



THE CHERWELL SCHOOL
OPPORTUNITY, RESPONSIBILITY, EXCELLENCE

Peer on Peer Abuse and Sexual Harassment

Person responsible for policy: Deputy Headteacher

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The Cherwell School Peer on Peer Abuse and Sexual Harassment

1. Overview

Peer on peer abuse and sexual harassment is an area of national concern and this document is designed to provide additional focus. It should be read in conjunction with our existing Child protection, anti-bullying and Behaviour for Learning policies.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or harassing a single child or group of children.

Peer-on-peer abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- physical and sexual abuse
- sexual harassment and violence
- emotional harm
- on and offline bullying
- teenage relationship abuse

It can even include grooming children for sexual and criminal exploitation.

There is extensive evidence of peer-on-peer abuse in the context of both sexual and criminal exploitation. In autumn 2020, the NSPCC announced a 29% increase in children seeking help from Childline due to peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their wellbeing and educational attainment. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap, they can occur online and offline (both physical and verbal) and are never acceptable. It is important that **all** victims are taken seriously and offered appropriate support. Staff should be aware that some groups are potentially more at risk. Evidence shows girls, children with SEND and LGBTQi+ children are at greater risk.

The member of our Extended Safeguarding team with a focus on Peer on Peer Abuse is Ms Holly Bristow

Safeguarding issues can present via peer-on-peer abuse, whereby a pupil is subject to significant harm by another pupil or pupils. This includes sexual violence and sexual harassment between children.

2. Ways in which Peer-on-peer abuse can manifest

Peer-on-peer abuse usually manifests as one, or a combination, of the following:

- **Bullying:** if a child is suffering or at risk of significant harm, a bullying incident should be addressed as a child protection concern. Bullying can take different forms, including cyberbullying, racist and religious bullying and homophobic bullying. It's important to bear in mind that some types of behaviour or communication may constitute a criminal offence
- **Domestic violence:** teenage relationship abuse involves controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between intimate partners or family members aged 16 or over. It can be psychological, physical, sexual, financial and/or emotional
- **Child sexual exploitation (CSE):** defined as an individual or group taking advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person into sexual activity, (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. CSE:
 - Can be perpetrated by other children
 - May have occurred even if the sexual activity appears consensual; for example, if the child is legally old enough to consent but lacks the freedom or capacity to do so. This applies if the child is fearful or under the influence of harmful substances
 - Does not always involve physical contact – it may occur through use of technology
 - Can sometimes be mistake for 'normal adolescent behaviours'
 - Is never the victim's fault, even if there is some form of exchange
- **Harmful sexual behaviour:** involves a child engaging in discussions or acts that are inappropriate for their age or stage of development, whether online or offline. It includes sexualised language or role play, viewing pornography, sexual harassment and sexual violence (see below). It also includes 'sexting', whereby a sexually explicit text, image or video is sent or received. Note: it is a criminal offence to possess or distribute sexual content of under-18s.
- **Sexual harassment:** unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which can include:
 - Sexual comments about another's body
 - Unwanted physical contact
 - Interfering with clothing
 - Comments about another's sexual experience
 - Sexual "jokes" or taunting including innuendo
 - Sexual name-calling
 - Sexual gestures
 - Online sexual harassment
 - Use of mobile phones to share images or take photos without permission (including upskirting)

Sexual harassment creates an atmosphere that, if not challenged, can normalise inappropriate behaviours and provide an environment that may lead to sexual violence

- **Sexual violence:** rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault, as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Note: the age of consent is 16, and a child under 13 can never consent to sexual activity

- **Serious youth violence:** this form of abuse applies to victims aged 1-19 who are subject to offences such as violence, sexual offences, robbery, or gun or knife crime. This may occur within the context of gang activity

3. Dealing with peer on peer abuse and sexual harassment

3.1 What to look for

Peer-on-peer abuse is a complex issue and will have varied warning signs. However, staff should be alert to:

