychologically and/or sexually arousing to the child responsible for the behaviour • Sadism

²³ Please see, for example, London Safeguarding Children Board, London Child Protection Procedures, Part B3: Practice Guidance, Section 15. Children Harming Others: http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/ch_harm_others.html

²⁴ The Bully Project <http://www.thebullyproject.com/>

²⁵ Please see pages 13 and 21 of NSPCC's and Research in Practice's Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/publications/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid, page 12 - which cites reference to the above mentioned definition of harmful sexual behaviours as having been derived from Hackett, 2014

²⁷ Ibid, page 14

Hackett's continuum relates exclusively to sexual behaviour and is not exhaustive. The Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool can also be very helpful in identifying sexual behaviours by children.²⁸ Staff should always use their professional judgment and discuss any concerns with the DSL. Where an (alleged) incident involves a report of sexually harmful behaviour, staff should consult the DfE's Advice.²⁹

Other behaviour

When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff can draw on aspects of Hackett's continuum to assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and to decide how to respond. This could include, for example, whether it:

- is socially acceptable
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
- is socially acceptable within the peer group
- 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
- involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour and the child/children allegedly the subject of that power
- involves a misuse of power

It should be borne in mind that there are some aspects of Hackett's continuum which may not of course be relevant or appropriate to consider in response to other alleged behaviour involving reports of other types of abuse. For example, the issue of consent and the nuances around it, is unlikely to apply in the same way in cases where the alleged behaviour is reported to involve emotional and/or physical abuse, as it could in cases of alleged sexual behaviour which is reported to involve harmful sexual behaviour.

In addition, the School could be required to deal with cases involving a range of alleged behaviours including sexual behaviour, emotional, physical behaviour and digital behaviour.³⁰

It should also be recognised that the same behaviour presented by different children may be understood at different points on a spectrum, depending on the particular context. For example, an incident involving youth produced sexual imagery may be inappropriate in one context, for example, when exchanged between two children in a consenting relationship, and abusive in another, for example, when it is (a) shared without the consent of the child in the image; (b) produced as a result of coercion; or (c) used to pressure the child into engaging in other sexual behaviours.

Behaviour which is not abusive at first may potentially become abusive quickly or over time. Intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour which may be displayed by a child is vital, and could potentially prevent their behaviour from progressing on a continuum to become problematic, abusive and/or violent - and ultimately requiring (greater/more formal) engagement with specialist external and/or statutory agencies. For example, a physical fight between two children may not constitute peer-on-peer abuse where the fight is a one-off incident, but may be abusive where the child's/children's behaviour subsequently deteriorates into a pattern of bullying behaviour and

²⁸ Learning project briefing on the role of schools in preventing, and responding to, peer-on-peer abuse

²⁹ Department for Education, *Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in Schools and Colleges: Advice for Governing Bodies, Proprietors, Head Teachers, Principals, Senior Leadership Teams and Designated Safeguarding Leads*, (December, 2017)

³⁰ A revised version of this policy will include a specific focus on digital behaviour

requires a safeguarding response from a multi-agency partnership – including a statutory assessment of whether this has led, for example, to a risk of significant harm to a child.

The importance of intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour does not just apply on an individual [pupil/student] basis, but could also apply across the [pupil/student] body.

Behaviour generally considered inappropriate may in fact indicate emerging concerning behaviour to which schools need to take a whole-school approach in order to prevent escalation. For example, where multiple boys are making inappropriate comments about girls, one-off sanctions are unlikely to be effective and wider actions should be considered, such as arranging for an external person to deliver a year group intervention exercise; revising the School's SRE programme; and/or a discussion around whether anything is happening within the wider community that might be affecting the [pupils'/students'] behaviour.

It will also be important to consider the wider context in which the alleged behaviour is reported to have occurred, and which may trigger the need for a referral. For example, some behaviour that is considered inappropriate may be capable of being dealt with internally. However, if there are wider safeguarding concerns relating to the child/children in question, a referral to statutory agencies may be necessary. Where the behaviour which is the subject of the concern(s)/allegation(s) is considered or suspected by the DSL to constitute peer-on-peer abuse, the School will follow the procedures set out below.

