



The Catholic Schools of the Waveney Valley

## **Child-on-Child Abuse Policy**

Reviewed by:	Mr Patrick Kennedy Executive Head teacher
Approved by:	Governing Body
Status & Review Cycle	Statutory Annual
Date Reviewed	7/4/2026
Review Date:	April 2027

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Catholic Primary Schools of the Waveney Valley take great pride in their friendly, safe and respectful atmosphere and the Christian values which all members of the schools within our academy trust (both staff and pupils) show towards each other. This considerate behaviour is encouraged at all times. We celebrate the fact that everyone in our community may be different and have different points of view, not that they are better or worse than anyone else.

The schools must be a safe, friendly and secure place to each individual, and this cannot be so for any individual who is in any way bullied. Our objective is to promote and encourage the maintenance of a friendly, safe and respectful atmosphere.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025 states that: 'All staff should be clear as to the school's or college's policy and procedures with regard to child on-child abuse and the important role they have to play in preventing it and responding where they believe a child may be at risk from it.

Ultimately, all systems, processes and policies should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart. Furthermore, Where there is a safeguarding concern, Governing Bodies, proprietors and school leaders should ensure the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account when determining what action to take and what services to provide.

The school safeguarding policies and procedures should be transparent, clear and easy to understand for staff, pupils, students, parents and carers. Systems should be in place, and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report, any form of abuse, exploitation or neglect, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously, and knowing they can safely express their views and give feedback.'

All staff are aware that children can abuse other children (child-on-child abuse) and that it can happen both inside and outside of school and online (extra familial harm). It is important that all staff recognise indicators and signs of child-on-child abuse and know how to identify it and respond to reports.

All staff understand that even if there are no reports of this type of harm, it does not mean it is not happening, it may be the case that it is just not being reported. As such, it is important that if staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they will speak to their Designated Safeguarding Lead (or Deputy).

This means that ALL staff will take a 'zero-tolerance' approach to any unacceptable behaviour including 'banter' and will seek to prevent, challenge and take action so that all children understand that any concerns regarding their welfare and safety will be taken seriously. This will encourage and promote a culture of acceptable behaviour and a safe educational environment for all children.

All staff must ensure that they reassure any victims that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. No victim should never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting abuse, sexual violence or sexual harassment. Nor should they ever be made to feel.

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

All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as child-on-child abuse), and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online.

All staff should be aware of the safeguarding issues which arise from child-on-child abuse including:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying);
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse');
- physical abuse which can include hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse);
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence);
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party;
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi nudes images and or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery);
- upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm; and
- Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

This abuse can:

- Be motivated by perceived differences e.g. on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other differences
- Result in significant, long lasting and traumatic isolation, intimidation or violence to the victim; vulnerable adults are at particular risk of harm

Staff should be aware that children or young people who harm others may have additional or complex needs e.g.:

- Significant disruption in their own lives
- Exposure to domestic abuse or witnessing or suffering abuse
- Educational under-achievement
- Involved in crime Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is the first priority of any education setting, but emotional bullying can sometimes be more damaging than physical bullying.

***School staff, alongside their Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Deputy, have to make their own judgements about each specific case and should use this policy guidance to help.***

#### **PURPOSE AND AIM**

*'Research from Farrer and Co has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of child-on-child abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by other children, parents or adults in the community.'*

Children may be harmful to one another in a number of ways which would be classified as child-on-child abuse. The purpose of this policy is to explore the many forms of child-on-child abuse and include a planned and supportive response to the issues.

## **FRAMEWORK AND LEGISLATION**

This policy is supported by the key principles of the Children's Act, 1989 that a child's welfare is paramount. Another key document is the Working together to safeguard children, 2023, which highlights that every assessment of a child, 'must be informed by the views of the child'. This view is also echoed in KCSIE 2025 which states that procedures should be in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

KCSIE 2025 states that: *'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse'*.

It also sets out how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with. Furthermore, it emphasises that the voice of the child must be heard: *'Governing bodies, proprietors and school or college leaders should ensure the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account when determining what action to take and what services to provide'*.

*'Systems should be in place, and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report, any form of abuse or neglect, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously, and knowing they can safely express their views and give feedback.'*

## **PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS**

We recognise that child-on-child abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms and that even if incidents are not being reported it does not mean that they are not happening.

