

## Peer on Peer Abuse: Actions and Expectations

Children can abuse other children; this is generally referred to as peer-on-peer abuse and can take many forms. It can include (but is not limited to) bullying (including cyberbullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting and initiating/hazing type violence and rituals.

Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2021

We recognise that, in contextualising our approach to peer-on-peer abuse, bullying and other forms of peer-to-peer conflict, all our students all have diagnosed and identified speech, language, communication and interaction needs. This does not excuse any actions within the definition of peer-on-peer abuse but our purpose as a school is to educate our students to operate successfully in the wider world. We hold a very clear view that Peer-On-Peer abuse, where the intention is to cause harm can and does happen amongst our student population and that their profile of need is not a reason to avoid acting clearly and effectively.

We take all reports of any form of abuse, harassment, and conflict very seriously and consider the complete safeguarding picture relating to individual ad groups of students in determining the best next step. In line with our Family Relationship Policy, we work with families as well as appropriate external agencies to ensure our approach to these issues are just, appropriate, personalised, and suitable for the age and stage of our students. We know that any form of conflict driven behaviour is harmful to both the perpetrator (who is a child) and the victim. Our approach focuses on harm reduction coupled with equipping students with healthy and appropriate strategies to identify their emotions, communicate them safely and effectively. This is alongside developing students' self-advocacy and sense of self-worth to ensure they are empowered to speak up, report any worries or concerns and that their views will be heard and taken seriously.

We teach across all year groups, throughout our Horizons curriculum, a full range of topics connected to peer-to-peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. This ensures that students understand and can identify any signs of peer-to-peer abuse or harmful sexual behaviour that they may experience, as well as anything they may hear or observe within their families or friendships groups. We follow the full RHSE curriculum and further details can be found within our RSHEC Policy, including curriculum content.

In line with our Positive Relationships Policy and as taught through Horizons and throughout the wider curriculum, we seek first to understand the experience of both the victim and the perpetrator and the events they have experienced. As per our Family Relationship Policy, we engage with student's families whether victim, perpetrator or witness to ensure the right support, guidance and information in available at all times.

In most cases, we will do the following:

- 1) The Learning Family Leader will contact the family of their student (perpetrator or victim).
- 2) Appropriate information will be shared with the family and discussion of the risks and support strategies to be followed and a decision made about the next steps.
- 3) Support Plans and risk assessments are updated to include the response and ongoing actions.
- 4) These may include family support in the form of monitoring social media usage, message content, supervised travel to and from school, restorative justice meetings as well as consequences such as community service, proportional loss of privileges, exclusion and involvement of outside agencies such as the Police, Children's Social Care or specialist services.

**All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.**

**If a direct disclosure is received or reported observations relating to Peer-on-Peer abuse or Harmful Sexual Behaviour: What Actions Should Be Taken?**

1	Staff must follow the reporting procedure for safeguarding concerns. Having listened carefully, assured, and validated the student – report immediately to a member of the safeguarding team and complete a detailed written report on CPOMS of the content, the facts as reported by the student, time, place and those present when the disclosure was made or worries observed. We are aware that any notes, records, or other document including messages and emails we make will be part of any follow up actions or processes led by an external agency as we will provide all necessary information to ensure that effective and efficient actions can be taken.
2	A formal report will be taken, with at least two staff present (one from the safeguarding team and the other a student’s preferred adult).
3	If the report includes an online element, staff will act in accordance with the advice for schools on <a href="#">searching, screening and confiscation</a> as well as the <a href="#">UKCIS Sharing Nudes and Semi-Nudes Advice</a> . In some cases, it may be appropriate to confiscate any devices to preserve evidence and hand them to the Police for inspection.
4	Staff will not promise confidentiality and will talk through who the report will be shared with, it will only be those necessary to progress it. We know the importance of ensuring all students – victims particularly – understand what the next steps will be and who the report will be passed to; It is important that the person to whom the student discloses recognises that they have been placed in a position of trust. They will be supportive and respectful of the student at all stages through the disclosure and any subsequent process that unfolds.
5	<p>Following receipt of any report or worry related to Peer-to-Peer abuse or harmful sexual behaviour, the DSL (or deputy where appropriate) will undertake a risk assessment and consider the most appropriate initial response. This will include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the victim, especially their protection and support.</li> <li>• whether there may have been other victims,</li> <li>• the alleged perpetrator(s); and</li> <li>• all the other students, (and, if appropriate, adults, students and staff) in our school community, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them from the alleged perpetrator(s), or from future harms</li> </ul>
6	<p>Additional considerations relating to harmful sexual behaviour and/or sexual harassment may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed which is especially important in the context of sexual violence and harassment.</li> <li>• Victims should be given as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and any support that they will be offered. This will however need to be balanced with our duty and responsibilities to protect other students.</li> <li>• the nature of the alleged incident(s), including whether a crime may have been committed and/or whether HSB has been displayed;</li> <li>• the ages of the students involved;</li> <li>• the developmental stages of the students involved;</li> <li>• any power imbalance between the students. For example, is the alleged perpetrator(s) significantly older, more mature or more confident? Does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty?;</li> <li>• if the alleged incident is a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse (sexual abuse can be accompanied by other forms of abuse and a sustained pattern may not just be of a sexual nature);</li> <li>• that sexual violence and sexual harassment can take place within intimate personal relationships between peers;</li> <li>• are there ongoing risks to the victim, other students, adult, or school staff; and</li> <li>• other related issues and wider context, including any links to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation.</li> </ul>