How can a child who is being abused by their peers be identified?

All staff should be alert to the well-being of [pupils/students] and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by peer-on-peer abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ.

Signs that a child may be suffering from peer-on-peer abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse (please see section [X] of the child protection policy for indicators of abuse) and can include:

- (a) failing to attend school, disengaging from classes or struggling to carry out school related tasks to the standard ordinarily expected;
- (b) physical injuries;
- (c) experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing;
- (d) 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;
- (e) broader changes in behaviour including alcohol or substance misuse;
- (f) changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age;
- (g) abusive behaviour towards others.³¹

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is by no means 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 their particular circumstances. Rather than checking behaviour against a list, staff are trained to be alert to behaviour that might cause concerns, to think about what the behaviour might signify, to encourage children to share with them any underlying reasons for their behaviour, and, where appropriate, to engage with their parents/carers so that the cause(s) of their behaviour

³¹ It should be noted that there is currently no definitive list of indicators of peer-on-peer abuse. The above list has been drawn from *Signs, symptoms and effects of child abuse and neglect (NSPCC)*: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/signs-symptoms-effects/>, and cases of peer-on-peer abuse

can be investigated. Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for his/her age, staff should always consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour (for example, whether the child is being harmed or abused by their peers) and, if so, what the concern is and how the child can be supported going forwards.

Looking behind [pupils'/students'] behaviour

A 15 year old girl starts to exhibit challenging behaviour in class which is out of character. She starts to have disagreements with the girls in her class and a number of "friendship issues" are reported to the teachers. The school moves the girl to another class, changes her timetable so that she does not have to interact with the girls in question, and provides her with a mentor.

A few months later the girl throws a chair across the classroom. The girl is sent to the head teacher who calls the parents and temporarily excludes the girl from school.

The pastoral lead discusses the incident with the head teacher, explaining that the behaviour is completely out of character for the girl and that the school should explore the matter further. The pastoral lead sits down with the girl and asks her how she is. The girl discloses that her boyfriend is being physically violent and verbally abusive towards her.

The power dynamic that can exist between children is also very important when identifying and responding to their behaviour: in all cases of peer-on-peer abuse, a power imbalance will exist within the relationship. This inequality will not necessarily be the result of an age gap between the child responsible for the abuse and the child being abused. It may, for example, be the result of their relative social or economic status. Equally, while children who abuse may have power over those who they are abusing, they may be simultaneously powerless to others.

Are some children particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by their peers?

"I recently started seeing this boy online. He started off by being really nice and it was great to have someone else to talk to about being gay, as it's been hard in school lately. I'm not sure what happened or if I did something to upset him, but he's turned really nasty and has been threatening to tell my family all these personal things about me. They don't know that I'm gay yet and I'm so scared about them finding out. I don't know what to do – I just want to die" (boy, 15)³²

Any child can be vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. For example, an image of a child could be shared, following which they could become more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to how others now perceive them, regardless of any characteristics which may be inherent in them and/or their family. Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, children who are more likely to follow others and/or who are socially isolated from their peers may be more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.

Research suggests that peer-on-peer abuse may affect boys differently from girls, and that this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological make-up.³³ Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, schools need to explore the gender dynamics of peer-on-peer abuse within their settings, and recognise that these will play out differently in single sex, mixed or gender-imbalanced environments.³⁴

³² Childline Annual review 2015/2016

³³ Barter C, McCarry M, Berridge D and Evans K, *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships* (2009) <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/partner-exploitation-violence-teenage-intimate-relationships-report.pdf>

³⁴ Schools may want to tailor and expand this paragraph based on the gender make-up of their school

III A whole school approach

How can the School raise awareness of and prevent peer-on-peer abuse?

