



## Peer on Peer Abuse

(To be read in conjunction with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2023)

If you're dealing with an allegation of peer-on-peer abuse, you should follow our Safeguarding and Child Protection policy.

The policy refers to locally agreed multi-agency arrangements put in place by our local safeguarding children board (LSCB)/local safeguarding partners, and covers:

- Procedures to minimise the risk of peer-on-peer abuse
- How allegations will be recorded, investigated and dealt with
- How victims, perpetrators and any other child affected by peer-on-peer abuse will be supported
- A clear statement that abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as "banter", "just having a laugh" or "part of growing up"
- Recognition of the gendered nature of peer-on-peer abuse, but that all peer-on-peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously
- The different forms peer-on-peer abuse can take, such as:
  - Sexual violence and sexual harassment
  - Physical abuse
  - Sexting (the policy should include the school's approach to this)
  - Initiation/hazing-type violence and rituals

All staff should be clear what the school's policy and procedures are, and should be aware that safeguarding issues can manifest in peer-on-peer abuse.

This is explained in paragraphs 48 and 94-95 of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018.

## Good practice when dealing with allegations

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018 includes a new section on peer-on-peer sexual violence and sexual harassment. It's the most detailed advice the document provides on dealing with peer-on-peer abuse, and the principles it sets out should be useful to consider when dealing with other kinds of peer-on-peer abuse too.

## **Decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis**

The response to reports of peer-on-peer sexual violence and sexual harassment will be decided on a case-by-case basis with our designated safeguarding lead (DSL) (Danvir Visvanathan/Simon Ward) taking a lead role, supported by other agencies as required.

The following is effective practice outlined in the new part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018.

### **Immediate response to a report**

All staff should be trained to manage a report. The following tips represent good practice:

- Do not promise confidentiality. Be clear about who you'll need to tell and why
- Reassure the child that they're being taken seriously and will be supported and kept safe
- Listen carefully, remain non-judgemental, and avoid leading questions
- Record the disclosure as soon as possible but try to avoid taking notes while the child is talking, so you can give them your full attention
- Record the facts as the child presents them – do not add your own opinion
- Do not view any photos or videos of a sexual nature

If you think a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, don't delay taking action – make a referral to children's social care. If an offence has been committed, report it to the police.

If the DSL (or a deputy) isn't involved in the initial report, inform them **as soon as possible**.

Where there has been a report of sexual violence, the DSL (or a deputy) should make an immediate risk and needs assessment, considering:

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

Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Risk assessments should be recorded and kept under review.

The DSL (or a deputy) should engage with children's social care and specialist services as required. Where there has been a report of sexual violence, it's likely that professional risk assessments by social workers or sexual violence specialists will be required. The DSL (or deputy) should use these assessments to inform your school's approach and update your own risk assessment.

This is outlined in paragraphs 246 to 250.

## **Managing the report**

The DSL (or a deputy) is likely to be the most appropriate person to advise on the school's response to the report.

How the report is managed, including when to inform the alleged perpetrator, will depend on a number of important considerations. Where a report is going to be made to children's social care and/or the police, as a general rule the school should speak to the relevant agency to discuss next steps and how the alleged perpetrator will be informed.

There are 4 likely scenarios for school to consider when managing reports:

1. Manage internally, where this is considered appropriate in the circumstances, and early help or statutory interventions are not required
2. Early help, as outlined in [chapter 1 of Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), where statutory interventions are not required
3. Referrals to children's social care, where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger
4. Reporting to the police (usually in parallel with a referral to children's social care), where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made

Where scenarios involve working with children's social care, school shouldn't wait for the outcome of an investigation before protecting the victim and other children – the DSL (or deputy) should work closely with children's social care to ensure the school's actions do not jeopardise a statutory investigation. There should be immediate consideration for safeguarding the victim, alleged perpetrator and all other children.

## **Ongoing response**

### **The victim**

How our school supports the victim will depend on:

- The age and developmental stage of the victim, the nature of the allegations and the potential risk of further abuse
- The needs and wishes of the victim

Please be aware that victims may not disclose the whole picture immediately, so dialogue should be kept open and encouraged.

Further guidance on how to support the victim can be found in Working Together to Safeguard Children.

### **The alleged perpetrator**

It can be difficult to balance the need to safeguard the victim (and other children) with providing the alleged perpetrator with an education and safeguarding support and implementing disciplinary sanctions.

School should consider support (and sanctions) on a case-by-case basis, considering:

- The age and developmental stage of the alleged perpetrator
- The nature of the allegations and risk of harm to other children
- Any unmet needs that the alleged perpetrator may have

Further guidance on supporting the alleged perpetrator can be found in Working Together to Safeguard Children.