



Peer on Peer Abuse Policy and Procedure

This policy is reviewed annually in July

Issue no	Author/Owner	Date Written	Approved by School Committee	Comments
1	C Ferguson	Dec 2016		New policy
2	C Ferguson	July 2017		Amended p5 to show all involved are victims
3	C Ferguson	July 2018		Amended in line with KCSIE 2018
4	C.Ferguson	July 2019		Minor amendments
5	C Ferguson	July 2020		Amended in line with KCSIE 2020
6	A McLellan	July 2021		Amended in line with KCSIE 2021 New expectations around peer-on-peer abuse (KCSIE 2021 paragraphs 24, 29, 46, 47, 48 and 50)

This policy has been reviewed and adoption approved by the Chair of School Committee

Signed Date: 20.092021

This policy has been reviewed and adoption approved by the Headteacher.

Signed Date: 20.09.2021

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Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2021 states that all staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers. All staff should be clear about their school's policy and procedures with regard to peer-on-peer abuse. We have an attitude that 'It could happen here' even if incidents are not reported. It is therefore essential that staff are observant and vigilant to safeguard our young people. At Stowmarket High School we will ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to reduce the extent of harm to the young person, with full consideration to impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and well-being. We adopt a zero tolerance approach to abuse and it will never be passed off as banter. Ensuring that young people are safe and secure is of paramount importance.

Purpose and Aim

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

At Stowmarket High School we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- B4C policy (which includes use or reasonable force/screening and confiscation)

Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by the key principles of the Children's Act, 2014 in which the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document that focuses adult thinking towards the views of the child is Working Together, 2018, highlighting that every assessment of a child, 'must be informed by the views of the child' and within that 'It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child when planning appropriate services. This is clearly echoed by Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2021 through ensuring procedures are in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

Abusive behaviour can happen to students in schools and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed and what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual and what preventative strategies may be put in place to reduce further risk of harm.

Abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'. Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender specific e.g. girls being sexually touched/assaulted and boys being subject to initiation/hazing type violence (KCSIE, 2021). It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

Types of abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between peers and this list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse or prejudiced behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

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 young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

Be aware that technology is a significant component in many safeguarding and wellbeing issues, and that children are at risk of online abuse (as well as face to face). Be aware that children can abuse their peers online through:

- Abusive, harassing, and misogynistic messages
- Non-consensual sharing of indecent nude and semi-nude images and/or videos, especially around chat groups
- Sharing of abusive images and pornography, to those who don't want to receive such content

Recognise that peer-on-peer abuse may be taking place, even if not reported. It is important to understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between peers. If they don't, it can create an unsafe environment and lead to a culture that normalises abuse. Abuse can take place inside and outside of school or online.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment (Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between children, September 2021)

Sexual violence - when referring to sexual violence we are referring to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003¹⁰⁵ as described below: [105 Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

All staff need to maintain an attitude of "it could happen here" when addressing sexual violence and sexual harassment. Victims of this abuse will likely find the experience distressing, which can affect their progress in school, this can be made worse if the students attend the same school. Staff should be aware that girls are more likely to be victims. Sexual violence and harassment could be done by a group, not just an individual.

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.

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.

Sexual harassment - 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline. When we reference sexual harassment, we do so 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.

Whilst not intended to be an exhaustive list, 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 (school will consider, when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence that it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim) and displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature; and
- online sexual harassment. This may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence. It may include:
 - non-consensual sharing of sexual images and videos;
 - sexualised online bullying;
 - unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media; and
 - sexual exploitation; coercion and threats.

Staff should be aware that some groups are potentially more at risk. Evidence shows girls, children with SEND and LGBTQ+ children are at greater risk.

Any decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis, with the Head of Years and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) taking a leading role and using their professional judgement, supported by other agencies, such as children's social care and the police as required. Our initial response to a report from a child is important. It is essential that **all** victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. 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. The DSLs are likely to have a complete safeguarding picture and be the most appropriate person to advise on the school's initial response. Important considerations will include:

- the wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed. This is especially important in the context of sexual violence and sexual harassment. 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;
- the nature of the alleged incident(s), including: whether a crime may have been committed and consideration of harmful sexual behaviour;
- the ages of the children involved;
- the developmental stages of the children involved;
- any power imbalance between the children. For example, is the alleged offender significantly older, more mature or more confident? Does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty?
- if the alleged incident is a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse;

- are there ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or school staff; and
- other related issues and wider context.

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the designated safeguarding lead should make an immediate risk assessment. Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The designated safeguarding lead will ensure they are engaging with children's social care and specialist services as required. Where there has been a report of sexual violence, it is likely that professional risk assessments by social workers and or sexual violence specialists will be required.

As always when concerned about the welfare of a child, all staff should act in the best interests of the child. In all cases, we will follow general safeguarding principles as set out throughout this guidance. **Immediate** consideration should be given as to how best to support and protect the victim and the alleged offender (and any other children involved/impacted). The starting point regarding any report should always be that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Especially important is not to pass off any sexual violence or sexual harassment as 'banter', 'part of growing up' or 'having a laugh'.

Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic etc.)

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived Power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be aggressive and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Young people who use their power —such as physical strength to access embarrassing information or popularity – to control or harm others. Power imbalances change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally or for a particular reason e.g. size, hair colour, gender, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on. Refer to the anti-bullying policy 2021 regarding prejudiced and discriminatory based bullying.

Cyber bullying

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or a social networking site such as Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter to harass threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above. Be aware that children can abuse their peers online through:

- Abusive, harassing, and misogynistic messages
- Non-consensual sharing of indecent nude and semi-nude images and/or videos, especially around chat groups
- Sharing of abusive images and pornography, to those who don't want to receive such content

It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 under section 1 which states that electronic communications which are indecent or grossly offensive, convey a threat or false information or demonstrate that there is an intention to cause

distress or anxiety to the victim would be deemed to be criminal. This is also supported by the Communications Act 2003, Section 127 which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another could also be deemed to be criminal behaviour.

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

Sexting

Sexting is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video. This includes sending 'nude pics', 'rude pics' or 'nude selfies'. Pressuring someone into sending a nude picture can happen in any relationship and to anyone, whatever their age, gender or sexual preference. 'Sexting' refers specifically to the consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos.

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, young people are not even aware that they could be breaking the law as stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. UKCCIS Guidance: Sexting in schools and colleges, responding to incidents, and safeguarding young people (2017).

Initiation/Hazing

Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation such as a 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 bonds between them. After the hazing is over, the newcomers also have something in common with older members of the organisation, because they all experienced it as part of a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment. Initiation and hazing may occur online and it is important to share your concerns with the DSL immediately.

Upskirting

The Voyeurism (Offences) Act, which is commonly known as the Upskirting Act, came into force on 12 April 2019. Upskirting is where someone takes a picture under a person's clothing (not necessarily a skirt) without their permission and or knowledge, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks (with or without underwear) to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is a criminal offence. Anyone of any gender, can be a victim.

Prejudiced Behaviour

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

Teenage relationship abuse

Teenage relationship abuse 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 abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour, in a heterosexual or same relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner. It is an offence 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.

Expected action taken from all staff

Challenge inappropriate behaviours. As a member of staff you should challenge inappropriate behaviours. For example:

- Making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up.
- Not tolerating or dismissing sexual violence or sexual harassment as 'banter', 'part of growing up', 'just having a laugh' or 'boys being boys'.

Dismissing inappropriate behaviour risks leading to:

- A culture of unacceptable behaviours
- An unsafe environment for children
- A culture that normalises abuse, leading to pupils accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and initiator of the harm, the following steps can help clarify the situation and establish the facts before deciding the consequences for those involved in perpetrating harm. It is important we deal with a situation of peer abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts around what has occurred. It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and the parents when they become involved. For example; we do not use the word perpetrator, this can quickly create a blame culture and leave a child labelled. Staff will not be prejudiced, judgemental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters. All students involved in Peer to Peer abuse should be considered victims.

For the young person who has been harmed

What support they require depends on the individual young person. 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 young person continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the young person may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other young people 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 PHSE that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

If the young person feels particularly vulnerable it may be that a risk assessment 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 young person who has displayed harmful behaviour

In this circumstance it is important to find out why the young person has behaved in such a way. It may be that the young person is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have been harmed themselves and may even have been harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases support such as one to one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary.

Particular support from identified services may be necessary through a CAF/strengthening families/early help referral and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person has been met, it is important that young person receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the form of restorative justice e.g. making amends with the young person they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. In the cases of sexually harmful behaviour it may be a requirement for the young person 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 young person cannot be educated on site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the young person will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site.

The school may also choose a sanction as a consequence such as exclusion or supervised exclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour.

After care

It is important that following the incident the young people 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 young people do not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). In which case, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative. All incidents of peer on peer abuse will be recorded within our electronic school bully log and where relevant using MyConcern. Types and numbers of incidents will be recorded to show where further knowledge, training and support is needed. All information will be shared with the School Committee.

Preventative Strategies

At Stowmarket High School, it is important to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of peer on peer abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way. Firstly, we recognise that peer on peer abuse can and will occur even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. 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 young people to talk about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

This can be supported by ensuring we have an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This can be strengthened through a strong and positive PHSE curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one on one opportunities to be harmful to one another. It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. At Stowmarket High School young people are taught about safeguarding, including how to stay safe online. We have a whole school approach to tackle (in an age-appropriate and inclusive way) issues such as:

- Healthy and respectful relationships
- What respectful behaviour looks like
- Consent
- Gender roles, stereotyping and equality
- Body confidence and self-esteem
- Prejudiced behaviour
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment

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 young person seeking no further help or advice. It is important that signposting is available to young people in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer.

We have resource boards with support services on a wide range of issues around the school so young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to.