"Well we had a really big meeting one time and the girls were split from the boys and then they spoke to us about reporting it and all that and they spoke to the boys about they shouldn't do it... that is when it kind of slowed down and they didn't do it as much and then all of that talk just goes and they start doing it again. And we had another meeting... but the boys, I don't think they really care because no girls have said anything" (girl, year 10).³⁵

School environment

The School actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by:

- Educating all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers, [pupils/students], and parents about this issue. This includes:
 - training all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers on the nature, prevalence and effect of peer-on-peer abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it. This includes (a) Contextual Safeguarding; (b) the identification and classification of specific behaviours; and (c) the importance of taking seriously all forms of peer-on-peer abuse (no matter how low level they may appear) and ensuring that no form of peer-on-peer abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing. Training includes case studies which the staff design themselves;
 - educating children about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse via PSHE and the wider curriculum. For example, by addressing gender inequality in a statistics class, or by reviewing literature in an English class which addresses bullying and its effect on mental health. [Pupils/Students] are frequently told what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse. They are regularly informed about the School's approach to such issues, including its zero tolerance policy towards all forms of peer-on-peer abuse.
 - engaging parents on this issue by:
 - (a) talking about it with parents, both in groups and one to one;
 - (b) asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the School address those risks;
 - (c) involving parents in the review of School policies and lesson plans; and
 - (d) encouraging parents to hold the School to account on this issue.

With [my] Blackberry like with my phone... my parents don't really check my phone... That is why most people hide their stuff in their Blackberry. But on Facebook... it is normal for your parents or your family to have Facebook, and they will check it (girl, year 8)³⁶

³⁵ Ringrose J, Gill R, Livingstone S, Harvey, L, *A qualitative study of children, children and "sexting"* (2012): <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/sexting-research-summary.pdf>

³⁶ Ibid

- ensuring that all peer-on-peer abuse issues are fed back to the School's safeguarding [team/lead] so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify [pupils/students] who may be in need of additional support. [This is done by way of a weekly staff meeting at which all concerns about [pupils/students] (including peer-on-peer abuse issues) are discussed];³⁷
- challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom);
- working with Governors, Senior Leadership Team, all staff and volunteers, [pupils/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 community;
- creating conditions in which our [pupils/students] can aspire to and realise safe and healthy relationships;
- creating a culture in which our [pupils/students] feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to; and
- responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately.

"I would just go home and my mum would say, 'Did you have a good day?' and I would just say 'Yes' knowing that it wasn't okay, but there was nothing I could do about it. But what would be better [is] if the teachers checked the cameras more often because it is mostly right in front of the cameras and this has happened from Year Seven and no one has discovered about it." (girl, year 8)³⁸

Multi-agency working

The School actively engages with its local partners in relation to peer-on-peer abuse, and works closely with, for example, [insert name] LSCB, [insert name of local MASH (or equivalent)], children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies, and other schools.

The relationships the School has built with these partners are essential to ensuring that the School is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse. They help the School (a) to develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist; (b) to ensure that our [pupils/students] are able to access the range of services and support they need quickly; (c) to support and help inform our local community's response to peer-on-peer abuse; (d) to increase our awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in our local area to enable us to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by our [pupils/students].

The School actively refers concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse where necessary to [insert name of local MASH (or equivalent)], children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies. This is particularly important because peer-on-peer abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist. It is often not appropriate for one single agency (where the incident cannot be managed internally) to try to address the issue alone – it requires effective partnership working.

IV Responding to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse

General Principles

"Sometimes if it's serious they are gonna tell somebody and that comforts you sometimes if you know that something is going to be done" (girl, 14 years old, Birmingham)³⁹

³⁷ Schools should tailor this sentence according to their particular circumstances

³⁸ Firmin, C. (2011). *This is it. This is my life...Female Voice in Violence Final Report*. London: ROTA

³⁹ Ibid

It is essential that all concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our School environment.