In which case it is important to continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in supporting children to talk about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

This involves staff analysing any incidents for trends, patterns and identifying any areas around the site that may appear to be 'less safe'. Staff will also have access to regular CPD and training to ensure a consistent approach to managing child-on-child issues.

All staff should also be aware that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse, neglect or exploitation. We take a 'zero-tolerance' approach to abuse, harm or bullying between children and this is clearly expressed in our school's ethos and values and will be shared with all school partners including children, parents and carers.

It will be made clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is never acceptable and it will not be tolerated and never passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', 'a part of growing up' or 'boys being boys', as failure to do so can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviour, an unsafe environment and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

Therefore, in school, we recognise, acknowledge and understand the scale of harassment and abuse. This means that all staff will challenge any form of behaviour both on or off line, from language and comments to physical behaviour (potentially criminal in nature) such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and genitalia, pulling down trousers, flicking bras and lifting up skirts. Dismissing or tolerating such behaviours risks normalising them.

All staff will also ensure that any information is shared directly with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or Deputies) and recorded factually and accurately as soon as possible so that any action required to

prevent further incidents occurs immediately. Therefore, a whole school approach is needed as part of preventative education.

### **A SAFE ENVIRONMENT TO SHARE CONCERNS ALONGSIDE A POSITIVE CURRICULUM**

As stated above it is therefore important that in school there is an open environment where children feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This will be strengthened through a strong and positive RE/RSE/PSHE curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced-based and discriminatory behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one on one opportunities to be harmful to one another.

The curriculum will be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individual children, including children who are victims of abuse and children with special educational needs or disabilities.

All staff are made aware that children may not feel ready, or know how, to tell someone that they are being abused, exploited, or neglected and they may not recognise their experiences as harmful, e.g., children may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or threatened. This could be due to their vulnerability, disability and/or sexual orientation or language barriers. This will not prevent staff from having professional curiosity and speaking to the DSL (or Deputy) if they have concerns about a child.

It is also important that staff determine how best to build trusted relationships with children and young people which facilitate communication. Therefore, to enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure that Governing Bodies or proprietors feel confident that the whole workforce are supported 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.

This is in line with the school's legal obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010 (including the Public Sector Equality Duty) and local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. 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.

Systems are in place and they are well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report any form of abuse, exploitation or neglect, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously, and knowing they can express their views and give feedback. Staff will be enabled to discuss issues about online access and support and reinforce appropriate behaviours online including understanding why age limits are in place on social media platforms, encouraging children to share online concerns, talking about issues that have happened in an open forum and working closely with parents. (Farrer and Co, 2019)

All staff are aware that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and wellbeing issues. Children are at risk of abuse online as well as face to face. In many cases abuse will take place concurrently both online and offline.

Children can also abuse other children online, this can take the form of abusive, harassing, and misogynistic/misandrist messages, the non-consensual sharing of indecent images, especially around chat groups and the sharing of abusive images and pornography, to those who do not want to receive such content.

At CPSWV we have a clear Online Safety/Acceptable Use Policy that gives clarity and expectations to children about their role in keeping themselves and other children safe in regards to the use of technology both inside and outside of school.

### **SIGNPOSTING**

Although every effort is made for children to have a variety of opportunities to seek support and advice, signposting is available to children in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue directly to staff or a peer. External services or support programmes will be provided to talk to children about specific issues in support of the prevention of child-on-child abuse wherever necessary in school. This will encourage a variety of forms or mediums for children to have their voices heard.

### **FORUMS FOR CHILDREN TO MAKE CHANGES/HAVE THEIR VOICE HEARD**

It is useful to ensure children are part of changing their circumstances and that of the procedures within school. We have a school council where we encourage pupil voice and encourage children to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' which helps to create a positive ethos in school and one where all children understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

In school, Children should be able to effectively communicate how to improve the school's culture and ethos around acceptable behaviour so that they feel confident and empowered to identify unacceptable behaviours that can be dealt with accordingly and in the longer term eradicated.

### **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

Multi agency working can consolidate in house procedures in school. By accessing advice, support and guidance, effective decisions can be made in collaboration to improve outcomes for children who may be at risk of harm. Seeking advice and guidance can act as a preventative measure so that the right course of action is taken at the earliest opportunity.

