

Peer abuse is the physical, emotional & sexual abuse of a child or young person by their peers, including:

- Bullying (including cyber bullying)
- Sexual violence & sexual harassment
- Up-skirting (photographing genitals or buttocks for sexual gratification and/or victim distress)
- Sexting
- Teen partner abuse
- Physical abuse
- Initiation & hazing rituals & violence
- Cyber-bullying & sexting

Although 'online' bullying can occur at any time & outside of a setting it should still be assessed by your safeguarding team if it involves one of your pupils.

## Peer abuse can:

- Be motivated by perceived differences e.g. on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other differences
- Result in significant, long lasting and traumatic isolation, intimidation or violence to the victim.

Children or young people who harm others may have additional or complex needs e.g.:

- Significant disruption in their own lives
- Exposure to domestic abuse or witnessing or suffering abuse
- Educational under-achievement
- Involved in crime

Stopping harm & ensuring immediate safety is the first priority of a setting.

Emotional bullying can sometimes be more damaging than physical harm and should be taken equally seriously.

## Multi-agency approach:

All agencies must be aware of their responsibilities to both the victim and the alleged perpetrator. The needs of the victim are paramount.

Separate management & assessment of the victim & alleged perpetrator is essential & should consider the:

- Nature and extent of the abusive behaviour, using expert professional advice if required
- Context of the behaviour including unmet developmental and behavioural needs
- Child or young person's family and social circumstances
- Risk to self and to others, including household, extended family, school, peer group or wider social network

## Education settings should:

- Have an ethos where students & staff treat each other with respect and understand how their actions affect others
- Openly discuss any issues that could motivate bullying with staff and students
- Address issues early between pupils which might later provoke conflict
- Develop strategies to help to prevent bullying
- Involve students & parents to ensure they know what to do to prevent & report concerns
- Create an inclusive, safe environment where pupils can openly discuss issues without fear
- Invest in skills to help staff understand the needs of SEND, disabled and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pupils
- Work with the wider community & agencies to tackle issues that occur outside the setting

**Your peer abuse policy:** should state that peer abuse IS abuse and should not be tolerated and include:

- procedures to minimise the risk of peer abuse
- how allegations will be investigated & dealt with
- the different forms this abuse can take
- clarity for parents, students & staff to respond to incidents quickly
- how victims & perpetrators will be assessed & supported
- regular evaluation and updating
- resources to help with particular problems
- staff training to understand all aspects of peer abuse, including sexual violence & harassment, their statutory responsibilities, how to resolve problems, and where to seek support
- easy process for pupils to report all forms of bullying so that they are assured that they will be listened to and incidents acted on
- assurance that disciplinary processes will be applied fairly, consistently & reasonably, taking account of special educational needs, disabilities and vulnerability of students

**Staff should discuss all concerns with their Designated Safeguarding Lead/Deputy (DSL/D), who will assess each specific case using this guidance.**

**The Peer Abuse Risk Assessment guidance below will help the DSL/D to consider all aspects of the incident & decide what further action is needed.**

## Taking action:

- Always take complaints seriously
- Never ask a student for a written statement, it can interfere with a criminal investigation
- Assess needs of victim and perpetrator
- Consider referral to Police or Social Care
- Contribute to multi-agency assessments
- Convene a risk management meeting
- Record all incidents and all action taken

## Sexual violence & harassment:

Incidents are likely to be complex & require difficult professional decisions alongside other agencies.

### The DSL/D should:

- Report all concerns about sexual violence to Children's Social Care and/or the Police and complete a risk assessment
- Discuss how the alleged perpetrator will be informed and any next steps with children's social care and/or the police
- Risk assess all reports of sexual harassment and considered if a referral to Children's Social Care or the Police is required
- Record all risk assessments and keep a copy on the individual safeguarding file for the victim and alleged perpetrator
- Regularly review & update the risk assessment with assessments from other professionals
- Liaise with the social worker, police officer or other involved practitioners as required
- The police should advise the setting about the investigation e.g. if alleged perpetrator is 'released under investigation', 'no further action' is taken, they are given bail, cautioned or convicted

## Risk assessment & safety planning:

This is the responsibility of the DSL, fulfilling the organisation's 'duty of care' to all people using the setting.

The purpose is to decide whether to re/admit a pupil with concerning behaviour & plan for the safety of the alleged/abuser, their alleged/victim, and others at the setting.

### Risk assessment identifies the impact:

- Of alleged/abuser being educated at the setting
- For the alleged/victim if at the setting
- Of the alleged/abuser around other people
- Of using strategies to minimise identified risks

..and helps staff to respond clearly and reduce risks to a manageable level.