Any response should:

- include a thorough investigation of the concerns/allegations and the wider context in which they may have occurred (as appropriate);
- treat all children involved as being at potential risk - while the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. Schools should ensure a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it, and additional sanctioning work may be required for the latter;
- take into account:
 - that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved, and consider and address the effect of wider socio-cultural contexts - such as the child's/children's peer group (both within and outside the School); family; the School environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children's online presence. Consider what changes may need to be made to these contexts to address the child's/children's needs and to mitigate risk; and
 - the potential complexity of peer-on-peer abuse and of children's experiences and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While children may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited they are not consenting;
 - the views of the child/children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL should discuss the proposed action with the child/children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made. The School should manage the child/children's expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so.

What should you do if you suspect either that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s)?

*"And all teachers chat in the staff room; they say they won't say anything and then the next thing you know the other teachers are looking at you and the whole school knows"
(girl, 15 years old, Birmingham)*

If a [pupil/student] is in immediate danger, or at risk of significant harm, a referral to children's social care (if the [pupil/student] is aged under 18) and/or the police should be made immediately. Anyone can make a referral. Where referrals are not made by the DSL, the DSL should be informed as soon as possible that a referral has been made (see Section [X] of the child protection policy).

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay (in accordance with Section [X] of the child protection policy) so that a course of action can be agreed.

If a child speaks to a member of staff about peer-on-peer abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff should listen to the child and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement. For further details please see the procedure set out in [X] section of the child protection policy.

How will the School respond to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse?

*"I told someone something once and it just made everything worse. If I thought for one minute that it would help me then I'd talk but I know that it won't so what's the point?"
(Girl, 15 years old, Birmingham)⁴⁰*

The DSL will discuss the concerns or allegations with the member of staff who has reported them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child/all children affected.

DSLs should always use their professional judgement to determine whether it is appropriate for alleged behaviour to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required. In borderline cases the DSL may wish to consult with children's social care and/or any other external agencies on a no-names basis to determine the most appropriate response. Where the DSL considers or suspects that the behaviour in question might be abusive or violent on a spectrum (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic), the DSL should contact [insert name (this will be the School's local MASH (or equivalent), or as otherwise in accordance with the LSCB's procedures)] immediately, and in any event within 24 hours of the DSL becoming aware of it. The DSL will discuss the allegations/concerns with [insert name (this will be the School's local MASH (or equivalent), or as otherwise in accordance with the LSCB's procedures)] and agree on a course of action, which may include:

A - Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible

Where behaviour between peers is abusive or violent (as opposed to inappropriate or problematic), scenarios B, C or D should ordinarily apply. However, where support from local agencies is not available, the School may need to handle allegations/concerns internally. In these cases, the School will engage and seek advice from external specialists (either in the private and/or voluntary sector).

B – Undertake/contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted early help services provided to address the assessed needs of a child/children and their family

These services may, for example, include CAMHS, a specialist harmful sexual behaviour team, and/or youth offending services.⁴¹

C – Refer child/children to children's social care for a section 17 and/or 47 statutory assessment

As a matter of best practice, if an incident of peer-on-peer abuse requires referral to and action by children's social care and a strategy meeting is convened, then the School will hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response, including themselves, to both the child who has experienced the abuse, and the child who was responsible for it, and the contexts to which the abuse was associated.

D – Report alleged criminal behaviour to the Police

Alleged criminal behaviour will ordinarily be reported to the Police. However, there are some circumstances where it may not be appropriate to report such behaviour to the Police. For example, where the exchange of youth produced sexual imagery does not involve any aggravating factors (please see Appendix C below). All concerns/allegations will be assessed on a case by case basis, and in light of the wider context.

⁴⁰ Firmin, C. et al 2016

⁴¹ Schools to tailor depending on their local authority's services and response to peer-on-peer abuse. Please note that where the school's local partnership has a Harmful Sexual Behaviour framework in place this framework will need to be referred to in the policy

Individual risk and needs assessment

Where there is an incident of peer-on-peer abuse, the School will carry out a robust risk and needs assessment in respect of each child affected by the abuse. These risk assessments will:

- i. assess and address the nature and level of risks that are posed and/or faced by the child;
- ii. engage the child's parents and draw upon local services and agencies to ensure that the child's needs are met in the long-term. Consider whether any targeted interventions are needed to address the underlying attitudes or behaviour of any child; and
- iii. be reviewed at regular intervals in light of the child's on-going needs to ensure that real progress is being made which benefits the child.