It is also necessary that we actively refer concerns/allegations of child-on-child abuse where necessary to Local Authority Children's Social Care and the police where appropriate. This is particularly important because child-on-child 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 by schools or colleges themselves) to try to address the issue alone – it requires effective partnership working. (Farrer and Co. 2019).*

### **CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE EXPLAINED FURTHER**

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

Child-on-child abuse can take various forms, including: bullying (including cyber-bullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying), intimate personal relationships between children (also known as teenage relationship abuse), physical abuse, sexual violence, sexual harassment, consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes images and/or videos, causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, upskirting and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

It may also involve gang related behaviours, including serious violence and county lines. 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 child-on-child abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of child-on-child abuse set out above and capture the full context of children's lived experiences. This can be done by adopting a Contextual Safeguarding approach and by ensuring that our response to incidents of child-on-child abuse takes into account any potential complexity (Farrer and Co. 2019).

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.

This means adopting a whole school community approach by ensuring all staff:

- are aware that safeguarding incidents and/or behaviours can be associated with factors outside the school or college and/or can occur between children outside of these environments,
- understand how a child's wider context may have impact on them;
- contribute to creating a strong safeguarding culture in school by following policies that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes;
- promote healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/sexuality;
- support the school by identifying 'less safe' areas in school;
- access training on bias and stereotyped assumptions;
- be alert to changes in children's behaviour and seek appropriate responses to concerns shared.

*Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, schools and colleges need to explore the gender dynamics of child-on-child abuse within their settings and recognise that these will play out differently in single sex, mixed or gender imbalanced environments (Farrer and Co. 2019).*

It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

#### **CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or certain health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges. These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration;
- 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 overcoming these barriers.

To address these additional challenges, school will consider extra pastoral support for children with SEND or certain medical conditions particularly when investigating any form of child-on-child abuse.

#### **CHILDREN WHO ARE LESBIAN, GAY, BI OR TRANS (LGBT)**

Children who are LGBT can be targeted by other children and risks can be compounded where children who identify as LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced, and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff.

#### **LANGUAGE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS POLICY**

The language used will refer to 'victims'. It is a widely recognised term; however all children may not recognise themselves as a victim or want to be described in this way. The term 'alleged perpetrators' will also be used, this is to ensure that children are not given 'labels' about their behaviour unfairly

and without any full and thorough conclusive investigation and because they themselves found the abusive behaviour harmful or may have been a victim of previous harm.

The language used is to support victims so that they understand that they will always be believed, supported, listened to and taken seriously. The language used to support children and parents in the reporting of any incidents that may have occurred could impact on any future rehabilitation of children following any investigations that may occur. The use of certain words can be both inflammatory and distressing for children and their parents, so care will be taken in the discussion of incidents with parents to ensure they are factual and accurate.

### **TYPES OF ABUSE**

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between children 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.

### **BULLYING (INCLUDING CYBERBULLYING, PREJUDICE-BASED AND DISCRIMINATORY BULLYING)**

The new definition of bullying is, 'a person who habitually seeks to harm or intimidate those who they perceive as vulnerable,' (taken from the Oxford, Cambridge and Collins Dictionary, updated 2018). Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.

Bullying can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages, social media or gaming, which can include the use of images and video) and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs or disabilities, or because a child is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children or perceived differences.

Bullying involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This could involve perpetrators of bullying having control over the relationship which makes it difficult for those they bully to defend themselves. The imbalance of power can manifest itself in several ways, it may be physical, psychological (knowing what upsets someone), derive from an intellectual imbalance, or by having access to the support of a group, or the capacity to socially isolate. It can result in the intimidation of a person or persons through the threat of violence or by isolating them either physically or online.

Low-level disruption and the use of offensive language can in itself have a significant impact on its target. If left unchallenged or dismissed as banter or horseplay, it can also lead to reluctance to report other behaviour.

### **CYBER BULLYING**

Cyber or online bullying is the use of phones; instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or social networking sites, such as Facebook and X, to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above.

Many children have unlimited and unrestricted access to the internet via mobile phones. This means that some children, whilst at school or college, sexually harass, bully and control others via their mobile and smart technology, share indecent images; consensually and non-consensually (often via large chat groups) and view and share pornography and other harmful content.

