

Woodchurch High School

A Church of England Academy



PEER ON PEER ABUSE POLICY DOCUMENT

Approved by the Curriculum Committee: Spring 2017
Approved by the Full Governing Body: Spring 2017

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Purpose and Aim	3
Framework and Legislation.....	3
Peer on Peer Abuse and Discriminating Between Exploratory Play and Peer Sex Abuse	4
Types of Abuse.....	5
School Procedure	7

Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2016 states that '*Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with*' (page 19). The document also states it is most important to ensure opportunities of seeking the voice of the child are 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 for children to express their views and give feedback. Ultimately, any system and processes should operate with the **best** interests of the child at their heart.*'

While it is recommended that Peer on Peer abuse is part of the Child Protection Policy, due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with peer on peer abuse we have completed this separate policy guidance template.

At Woodchurch High School we continue to 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.

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

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Cyber Bullying Policy
- Sexting Policy
- Online Safety Policy

Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by the key principles of the Children's Act, 1989 that the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document that focuses adult thinking towards the views of the child is Working Together, 2015, 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.*' (Working Together, 2015:23) This is clearly echoed by Keeping

Children Safe in Education, 2016 through ensuring procedures are in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

Peer on Peer Abuse and Discriminating Between Exploratory Play and Peer Sex Abuse

There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be regarded as abusive and incidents that are more properly dealt with as bullying, sexual experimentation etc. This is a matter of professional judgement.

Safeguarding leaders will use their professional judgement to determine whether an incident between children is abusive. If one child or young person causes harm to another, this should not necessarily be dealt with as abuse: bullying, fighting and harassment between children are not generally seen as child protection issues.

However, it may be appropriate to regard a young person's behaviour as abusive if:

- There is a large difference in "power", i.e. age, size, or development, between the children.
- The alleged perpetrator has repeatedly tried to harm another child or other children.
- There are concerns about the intention of the alleged perpetrator.
- If the evidence suggests that there was an intention to cause severe harm to the victim, this should be regarded as abusive whether or not severe harm was actually caused.
- Allegations of peer abuse will be taken as seriously as allegations of abuse perpetrated by an adult.
- The age and understanding of the alleged perpetrator must be considered throughout the decision making process
- The circumstances of the alleged perpetrator must be assessed separately from those of the alleged victim, and the reasons for his/her behaviour must be explored
- All allegations of abuse made against a person under 18 years old should be passed to children's social care.
- The possible impact on the child/victim
- Any disparity in age between the alleged abusing child and abused child
- Whether there is any element of coercion or violence involved

Exploratory play can be dealt with in school, but allegations of peer sex abuse should be referred to children's social care.

Safeguarding Leaders should consider the continuum of sexual behaviours and also that exploratory play can be handled in school. Also staff may want to consult the Wirral Council's Local Safeguarding Board sets out information on sexually harmful behaviour by children, which includes guidance on referral to local children's specialist services, and incidents involving children under 10.

http://wirrallscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_ch_yp_sex_harm_behv.html#sexually_harm

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.

Sexually harmful behaviour/sexual abuse e.g. (inappropriate sexual language, touching, sexual assault etc.)

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse.

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 bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can 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 orientation, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Cyber bullying

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

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, the 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.

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, 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.

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. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment.

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 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, non-binary).

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 gender relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner.

School Procedure

The management of children and young people with sexually harmful behaviour is complex, and the principal and appropriate designated senior person officer will work with other relevant agencies to maintain the safety of the whole school community.

Young people who display such behaviour may be victims of abuse themselves and the child protection procedures will be followed for both victim and perpetrator.

What staff should do if an allegation of abuse is made against a child.

- Anyone who has a concern that a child might have been abused by another child should refer their concerns to children's social care in accordance with the referrals procedure.
- Reassure the child that he/she has done the right thing in telling you.
- Let him/her know you will need to tell someone else.
- Record the allegation accurately and promptly
- Do not start investigating the allegation or ask for more information from the alleged victim or their peers.
- The allegation should be brought the attention of the Headteacher/DSL immediately

What the school will do next

The Headteacher/DSL will decide whether the matter should be dealt with under the school's safeguarding policy or bullying/discipline policy.

If from the information that you gather you believe any young person to be at risk of significant harm a safeguarding referral to social care will be made immediately (where a crime has been committed the police should be involved also).

If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and made a decision on what will happen next then you will be informed on your next steps.

If social care and the police intend to pursue this further they may ask to interview the young people in school or they may ask for parents to come to school to be spoken to also.

The Headteacher/DSL will decide whether the matter should be dealt with under the school's safeguarding policy or bullying/discipline policy.

The Headteacher/DSL will inform parents of each of the pupils involved within one day of the allegation being made.

The Headteacher/DSL will speak to each of the pupils involved with their parents present, or to the parents alone if appropriate (but never to the pupils alone) Keep the involved children separate throughout the school day to avoid collusion or intimidation (this may involve them attending on a rota basis until enquiries are complete).

Not talk to the children about the incident to avoid distorting the evidence, other than initially establishing what is alleged to have taken place.

Keep a detailed log of actions, discussions and decisions.

If the situation warrants it (for example possible press coverage), sending a letter to all parents/carers of children in the school, giving appropriate information about the situation.

If the assessment concludes that the allegations made can be substantiated, the children should not necessarily be expected to continue their education in contact with each other. The children responsible for the abuse should be moved if necessary. The views and wishes of the children who have been abused and their parents should be appropriately considered in the decision making.

Ongoing support will be offered to victims of abuse in conjunction with any recommendations of agencies involved.

Actions Headteachers can take following allegations

If the assessment concludes that the allegations are substantiated, the children involved should not necessarily be expected to continue their education in contact with each other.

The views and wishes of the children who have been abused, and those of their parents, should be appropriately considered in the decision making.

The school may wish to take disciplinary action against the perpetrator, this may depend on any ongoing police investigation or action.

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 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 PSCHEE and SMSC 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 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.

Even following the conclusion of any investigation the behaviour that the young person 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 young person and the risks towards others are measured by all of those agencies involved including the young person and their parents. This may mean additional supervision of the young person or protective strategies if the young person feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

The school may also choose a punishment as a consequence such as exclusion or internal exclusion/inclusion/seclusion 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.

Preventative Strategies

We feel at Woodchurch 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, and most importantly we recognise that peer on peer abuse can and will occur on any site 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 that Woodchurch High School has an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This is strengthened through a strong and positive PSCHEE/SMSC 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.

To enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure the whole workforce feels confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of young people 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 young people in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice.

It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. 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. It is useful to have a resource board with support services on a wide range of issues so young people can seek

their own solutions should they wish to. In the same way external services or support programmes could be brought in to talk to young people about specific issues in support of the prevention of peer on peer abuse.

Finally, it is useful to ensure young people are part of changing their circumstances and that of the procedures within schools. Having a school council and pupil voice and encouraging young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' will go far in helping to create a positive ethos in school and one where all young people understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.