- Changes in behaviour or demeanour; for example, a child becoming withdrawn
- Signs of depression or anxiety
- Avoidance of particular individuals
- Unexplained injuries
- Unusually poor performance at school
- Sudden development of sexualised behaviour or language
- Exclusion or isolation from peers
- Acts of servitude

3.2 What to do

- Report all incidents of peer on peer abuse and sexual harassment in line with our Behaviour for Learning Policy anti bullying and Child Protection Policy or using the Safeguarding Concern Form on the staff intranet.
- Never pass incident off as “banter”, “part of growing up” or “having a laugh”
- Recognise the gendered nature of peer-on-peer abuse (that girls will more likely be victims and boys more likely be perpetrators), but that all forms are unacceptable and will be taken seriously
- If you or another member of staff think a child is in **immediate danger**, call 999

3.3 What the school will do

- Include training on Peer on Peer abuse and sexual harassment in staff meetings and briefings and we will include this within our annual professional learning calendar
- Ensure that staff are aware that safeguarding issues can manifest via peer-on-peer abuse and that they know the school’s policy and procedures with regards to this issue
- Ensure students are taught about what constitutes acceptable behaviour and learn about topics such as healthy and respectful relationships, self-esteem and gender roles. Ensure that they understand the consequences of peer-on-peer abuse, and address any culture of abuse, of any form, that may develop

4. Vulnerable children

While peer-on-peer abuse can affect all children, research shows that some are particularly vulnerable:

- Young people aged 10 or over
- Girls and young women, with boys and young men more likely to be identified as abusers
- Boys and young men in gang-affected neighbourhoods
- Those with a history of abuse within their families
- Young people in care
- Those who have experienced loss through bereavement
- Children with special educational needs and disabilities
- LGBT students

Studies have also found that black and ethnic minority children are often under-identified as victims and over-identified as perpetrators.

5. Guidelines on how victims, perpetrators and any other child affected by peer-on-peer abuse will be supported

- Staff know to speak to a member of the safeguarding or pastoral team if they are concerned that a child is experiencing, or at risk of, peer-on-peer abuse
- Where staff share concerns, We will coordinate a plan of action and trigger safeguarding procedures. This may include a referral to the MASH, and/or the local police.
- Consider the school environment and the implications where victims and perpetrators attend the same school. For example, the DfE says that in the case of a report of sexual violence or sexual harassment, a school should consider the proximity of the victim and alleged perpetrator immediately; if rape or assault by penetration is reported, the alleged perpetrator should be removed from any classes they share with the victim
- Consider 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
- Review the support in place for both victims and perpetrators, including how you protect anonymity where appropriate. Perpetrators may need help to understand the implications of their behaviour
- Consider the wider context of both the victim and perpetrator to build a picture of why the abuse may be occurring

6. Preventing peer-on-peer abuse

Our Social Wellbeing and Computing lessons as well as assemblies and tutorials ensure that students are taught about all aspects of safeguarding in an age-appropriate and inclusive way, for example:

- Healthy and respectful relationships
- How to stay safe online.
- What respectful behaviour looks like
- Consent
- Gender roles, stereotyping and equality

- Body confidence and self-esteem
- Prejudiced behaviour
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment

The information in this policy is based on the following sources:

- [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges, GOV.UK - DfE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-between-children-in-schools-and-colleges)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-between-children-in-schools-and-colleges>
- [Preventing and tackling bullying, GOV.UK - DfE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying>
- [Keeping children safe in education, GOV.UK - DfE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>
- [Domestic violence and abuse, GOV.UK – Home Office](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse)
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse>
- [Child sexual exploitation, GOV.UK - DfE](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>
- [NICE issues first of its kind guidance on harmful sexual behaviour, NICE](https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/nice-issues-first-of-its-kind-guidance-on-harmful-sexual-behaviour)
<https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/nice-issues-first-of-its-kind-guidance-on-harmful-sexual-behaviour>