If the behaviour involves the use of taking or distributing sexual 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.

### **PREJUDICED-BASED AND DISCRIMINATORY BULLYING**

The term prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both and online, 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).

### **ABUSE IN INTIMATE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILDREN (TEENAGE RELATIONSHIP ABUSE)**

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

### **PHYSICAL ABUSE E.G., (BITING, HITTING, KICKING, HAIR PULLING ETC.)**

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 accidentally, before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

### **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Sexual violence refers to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as described below:

- **Rape:** A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
- **Assault by Penetration:** A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
- **Sexual Assault:** A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. Sexual assault covers a very wide range of behaviour so a single act of kissing someone without consent, or touching someone's bottom/breasts/genitalia without consent, can still constitute sexual assault.
- **Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent:** A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally causes another person (B) to engage in an activity, the activity is sexual. B does not consent to engaging in the activity, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents. (This could include forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party.)

### **WHAT IS CONSENT?**

Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g., to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity

and each time activity occurs. Someone consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

Important points to note:

- A child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity
- The age of consent is 16
- Sexual intercourse without consent is rape

### **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexual harassment means 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline and both inside and outside of school/college. In referencing sexual harassment, it is in the context of child-on-child sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is likely to violate a child's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment.

Sexual harassment can include:

- Sexual comments, such as; telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance and calling someone sexualised names;
- Sexual 'jokes' or taunting;
- Physical behaviour, such as; deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes (schools and colleges should be considering when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence - it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim) and displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature;
- Displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature
- Upskirting (this is a criminal offence)
- Online sexual harassment. This may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence.

It may include:

- Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and videos;
- Sharing of unwanted explicit content;
- Sexualised online bullying;
- Unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media;
- Sexual exploitation; coercion and threats; and
- Coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they're not comfortable with online.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex from primary through to secondary stage and college. It can also 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.

Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment and will be exacerbated if the alleged perpetrator(s) attends the same school or college.

A victim should never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment. Nor should a victim ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report. Staff should be aware that 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.

## **CONSENSUAL AND NON-CONSENSUAL SHARING OF NUDES AND SEMI-NUDES IMAGES AND/OR VIDEOS**

This is also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery. 'Youth Involved/Produced' includes children sharing images that they, or another child, have created themselves. 'Imagery' covers both still photos and moving videos (and this is what is meant by reference to imagery throughout the policy). Sexting (more commonly known as) 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 occur in any relationship, 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 are not even aware that they could be breaking the law as stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

### **UPSKIRTING**

'Upskirting' typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is now a criminal offence.

### **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. It can include activities involving harassment, abuse, or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element.

### **HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR**

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. The umbrella term is 'harmful sexual behaviour' (HSB). Harmful Sexual Behaviour can occur online and/or face to face and can also occur simultaneously between the two. When considering Harmful Sexual Behaviour, ages and stages of development of children are critical factors.

Sexual behaviour between children can be considered harmful if one of the children is much older, particularly if there is more than two years difference or if one of the children is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child can abuse an older child, particularly if they have power over them, e.g., the child is disabled, or smaller in stature.

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

Harmful sexual behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another, sexual assault, rape or abuse.

### **Measuring the Behaviour**

Simon Hackett’s sexual behaviours continuum model (taken from Farrer and Co. 2019) can be a useful guide to measure the behaviour that has occurred and consider the circumstances around the incident (s). A copy of the model can be found below:

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

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.

#### **EXPECTED ACTION TAKEN FOR ALL STAFF**

All staff will be alert to the well-being of children and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by child-on-child 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* (Farrer and Co. 2019).

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and alleged perpetrator 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.

Firstly, all staff will need to reassure victims that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. It is important for all staff 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 a true, accurate account of the facts around what has happened, so that nothing is forgotten.

It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and confidentially 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.

In all cases of child-on-child abuse it is necessary that all staff are trained in dealing with such incidents, talking to children and instigating immediate support in a calm and consistent manner. Staff will not be prejudiced, judgemental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

Staff will also be mindful that wider safeguarding concerns may influence the child's account of the event(s). Alongside this, peer pressure and the impact of sharing information about the incident(s) may also influence a child's account.