If at any stage the child's needs escalate, the DSL should contact [insert name (this will be the School's local MASH (or equivalent) or as otherwise in accordance with the LSCB's procedures)] to determine the appropriate course of action.

Disciplinary action

The School will consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved – any such action should address the abuse, the causes of it, and attitudes underlying it. Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including (a) to ensure that the child/children take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour; (b) to demonstrate to the child/children and others that peer-on-peer abuse can never be tolerated; and (c) to ensure the safety and wellbeing of other children. However, these considerations must be balanced against the child's/children's own potential unmet needs and any safeguarding concerns. Before deciding on appropriate action the School will always consider its duty to safeguard all children from harm; the underlying reasons for a child's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the peer-on-peer abuse and the causes of it.

The School will, where appropriate, consider the potential benefit, as well as challenge, of using managed moves or exclusion as a response, and not as an intervention, recognising that even if this is ultimately deemed to be necessary, some of the measures referred to in this policy may still be required. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the School. Engaging in Fair Access Panel Processes to assist with decision-making associated to managed moves and exclusions can also be beneficial.⁴² Disciplinary interventions alone are rarely able to solve issues of peer-on-peer abuse, and the School will always consider the wider actions that may need to be taken, and any lessons that may need to be learnt going forwards, as set out above and below.

On-going proactive work to a contextual whole-school approach

"The past few months have been very hard for me. A lot has happened and throughout all of it, I have only ever been able to talk to one person around me; my History teacher. Yesterday she told me she was leaving and I have no idea what I'm going to do...School was the only normal place for me and now even that's changing" (anonymous)⁴³

The School's response to concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse should be part of on-going proactive work by the School to embed best practice and take a contextual whole-school approach to such abuse. As such the School's response can become part of its wider prevention work. This response may include the School asking itself a series of questions about the context in which an incident of peer-on-peer abuse occurred in the School, the local community in which the School is based, and the wider physical and online environment - such as:

⁴² Firmin, C. et al 2016

⁴³ ChildLine annual review 2015/2016

- (a) what protective factors and influences exist within the School (such as positive peer influences, examples where peer-on-peer abuse has been challenged etc.) and how can the School bolster these?;
- (b) how (if at all) did the School's physical environment contribute to the abuse, and how can the School address this going forwards, for example by improving the School's safety, security and supervision?;
- (c) did wider gender norms, equality issues and/or societal attitudes contribute to the abuse?;
- (d) what was the relationship between the abuse and the cultural norms between staff and [pupils/students], and how can these be addressed going forwards?;
- (e) does the abuse indicate a need for staff training on, for example, underlying attitudes, a particular issue or the handling of particular types of abuse?;
- (f) how have similar cases been managed in the past and what effect has this had?;
- (g) does the case or any identified trends highlight areas for development in the way in which the School works with children to raise their awareness of and/or prevent peer-on-peer abuse, including by way of the School's PSHE curriculum and lessons that address underlying attitudes or behaviour such as gender and equalities work?;
- (h) are there any lessons to be learnt about the way in which the School engages with parents to address peer-on-peer abuse issues?;
- (i) are there underlying issues that affect other schools in the area and is there a need for a multi-agency response?;
- (j) does this case highlight a need to work with certain children to build their confidence and teach them how to identify and manage abusive behaviour?; and
- (k) were there opportunities to intervene earlier or differently and/or to address common themes amongst the behaviour of other children in the School?

Answers to these questions can be developed into an action plan that is reviewed on a regular basis by school leadership and the DSL.

Appendix A – Examples of Further Resources

Peer-on-peer abuse statistics

- The crime survey data from 2013:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf
This includes information around sexual violence; and street based violence perpetrated by young men.
- NSPCC:
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/partner-exploitation-violence-teenage-intimate-relationships-report.pdf>
This 2009 report explores partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships.
- The Centre for Social Justice:
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Bullying-RT-Report-1.pdf>
This 2016 roundtable report looks at how the education sector can best support children who self-exclude due to bullying. It sets out a number of important statistics.
- Parliament publication:
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/9105.htm>
This 2016 publication examines the scale and impact of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.

