

St Margaret's C of E Primary School



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Renewal Date: June 2027

Child on Child Abuse Policy June 2026

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1. Introduction

Severe harm may be caused to children by the abusive and bullying behaviour of other children, which may be of a physical, sexual or emotional nature. The effect on the victim of intimidation and peer pressure by the child who harmed may make disclosure difficult for the victim.

2. Bullying

Bullying is the use of aggression with the intention of causing harm. It results in pain, distress, or emotional harm to the targeted child.

Bullying may take many forms, including:

- **Emotional bullying** — being unfriendly, excluding others, sending hurtful messages, tormenting, hiding someone's property, or using threatening looks or gestures.
- **Physical bullying** — pushing, kicking, hitting, punching, or any use of physical violence.
- **Racist bullying** — racial taunts, derogatory name-calling, racist graffiti, or offensive gestures.
- **Sexual bullying** — unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.
- **Verbal bullying** — name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing, or ridiculing.
- **Cyberbullying** — misuse of digital platforms or devices, including:
 - Sending threatening or abusive messages via email, messaging apps, or online chat
 - Harmful or intimidating mobile phone calls or texts
 - Misuse of technology such as cameras, videos, or social media platforms

3. Sexual Abuse

When there is suspicion or an allegation of a child having been sexually abused or being likely to sexually abuse another child, it should be referred immediately to Children's Social Care or the Police – see Making a Referral chapter. When considering whether sexual abuse has occurred, it is important to determine what is developmentally normal sexual experimentation and what is coercive (see also Understanding Sexual Behaviour in Children and Children who present with Harmful Sexual Behaviours chapters).

4. Teenage Relationship Abuse

Young people can also experience domestic abuse within their own intimate relationships. This form of child on child abuse is sometimes referred to as 'teenage relationship abuse'. Depending on the age of the young people, this may not be recognised in law under the statutory definition of 'domestic abuse' (if one or both parties are under 16). However, as with any child under 18, where there are concerns about safety or welfare, child safeguarding procedures should be followed and both young victims and children / young people who harm should be offered support.

5. Role of Schools and Colleges in Recognition of Child on Child Abuse, including Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children

Concerns about possible abuse by one child of another (child on child abuse) are frequently first considered within a school environment and it may frequently be unclear if the circumstances

should be considered under child protection procedures or not. All staff should be aware that children could abuse other children, and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online.

It is important that all staff recognise the indicators and signs of child on child abuse and know how to identify and respond to it. It is essential 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.

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. Keeping Children Safe in Education (Department for Education) emphasises the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviour between peers. These can include:

- Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying);
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers;
- physical abuse such as 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 nude and semi-nude 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 include an online element).

Downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as “just banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys” can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for children and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

All school staff should understand that even if there are no reports in their school 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 if staff have any concerns regarding child on child abuse they should speak to a member of their safeguarding team, DLS Jenna Darby, DDSL George Lumley, Kelly Magee or Terri Challis.

All school staff should be clear as to the school'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. Where it is clear that the concern is one of child protection there should be no delay in the referral to Children's Social Care, for example disclosure or witnessing of child on child sexual abuse. Where further assessment is required prior to deciding the extent and nature of the concerns, the school should:

- Ensure the parents / guardian of both the victim and child / young person who has allegedly harmed, are advised, unless doing so would create further risk for the child. If the behaviour is already established as harmful or likely as harmful, practitioners should hold a Strategy Discussion as a priority;
- Provide pupils with the opportunity to record or dictate in their own words their version of events;
- Consider any need to separate the alleged victim and child / young person who harmed in the classroom, in the school and the possible need to send one or both home;
- Not interview either child on their own after the preliminary interview following disclosure – they should be accompanied by a parent or guardian;
- Keep a written record of pertinent information including date, time, those present and signature – a diagram / photo of the room / playground may be useful, as well as a description of who was present etc;
- Provide the child with the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the record and record any disagreement.

6. Recognition of Abuse for Referral to Children's Social Care Professionals must decide in the circumstances of each case whether or not behaviour directed at another child should be categorised as abusive or not.

It will be helpful to consider the following factors:

- Relative chronological and developmental age of the two children (the greater the difference, the more likely the behaviour should be defined as abusive);
- A differential in power or authority (e.g. related to race or physical or intellectual vulnerability of the victim);
- Actual behaviour (both physical and verbal factors must be considered);
- Whether the behaviour could be described as age appropriate or involves inappropriate sexual knowledge or motivation;
- Physical aggression, bullying or bribery;
- The victim's experience and perception of the behaviour;
- The possibility the child who harmed is, or was, also a victim:
- Attempts to ensure secrecy;
- An assessment of the change in the behaviour over time (whether it has become more severe or more frequent);

- Duration and frequency of behaviour. Where it is clear that the concern is one of child protection there should be no delay in the referral to Children's Social Care – see Making a Referral chapter.

7. Response to Referrals

The interests of the identified victim must always be the paramount consideration. However, whenever a child may have abused another, all agencies must be aware of their responsibilities to both individuals, and multi-agency management of the case must reflect this.

It is likely that the child who harmed may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, have considerable needs themselves and may also be or have been the victim of abuse. The interests of any such children must also be considered as part of the response to the referral and in the multi agency management of the case.

