



Thameside Primary School:
Child-on-Child Abuse & Managing Allegations Policy

Approved by Governors: October 2024

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Rights Respecting Schools



Thameside Primary School is a Rights Respecting School. School policies will respect the UN Convention on the rights of the child. The Safeguarding policy links to:

Article 19: Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them.

Article 23: Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support so that they can lead full and independent lives

Article 24: Children have the right to good quality health care, safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, so that they can stay healthy.

Contents

Introduction	p.3
What is child-on-child abuse?	p.3
What is child-on-child sexual violence and harassment?	p.4
The safeguarding implications of sexual activity between young people	p.4
What is sexting?	p.5
What is up-skirting?	p.6
Roles and responsibilities	p.6
How Thameside will minimise risk of sexual harassment	p.8
Support for victims, perpetrators and other children	p.9
Appendix	p.12
Continuum of Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Response Triage	

Policy reviewed by:	Sophie Greenaway
Key Changes:	<p>This policy is in line with KCSIE 2024 and its changes to Part 5.</p> <p>Part 5: child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment</p> <p>Updated definition of early help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early help is now defined as 'support for children of all ages that improves a family’s resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse' (paragraph 497) • This reflects the Working together to safeguard children guidance, linked above <p>Statistic clarification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidance says that children with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be abused than their peers. This previous wording was 'children with special educational needs and disabilities' (paragraph 456)



Introduction

Staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing other children.

Abuse is abuse and will not be tolerated.

All staff need to maintain an attitude of "it could happen here" and it can take place inside or outside of school and online.

Addressing inappropriate behaviour can help prevent abusive/violent behaviour.

Victims of this abuse will likely find the experience distressing, which can affect their progress in school, this can be made worse if the alleged perpetrator(s) attends the same school.

In most instances, the conduct of students towards each other will be covered by the school's behaviour policy.

Some allegations, however, may be of such a serious nature that they may raise safeguarding concerns. These allegations are most likely to include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and will be dealt with under this policy. It is also likely that incidents dealt with under this will involve older students and their behaviour towards younger students or those who are vulnerable.

What is child-on-child abuse?

Child on child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- 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 nudes and semi nudes 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 also include an online element).



What is child-on-child sexual violence and harassment?

Sexual violence and harassment could be carried out by a group of perpetrators, not just an individual perpetrator.

Sexual violence: It is important that school and college staff are aware of sexual violence and the fact children can, and sometimes do, abuse their peers in this way. When referring to sexual violence we are referring to sexual violence offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003: rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault.

What is consent? Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity and each time activity occurs.

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment is 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline 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 (schools and colleges should be considering when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence - 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;
 - sexual exploitation; coercion and threats; and
 - upskirting.

The safeguarding implications of sexual activity between young people

The intervention of child protection agencies in situations involving sexual activity between children can require difficult professional judgments. Some situations are statutorily clear – for example, a child under the age of 13 cannot consent to sexual activity. But it will not necessarily be appropriate to initiate safeguarding procedures where sexual activity involving children and young people below the age of legal consent (16 years) comes to notice. In our society generally the age at which children become sexually active has steadily dropped. It is important to distinguish between consensual sexual activity between children of a similar age (where at least one is below the age of consent), and sexual activity involving a power imbalance,



or some form of coercion or exploitation. It may also be difficult to be sure that what has or has been alleged to have taken place definitely does have a sexual component.

As usual, important decisions should be made on a case by case basis, on the basis of an assessment of the children's best interests. Referral under safeguarding arrangements may be necessary, guided by an assessment of the extent to which a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

Key specific considerations will include:

- The age, maturity and understanding of the children;
- Any disability or special needs of the children;
- Their social and family circumstance;
- Any evidence in the behaviour or presentation of the children that might suggest they have been harmed;
- Any evidence of pressure to engage in sexual activity, including [sharing nudes and semi nudes](#)
- Any indication of sexual exploitation.

There are also contextual factors. Gender, sexuality, race and levels of sexual knowledge can all be used to exert power. A sexual predator may sometimes be a woman or girl and the victim a boy.

[What is 'sexting'?](#)

The consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes images and or videos is also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery.