Settings should follow 'Information Sharing' in [Education policies, procedures & guidance, Safeguarding Sheffield Children](#) website) to ensure sensitive & appropriate communication with other agencies.

All agencies should agree how to communicate with the alleged/victim, alleged/abuser, parents/carers, staff & pupils, whilst ensuring that this does not prejudice any investigation and maintains individual confidentiality.

### Process - risk assessments should be:

- recorded and included on the child's safeguarding file (& linked to SEND file if appropriate)
- regularly reviewed e.g. through TAF or other meetings, and updated with any changes

A risk assessment should consider information from all agencies about:

- What the concerning behaviour is
- When & why the alleged/abuser may have behaved this way e.g. warning signs & triggers
- Any cultural context for the behaviour
- Related issues e.g. child exploitation, disability, abuse & neglect, substance/alcohol misuse
- Any language & interpretation needs of the alleged abuser/victim & their families to ensure full understanding of the safeguarding issues
- Age & understanding of alleged/abuser/victim
- Previous education experiences of the alleged/abuser (e.g. relationships, attainment)
- Views of parents/carers/family, their response, anxieties, level of cooperation/compliance
- Alleged/abusers cooperation, responsibility taken, understanding of allegations & victim's viewpoint
- Impact of social media
- Positive and negative friendship groups inside & the setting and in the community
- Mapping others at risk at the setting e.g. people related to concerns e.g. alleged/victim's siblings
- Alleged/abusers capacity to change, resilience, goals, attitudes, opportunities, engagement, participation
- Therapeutic support & other assessments from agencies & whether outcome has been positive
- Training needed to develop staff safeguarding & other skills e.g. behavioural understanding, disability, SEN, Team Teach

## Conclusions of DSL/D risk assessment:

### Manage internally:

- victim & alleged perpetrator not in need of early help or statutory intervention
- incident can be dealt with through e.g. behaviour policy & pastoral support

### Early help:

- victim and/or alleged perpetrator may benefit from early help e.g. to address non-violent harmful sexual behaviour & prevent escalation

### Referral to Children's Social Care:

- victim has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger
- A young perpetrator should also be referred and should be the subject of a child protection conference if considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm
- setting informs parents/carers unless doing so will put child at additional risk
- DSL/D & social workers coordinate support for victim, alleged perpetrator & other children
- Setting actions do not jeopardise a statutory investigation
- If children's social care decide statutory intervention is not appropriate, DSL/D should:
- refer again if they believe child remains at risk of harm
- re-consider early help, specialist & pastoral support

### Safety planning:

This considers risk reduction & should include agreed measures & interventions to support the alleged/abuser & alleged/victim effectively e.g.:

- Writing a behaviour management plan, or a MyPlan, EHC Plan, which addresses current and future behaviour, likelihood and impact
- Internal support interventions for situations that the alleged/abuser/victim identifies as difficult
- Assessment of related safeguarding needs e.g. though an FCAF for alleged/abuser/victim
- Discussion & advice for practitioners to develop support for the alleged/abuser/victim
- Referrals for the alleged/abuser/victim e.g. restorative justice, mental health support, Sheffield Safeguarding Hub, Community Youth Team, Speech & Language, Ed. Psychologist

- Support & monitoring arrangements for alleged/abuser/victim and their families
- Frequency of contact between the child and family and supporting agencies
- Agreeing what work will be done by each practitioner
- Process for sharing information with agencies & the family e.g. Team Around the Family or other meetings
- What to do if the child goes missing e.g. monitoring attendance, staff contact
- Searches for weapons/substances/phones (see 'Reasonable Force' in [Education policies, procedures & guidance, Safeguarding Sheffield Children](#) website)
- Clarity for the alleged/abuser/victim about un/acceptable behaviour & consequences in and outside the setting

**Remember: If child or young person is at risk of or suffering significant harm, immediately ring:**

- **Police tel. 999 and/or**
- **Children's Social Care tel. 0114 2734855**

### Useful links and resources:

- [SCSP Child Protection & Safeguarding Procedures](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE 2019](#)
- [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges, DfE 2017](#)
- [Bullying UK](#)
- [Childline \(NSPCC\) tel.: 0800 1111](#)
- [Stonewall - various resources](#)
- [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)
- [Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre](#)
- [Peer Abuse](#) information, NSPCC

**There are other related policies available here, e.g. Sexualised Behaviour on the [Safeguarding Sheffield Children website](#):**

- [Education section, policies, procedures & guidance page](#)
- [Professionals & volunteers section, Information & Resources pages](#)