### **GATHER THE FACTS**

The Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead will speak to all the young people involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use consistent language and open questions for each account. Staff will understand that children may not find it easy to tell staff about their abuse verbally. Children can show signs or act in ways that they hope adults will notice and react to. In some cases, the victim may not make a direct report, for example, a friend may make a report, or a member of school staff may overhear a conversation that suggests a child has been harmed or a child's own behaviour might indicate that something is wrong.

Staff will ensure that all victims are 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. Abuse that occurs online or outside of the school will not be downplayed and will be treated equally seriously.

A victim should never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment. Nor should a victim ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report. It is important to explain that the law is in place to protect children and young people rather than criminalise them, and this should be explained in such a way that avoids alarming or distressing them. They will ask the young people to tell them what happened. Use open questions, 'where, when, why, who', e.g. what happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?

Staff will not interrogate or ask leading questions. Staff taking a report will never promise confidentiality as it is very likely that it will be in the best interest of the victim to seek advice and guidance from others in order to provide support and engage appropriate agencies.

### **CONSIDER THE INTENT (BEGIN TO RISK ASSESS)**

Has this been a deliberate or contrived situation for a child to be able to harm another?

### **DECIDE ON YOUR NEXT COURSE OF ACTION**

If, from the information that school gathers, we believe any child to be at risk of significant harm, a safeguarding referral to Local Authority Children's Social Care will be made immediately (where a crime has been committed the police should be involved also). This action, in most circumstances, will be undertaken by the Designated Safeguarding Lead but in the event of their absence the referral can be made by another member of staff.

If this is the case, once Local Authority Children's Social Care has been contacted and made a decision on what will happen next then school will be informed of the next steps. If Local Authority Children's 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 to come to school to be spoken to also. It is important for school to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. It may also be that Local Authority Children's Social Care feel that it does not meet their criteria in which case school/DSL may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager.

If, on discussion however, school agrees with the decision, we may then be left to inform parents.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

Any staff member taking a report should never promise confidentiality as it is very likely that it will be in the best interest of the victim to seek advice and guidance from others in order to provide support and engage appropriate agencies.

Ultimately, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or a deputy) will have to balance the victim's wishes against their duty to protect the victim and other children.

## **INFORMING PARENTS**

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 young person may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents/carers whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another. It's important to remember that if the pupil is 13+ and does not want to share with parents, school should use the 'Gillick' test and the 'Fraser' guidelines. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/legal-definition-child-rights-law/gillick-competency-fraser-guidelines/>

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

## **POINTS TO CONSIDER (RISK ASSESSMENT):**

### **THE WISHES AND FEELINGS OF THE VICTIM**

It is important to understand how the victim wants to proceed to allow as much control as is reasonably possible over the decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed.

### **THE NATURE OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT**

This includes consideration as to whether a crime may have been committed and/or whether Harmful Sexual Behaviour has been displayed. What is the age and development of the children involved? How old are the children involved in the incident and is there any age difference between those involved? In relation to sexual exploration, children under the age of 5, in particular 1-4 year olds who are learning toileting skills may show a particular interest in exploration at around this stage. This, however, should not be overlooked if other issues arise (see following points). Any imbalance of power and control must be considered.

### **ARE THERE ANY ADDITIONAL VULNERABILITIES?**

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers. Therefore, care must be taken to ascertain any changes in mood or behaviour without attributing that to the child's condition. Every effort must be made to overcome barriers to communication and ensure the voice of the child is heard. Where did the incident or incidents take place? Was the incident in an open, visible place to others? If so, was it observed? If not, is more supervision required within this particular area?

### **WHAT WAS THE EXPLANATION BY ALL CHILDREN INVOLVED OF WHAT OCCURRED?**

Can each of the children give the same explanation of the incident and also what is the effect on the children involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying for example, in which case regular and repetitive? Is the version of one child different from another and why?

### **WHAT IS EACH OF THE CHILDREN'S OWN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT OCCURRED?**

Do the children know/understand what they are doing? e.g., do they have knowledge of body parts, of privacy and that it is inappropriate to touch? Is the child's explanation in relation to something they

may have heard or been learning about that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the child have an understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other child? In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear cut. If schools are concerned or unsure as to whether or not there is any risk involved, advice will be sought immediately from Local Authority Children's Social Care.