'Sexting' does not include the sharing of sexual photos and videos of under-18 year olds with or by adults. This is a form of child sexual abuse and must be referred to the police.

What to do if an incident involving 'sexting' or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes comes to your attention

Report it to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) immediately.

- Never view, download or share the imagery yourself, or ask a child to share or download – this is illegal.
- If you have already viewed the imagery by accident (e.g. if a young person has showed it to you before you could ask them not to), report this to the DSL.
- Do not delete the imagery or ask the young person to delete it.
- Do not ask the young person(s) who are involved in the incident to disclose information regarding the imagery. This is the responsibility of the DSL.
- Do not share information about the incident to other members of staff, the young person(s) it involves or their, or other, parents and/or carers.
- Do not say or do anything to blame or shame any young people involved.
- Do explain to them that you need to report it and reassure them that they will receive support and help from the DSL.

If a 'sexting' incident comes to your attention, report it to the DSL without delay.

For more information, please see [Sexting advice for schools](#) published by The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) Education Group.

[What is 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.

Roles and responsibilities

All child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously. We have a zero-tolerance to abuse.

At Thameside Primary School we believe that all children have a right to attend school and learn in a safe environment. Children should be free from harm by adults in the school and other students.

We recognise that children are capable of abusing other children and that child-on-child abuse may be taking place, even if not reported. Abuse will never be tolerated or passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh” or “part of growing up”.

The governing body should:

- ‘Ensure that there are procedures in place to handle allegations against other children’ **DfE guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education***
- Ensure that the school is actively minimising the risks of child on child abuse.

All staff should:

- Ensure that children are able to access worry boxes in their classrooms as an avenue to reporting child-on-child abuse and this should be well promoted, easy to understand and easily accessible.
- Not wait for a child to make a disclosure, they should act on any concerns immediately
- 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 the indicators of child-on-child abuse, know how to identify it and respond to reports
- Recognise that child-on-child abuse may be taking place, even if not reported
- Understand their role in preventing it and responding to it if they believe a child may be at risk
- 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



- Know that abuse can take place inside and outside of school or online
- Be aware that they may overhear a conversation that suggests a child may have been harmed or a child's behaviour may be an indicator
- Know that they may confiscate devices for evidence to hand to the police, if the report of abuse includes an online element
- Know that they can ask children outright if they've been harmed and what the nature of the harm was
- Keep in mind that certain children may face additional barriers to telling someone because of their vulnerability, disability, gender, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation
- Reflect back, using the child's language, when hearing a report
- Recognise it may only be the first incident reported, rather than representative of a singular incident and that trauma can impact memory, so children may not be able to recall all details or timeline of abuse

If a pupil makes an allegation of abuse against another pupil:

- Staff must record the allegation and tell the DSL, but do not investigate it
- A factual record should be made of the allegation, but no attempt at this stage should be made to investigate the circumstances.
- The DSL will contact the local authority children's social care team and follow its advice, as well as the police if the allegation involves a potential criminal offence
- Parents, of both the student being complained about and the alleged victim, should be informed and kept updated on the progress of the referral.
- The DSL will make a record of the concern, the discussion and any outcome and keep a copy in the files of both pupils' files.
- It may be appropriate to exclude the pupil being complained about for a period of time according to the school's behaviour policy and procedures.
- Where neither social services nor the police accept the complaint, a thorough school investigation should take place into the matter using the school's usual disciplinary procedures.
- In situations where the school considers a safeguarding risk is present, a risk assessment should be prepared along with a preventative, supervision plan.
- The DSL's risk and needs assessment in response to a report of sexual harassment should also consider whether there have been any other victims
- The DSL will also contact the children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), if appropriate



The DSL should:

- Refer to **Appendix 1: Continuum of Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Response Triage** (source: BFFC's Local advice: HSB, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence, September 2021)
- Be aware of, and respond appropriately to all reports and concerns about sexual violence and/or harassment both online and offline, including those that have happened outside of school
- Balance the victim's wishes against the responsibility to protect other children
- Remember that sexual violence and sexual harassment can take place within intimate personal relationships between peers
- Think about other related issues and wider context, including any links to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation, and take the potential for sexual violence and harassment in intimate personal relationships into consideration
- Keep victim and alleged perpetrator(s) a reasonable distance apart on school premises including at before and after-school activities
- Regularly review the actions taken to respond to reports. In response, update relevant policies with lessons learnt and consider whether there are wider cultural issues at play
- Record all concerns, discussions and decisions made, and the reasons for those decisions, in writing
- Be part of discussions with statutory safeguarding partners for all children involved.
- Initiate early help support for all children involved.