8. Strategy Discussion

In all cases where the suspected child who harmed is a young person, the Police and Children's Social Care must convene a Strategy Discussion (usually a face-to-face meeting) within the Section 47 Enquiry timescales.

The Police will also decide whether a criminal offence is alleged. Where the decision is reached that the alleged behaviour does not constitute abuse or the child is under the age of criminal responsibility, and there is no need for further enquiry or criminal investigation, the details of the referral and the reasons for the decision must be recorded.

When the young people concerned are the responsibility of different local authorities, each must be represented at the Strategy Discussion, which will usually be convened and chaired by the authority in which the victim lives. The Strategy Discussion must consider the needs of both children, as well as any other children who may be at risk from the alleged child / young person who harmed. A different social worker should be allocated for the victim and the child / young person who harmed, even when they live in the same household, to ensure that both are supported through the process of the enquiry and that both their needs are fully assessed.

The Strategy Discussion should be convened in line with the arrangements set out in the Strategy Discussions chapter. In planning the investigation, the following factors should be considered:

- Age of both children and any other child or children who may be at risk;
- Seriousness of the alleged incident;
- Effect on the child who was harmed and their own view of their safety;
- Parental attitude and ability to protect their child;
- Arrangements to protect the child who was harmed and other children, especially where the child who was harmed and the child who has harmed are in the same household or school class;
- Whether there is suspicion that the child who has harmed has also been abused;
- Whether there is reason to suspect that adults are also involved;
- The likelihood and desirability of criminal prosecutions taking place. Where there is suspicion that the child who has harmed may have also experienced abuse, the Strategy Discussion must consider the order in which interviews will take place.

The conduct of any investigation will be discussed within a Strategy Discussion and the interview-planning meeting to ensure the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 and Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings (Ministry of Justice) are met. See Making a Referral chapter.

Where police decide to conduct a separate 'offender' interview, Children's Social Care will not normally be involved other than in performing any statutory responsibilities to the child e.g. as Appropriate Adult.

9. Outcome of Section 47 Enquiries

The outcome of enquiries is as described in the Section 47 Enquiries chapter. However, the position of the alleged victim(s) and the alleged child/young person who harmed must be considered separately.

If the information gathered in the course of enquiries suggests that the child who harmed is also a victim, or potential victim, of abuse including neglect, a Child Protection Conference must be convened. Where there are no grounds for a Child Protection Conference, but concerns remain regarding the child's sexually abusive behaviour, they will be considered as a Child In Need. In such cases, a multi-agency planning meeting should be held.

10. Child Protection Conference

As well as carrying out all of its normal functions the Child Protection Conference must consider how to respond to the child's needs as a possible child who harms. Where the alleged child/young person who harmed is not subject to a Child Protection Plan, consideration should be given to the need for services to address any abusive behaviour and the multiagency responsibility to manage any risk, through the use of multi-agency planning meetings.

11. Criminal Proceedings

The decision as to how to proceed with the criminal aspects of a case will be made by the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This decision will take into account any recommendations of the youth offending team and the views of other professionals. Best practice suggests that criminal proceedings should not be taken where:

- Criminalising certain types of behaviour may be detrimental to the interests of all concerned;
- It is inappropriate to pursue the criminal aspects of the case because the professionals are satisfied that sexual activity took place but that it was not abusive.

12. Multi-Agency Planning Meetings

Where there are insufficient grounds for holding a Child Protection Conference, or where one has been held but the child is not subject of a Child Protection Plan as a result, a multi-agency approach will still be needed if the child/young person who harms needs are complex.

In such cases, a multi-agency planning meeting should be convened by Children's Social Care to pool information, allocate roles and set a timetable for an assessment of the needs of the child and the risk posed by them, as well as to coordinate any other interim intervention. Those invited should include participants of the Strategy Discussion and representatives from health (including child and adolescent mental health services), school and any other appropriate service provider, the child and her/his parents / carers.

In cases where the young child who harms is also Looked After, consideration should be given to the need for a plan to minimise risk of future offending, agreed with the child's carers and their agency. On completion of the assessment, the same forum will be reconvened to consider the outcome, to identify a Lead Professional and the roles of relevant agencies in providing any identified intervention, including specialist input with regard to young people with special needs. This may include action to address the risk posed to other children in contact with the alleged child who harms well as the identified victim. Care must be taken to provide services culturally appropriate to the needs of the child and the family.

Intervention should be reviewed at regular multi-agency meetings at intervals of no more than six months. At the point of closure, the review will consider the possible need for long-term monitoring and the availability of advice and other services.

Young people with inappropriate sexual behaviour who may pose a risk to children with whom they have contact or who are re-entering the community following a custodial sentence or time in secure accommodation, or who move into an area from another local authority also require such a multi-agency assessment / intervention – see Risk Management of Known Offenders and Those who Pose a Risk section. <https://www.sussexsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk/contents/risk-management-of-known-offenders-and-those-who-pose-a-risk/>

Annex 1 - Flowchart for reporting a concern

DSL – Designated Safeguarding Lead
MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
IFD – Integrated Front Door
CP – Child protection
LLC – Low Level Concern