Identifying, assessing and responding to behaviour

The following links are designed to help professionals working with children to identify, categorise and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours by children:

- NSPCC's and Research in Practice's Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework:
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/research-and-resources/2016/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework/>, which contains the continuum model proposed by Simon Hackett (2010), and provides schools with information about what to expect from local partnerships.
- NSPCC guidance on the stages of normal sexual behaviour:
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/healthy-sexual-behaviour-children-young-people/>
- NSPCC:
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/harmful-sexual-behaviour/research-resources/>
- Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool:
<https://www.brook.org.uk/our-work/the-sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool>

Here is a Fair Access Panel Referral **form** to capture peer-on-peer abuse as a reason for a move or exclusion, and accompanying practitioner **video**.

Educating staff and children

- Serious Youth Violence – Home Office 'This is abuse campaign for schools':
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/410010/2015-03-08_This_is_Abuse_campaign_summary_report__2_.pdf
- New youth produced imagery guidance:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/609874/6_2939_SP_NCA_Sexting_In_Schools_FINAL_Update_Jan17.pdf
- Anti-bullying guidance:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623895/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf
- Cyber bullying:
<http://www.childnet.com/ufiles/Cyberbullying-guidance2.pdf>
- Learning project briefing on the role of schools in preventing, and responding to, peer-on-peer abuse
- AVA Prevention platform has produced guidance for schools on how to develop [pupils'/students'] understanding and skills to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG):
<http://www.preventionplatform.co.uk/>
- Tender works with schools providing educational programmes for children and staff training aimed at preventing domestic abuse and sexual violence and promoting healthy relationships based on equality and respect:
<http://tender.org.uk/>
- Childnet:
<http://www.childnet.com/resources/pshetoolkit>

Support and interventions

- The charity, the Lucy Faithful Foundation (LFF), provides services to agencies working with children and their families – for those with problematic sexual behaviour on the internet and in the 'real world':
http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/files/inform_yp_agencies_leaflet.pdf.
LFF also provides information for parents and carers of children:
http://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/files/inform_yp_parents_leaflet.pdf.
- Red Balloon Learning Centres:
<http://www.redballoonlearner.org/>
- Leap Confronting Conflict:
<http://www.leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk/>
- Barnardo's:
https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/sexual_exploitation/cse-professionals/cse-can-you-see-it.htm

General

- Contextual Safeguarding Practitioners' Network:
www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

[Other relevant resources to be added on a school by school basis.]

Appendix B – Contact details for local agencies and summary of referral pathways

[Schools to complete, including local contact details.]

Appendix C – Youth Produced Sexual Imagery Policy

He walks along with her 'whole life', in his mobile phone, ready to share it with anyone at any time. (girl, 17)⁴⁴

Whilst professionals refer to the issue as 'sexting' there is no clear definition of 'sexting'. According to research, many professionals consider sexting to be 'sending or posting sexually suggestive images, including nude or semi-nude photographs, via mobiles or over the internet.' Yet, recent NSPCC research has revealed that when children are asked 'What does sexting mean to you?' they are more likely to interpret sexting as 'writing and sharing explicit messages with people they know.' Similarly, a recent ChildLine survey has revealed that many parents think of sexting as flirty or sexual text messages rather than images.

This policy only covers the sharing of sexual imagery by children.⁴⁵ Creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal, and therefore causes the greatest complexity for schools (amongst other agencies) when responding. It also presents a range of risks which need careful management.

On this basis, this policy introduces the phrase 'youth produced sexual imagery' and uses this instead of 'sexting'.⁴⁶ This is to ensure clarity about the issues this advice addresses.

What is youth produced sexual imagery?