7	<p>Each report and incident, unless part of a significant pattern, will be assessed on individual merit and with reference to individual contexts. Immediate consideration will be given to how best support and protect the victim and alleged perpetrator as well as any linked students such as witnesses or siblings.</p> <p>The starting point regarding any report is always that we have a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment; it is never acceptable and has no place in our school family. We do not pass off any sexual violence or harassment as “banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “girls being girls/boys being boys” as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for our students.</p>
8	<p>The options available to us include, but may not be limited to, the following.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Internal Management:</b> in some cases of peer to peer abuse or sexual harassment, for example one off incidents or needs driven behaviour as communication, we may take the view, based upon the facts and big picture, that the students concerned are not in need of early help or other referrals to statutory services. Handling the report and resultant actions may be best done through our pastoral and specialist support staff and services. Our response is driven by our values and zero tolerance to harassment, abuse or actions that intend to cause harm or are sustained and without reason. All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.</li> <li>2. <b>Early Help.</b> We may decide that the students involved do not require referral to statutory services but may benefit from early help referral. Early Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life. Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. It can be particularly useful to address non-violent Harmful Sexual Behaviour and may prevent escalation of sexual violence. Our connections with Early Help, in the areas of Devon our students live, are strong and we work closely with the Mid-Devon Team to undertake assessments, Team Around the Family meetings and other community support services. Early Help and the option to manage a report internally are not mutually exclusive: we may manage reports internally and seek early help for both the victim and perpetrator(s). All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.</li> <li>3. <b>Referrals to children’s social care (CSC) via Devon MASH.</b> Where a student has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, we will make a referral to Devon CSC. At the point of referral to CSC, we will generally inform parents or carers, unless there are compelling reasons not to (if informing a parent or carer is going to put the child at additional risk). Any such decision should be made with the support of CSC. If a referral is made, CSC will then: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. make enquiries to determine whether any of the students involved need protection or other services.</li> <li>b. Where statutory assessments are appropriate, an appropriate member of our safeguarding team will work alongside, and cooperate with, the relevant lead social worker. Collaborative working will help ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and, where appropriate, the alleged perpetrator(s) and any other students that require support.</li> <li>c. We will not wait for the outcome (or even the start) of a CSC investigation before protecting the victim and other students involved. We will work closely with CSC to ensure any actions we take do not jeopardise a statutory investigation. The risk assessment in place for the individuals will help inform any decision. Consideration of safeguarding the victim, alleged perpetrator(s), any other students directly involved in the safeguarding report as well as all students in our school community.</li> <li>d. In some cases, CSC will review the evidence and decide a statutory intervention is not appropriate. We are always prepared to refer again if we believe the student(s) remains in immediate danger or at risk of harm. If a statutory assessment is not appropriate, we will consider other support mechanisms such as early help, specialist support and pastoral support.</li> </ol> <p>All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.</p> </li> </ol>

**4. Reporting to the Police:** Any report to the police will generally be in parallel with a referral to CSC. We, as a safeguarding team remain up to date with the local processes for referring and reporting cases of suspected or actual Peer On Peer Abuse, Harmful Sexual Behaviour and other issues connected to these areas. Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, our starting point is that this will be reported to the Police. Where a report has been made to the police, we will work closely with them to agree what information can be disclosed to staff and others, in particular, the alleged perpetrator(s) and their parents or carers. We will also discuss the best way to protect the victim and their anonymity. At this stage, schools and colleges will generally inform parents or carers unless there are compelling reasons not to. In circumstances where parents or carers have not been informed, it will be especially important that the school or college is supporting the child in any decision they take. This should be with the support of children's social care and any appropriate specialist agencies. It may become clear very quickly that the police (for whatever reason) will not take further action; we will continue to engage with specialist support for the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) as required. Whilst protecting students and /or taking any disciplinary measures against the alleged perpetrator(s), the named Lead Safeguarding Team member will work closely with the police and other agencies as required), to ensure any actions the school or college take do not jeopardise the police investigation. All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.

**Considering Bail Conditions:** The police will consider what action to take to manage the assessed risk of harm which could involve the use of police bail with conditions, alternatively, the person suspected of an offence could be 'released under investigation' (RUI). People released under RUI can have no conditions attached to their release from custody and it is possible for a person on bail also to have no conditions. Whatever arrangements are in place, we will need to consider what additional measures may be necessary to manage any assessed risk of harm that may arise within their school experience. Particular regard will be given to the additional stress and trauma that might be caused to the victim, the potential for the suspected person to intimidate the victim or a witness; our risk management measures will strike a balance between management of risk and the rights of an unconvicted person (e.g. rights to privacy, family life, etc). Throughout any risk assessment process and investigation, we will carefully liaise with the police to ensure the best balance of arrangements. All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.

**5. Considering Malicious, Unsubstantiated, unfounded or false reports: 453.** Records should be reviewed so that potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour can be identified, and addressed. If a report is determined to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious, we will consider whether the child and/or the person who has made the allegation is in need of help or may have been abused by someone else and this is a cry for help. In such circumstances, a referral to Early Help, CSC or other agencies may be appropriate. If a report is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, we will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the individual who made it as per our behaviour policy. All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions should be recorded via our school systems.

**9 Further Advice, Guidance and Resources:**

DfE: [Keeping Children Safe in Education: 2021](#) and [Sexual Harrassment and Harmful Behaviours In School](#)  
NSPCC: [NSPCC Learning: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour and NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework.](#)

StopItNow:- [Preventing harmful sexual behaviour in children - Stop It Now provides a guide for parents, carers and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe, they also run a free confidential helpline.](#)

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