#### **REPETITION**

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

#### **ONGOING RISKS**

Are there any ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or school, college or other setting staff?

#### **CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING/EXTRA FAMILIAL HARM**

Is there any other related or wider context involving the child, including any links to child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation?

#### **OUTCOMES**

The outcome of the investigation will follow local threshold guidance. Therefore, either a referral has been made to either the police/Local Authority Children's Social Care for a full investigation (tier 4). It may have resulted in Local Authority Children's Social Care undertaking a further assessment (Tier 3) or as a school we may have identified additional services/intervention that are non-statutory and in which case completed an early help assessment (Tier 2). It may be that on investigation, a decision has been made to handle the incident (s) internally, in which case the school may implement a risk assessment plan (Tier 1). In any of the above outcomes, school has a duty of care to manage the education needs of both children in which case a risk assessment plan may be needed irrespective of the outcome.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

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

#### **FOR THE CHILD WHO HAS BEEN HARMED (VICTIM)**

Victims may not display the whole picture immediately. It is essential that dialogue is kept open and encouraged. Children who have experienced sexual violence display a wide range of responses to their experience, including, in some cases, clear signs of trauma, physical and emotional responses, or no overt signs at all. Therefore, school will remain alert to the possible challenges of detecting those signs and show sensitivity to the needs of the child irrespective of how overt the child's distress is.

What support they require depends on the individual child. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or one to one support via a mentor. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with support of family and friends. In which case it is necessary that this child continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future.

If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the child may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other children or some restorative justice work with all those involved may be required. Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group, for example, a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc.

It may be that through the continued curriculum of PSHE/Relationship and Sex Education that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently. If the child feels particularly vulnerable it may be that a risk assessment/safety plan can be put in place for them whilst in school so that they have someone named that they can talk to, support strategies for managing future issues and identified services to offer additional support.

### **FOR THE CHILD WHO HAS DISPLAYED HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR (ALLEGED PERPETRATOR)**

In this circumstance it is important to find out why the child has behaved in such a way. It may be that the child is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases support such as one to one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary. Particular support from identified services may be necessary through an early help referral and the child may require additional support from family members. Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the child has been met, it is important that the child receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the form of restorative justice e.g., making amends with the child they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. In the cases of harmful sexual behaviour it may be a requirement for the child to engage in one to one work with a particular service or agency (if a crime has been committed this may be through the police or youth offending service). If there is any form of criminal investigation ongoing it may be that this child cannot be educated on site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the child will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site.

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. This may mean additional supervision of the child or protective strategies if the child feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

A punishment or consequence such as exclusion or internal suspension for a period of time may also be required to allow the child to reflect on their behaviour.

### **AFTER CARE**

It is important that following the incident, the children involved continue to feel supported and receive help even if they have stated that they are managing the incident. Sometimes the feelings of remorse, regret or unhappiness may occur at a much later stage than the incident.

It is important to ensure that the children do not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). Regular reviews with the children following the incident(s) are imperative in preventing this.

### **SAFETY PLANNING**

Safety planning is a positive way of supporting a child who may benefit from a planned approach; this may be either the alleged victim or the alleged perpetrator. Safety plans support the child by considering the behaviours that may be risky and plan ways to manage triggers and to seek support from adults and peers. They are inclusive of parents and staff and are a planned intervention to support children in feeling secure in the school, helping children identify behaviours that may leave them feeling anxious or at risk and have strategies that they can apply to keep themselves feeling safe.

The language of safety planning is more positive than risk assessment and can give security to the child that a joined up approach is being followed by all in school.

### **DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

Taking disciplinary action and still providing support are not mutually exclusive actions. In some circumstances, the school may need to 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 child-on-child 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, 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 child-on-child abuse and the causes of it.

Where appropriate, school will 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.

### **REVIEW OF CIRCUMSTANCES**

Following any incident of harm, it is necessary for the school to consider if anything could have been done differently. This demonstrates how proactive school is in continually reviewing its policies and systems in effectively keeping children safe.

### **POLICIES IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS:**

Behaviour Policy  
Anti-Bullying Policy  
Safeguarding and Child Protection  
Acceptable Use Policy  
Online Safety Policy