'Youth produced sexual imagery' best describes the practice because:

- 'Youth produced' includes children sharing images that they, or another child, have created of themselves.
- 'Sexual' is clearer than 'indecent'. A judgement of whether something is 'decent' is both a value judgement and dependent on context.
- 'Imagery' covers both still photos and moving videos (and this is what is meant by reference to imagery throughout the policy).

What types of incidents are covered by this policy?

Yes:

- A child creates and shares sexual imagery of themselves with a peer (also under the age of 18).
- A child shares sexual imagery created by another child with a peer (also under the age of 18) or an adult.
- A child is in possession of sexual imagery created by another child.

⁴⁴ Daphne II European Commission, Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships (STIR), Briefing Paper 5: Children's Perspectives on Interpersonal Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationships

⁴⁵ For the purposes of this appendix, 'child', 'youth' and 'young person' refers to anyone under the age of 18; 'adult' refers to anyone aged 18 or over

⁴⁶ This is in accordance with the new advice *Sexting in schools and colleges: responding to incidents and safeguarding children*, which has been published by the UK Council for Child Internet Safety

No:

- The sharing of sexual imagery of children by adults constitutes child sexual abuse and schools should always inform the police.
- Children sharing adult pornography or exchanging sexual texts which do not contain imagery.⁴⁷
- Sexual imagery downloaded from the internet by a child.⁴⁸
- Sexual imagery downloaded from the internet by a child and shared with a peer (also under the age of 18) or an adult.⁴⁹

Disclosure

Disclosure about youth produced sexual imagery can happen in a variety of ways. The child affected may inform a class teacher, the DSL in School, or any member of the School staff. They may report through an existing reporting structure, or a friend or parent may inform someone in School or colleague, or inform the police directly.

All members of staff (including non-teaching staff) should be aware of how to recognise and refer any disclosure of incidents involving youth produced sexual imagery. This will be covered within staff training and within the School's child protection policy.

Any direct disclosure by a child should be taken very seriously. A child who discloses they are the subject of sexual imagery is likely to be embarrassed and worried about the consequences. It is likely that disclosure in School is a last resort and they may have already tried to resolve the issue themselves.

Handling incidents

All incidents involving youth produced sexual imagery should be responded to in line with the School's child protection policy.

When an incident involving youth produced sexual imagery comes to a member of staff's attention:

- The incident should be referred to the DSL as soon as possible.
- The DSL should hold an initial review meeting with appropriate School staff.
- The DSL will follow the procedures and guidance set out in *Sexting in schools and colleges: responding to incidents and safeguarding children*.
- There should be subsequent interviews with the children involved (if appropriate).
- Parents should be informed at an early stage and involved in the process unless there is good reason to believe that involving parents would put the child at risk of harm.
- At any point in the process if there is a concern a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm a referral should be made to children's social care and/or the police immediately.

Education

Teaching about safeguarding issues in the classroom can prevent harm by providing children with skills, attributes and knowledge to help them navigate risks. The School will provide children with opportunities to learn about the issue of youth produced sexual imagery, as part of its commitment to ensure that they are taught about safeguarding, including online, through teaching and learning opportunities – as also referred to in the School's [online safety policy].

⁴⁷ All such incidents should be responded to with reference to the School's [online safety policy], and in line with the School's child protection policy

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

Contacts



David Smellie
Head of Safeguarding Unit
T: +44 (0)20 3375 7000
E: david.smellie@farrer.co.uk



Adele Eastman
Senior Associate
T: +44 (0)20 3375 7581
E: adele.eastman@farrer.co.uk



Katie Rigg
Associate
T: +44 (0)20 3375 7607
E: katie.rigg@farrer.co.uk



Dr Carlene Firmin, MBE
Principal Research Fellow,
University of Bedfordshire
T: +44 (0)7710 075182
E: carlene.firmin@beds.ac.uk

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F&
Co

Farrer & Co LLP

66 Lincoln's Inn Fields London WC2A 3LH

Telephone +44 (0)20 3375 7000 **Facsimile** +44 (0)20 3375 7001

Email enquiries@farrer.co.uk

www.farrer.co.uk