Early help is 'support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse' (KCSIE Part 5, paragraph 497). Where children have been subject to child-on-child abuse, the DSL (and deputies) should know what the early help process is and how and where to access support. DSLs can find more detailed information on early help in the [Working together to safeguard children](#) guidance, which includes a more comprehensive list of indicators that a child may need early help.

The response of the DSL should always be underpinned by the principle that "there is a zero tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment and it is never acceptable and it will not be tolerated."

We will create a supportive environment in school and minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse by:

- Providing a developmentally appropriate PSHE syllabus which develops students understanding of acceptable behaviour and keeping themselves safe
- Challenging any form of derogatory or sexualised language or inappropriate behaviour between peers, including requesting or sending sexual images
- Being vigilant to issues that particularly affect different genders – for example, sexualised or aggressive touching or grabbing towards female pupils, and initiation or hazing type violence with respect to boys



- Ensuring our curriculum helps to educate pupils about appropriate behaviour and consent
- Ensuring pupils are able to easily and confidently report abuse using our reporting systems
- Ensuring staff reassure victims that they are being taken seriously
- Being alert to reports of sexual violence and/or harassment that may point to environmental or systemic problems that could be addressed by updating policies, processes and the curriculum, or could reflect wider issues in the local area that should be shared with safeguarding partners
- Supporting children who have witnessed sexual violence, especially rape or assault by penetration. We will do all we can to make sure the victim, alleged perpetrator(s) and any witnesses are not bullied or harassed
- Considering intra familial harms and any necessary support for siblings following a report of sexual violence and/or harassment
- Ensuring staff are trained to understand that a pupil harming a peer could be a sign that the child is being abused themselves, and that this would fall under the scope of this policy

Ongoing support and safeguarding

The victim

Staff should be aware of the importance of:

- Challenging inappropriate behaviours
- Making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up
- Challenging physical behaviours (potentially criminal in nature), such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and genitalia, pulling down trousers, flicking bras and lifting up skirts. Dismissing or tolerating such behaviours risks normalising them
- Knowing that some groups are potentially more at risk from child on child abuse. Evidence shows that girls, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children are at greater risk. Guidance also states that **children with disabilities** are 3 times more likely to be abused than their peers.
- Regularly reviewing decisions and actions, and update policies with lessons learnt
- Looking out for potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour, and decide on a course of action where patterns are identified
- Considering if there are wider cultural issues within the school that enabled inappropriate behaviour to occur and whether revising policies and/or providing extra staff training could minimise the risk of it happening again
- Remaining alert to the possible challenges of detecting signs that a child has experienced sexual violence, and show sensitivity to their needs

When supporting victims, staff will:

- Consider the support required for a victim on a case by case basis. The level of support required for a one-off incident of sexualised name calling is likely to be entirely different to the level required following a report of rape.
- Reassure victims that the law on child-on-child abuse is there to protect them, not criminalise them



- Enlist the support of external professionals such as therapists (with consent of the victim and their family). Victims may require support for a long period of time and schools should be prepared to offer long-term support in liaison with relevant agencies. Everything possible should be done to protect the victim from bullying and harassment as a result of any report they have made.
- Consider the best environment for the victim. Understandably, children who have been subject to child on child abuse may struggle to remain in a normal classroom environment. Whilst it is important not to isolate the victim, the victim may wish to be withdrawn from lessons and activities at times. This should only happen when the victim wants it to, not because it makes it easier to manage the situation. Schools may wish to provide a physical space for victims to withdraw to. If the victim is unable to remain in the school, alternative provision or a move to another school should be considered – this should only be considered at the request of the victim and following discussion with their parents. If the victim does move to another school, the DSL should inform the school of any ongoing support needs and transfer the child protection file.
- Encourage Open Communication (see more detailed information below)

Encouraging open communication is an essential aspect of supporting victims of child on child abuse in their healing process. By creating a safe and non-judgmental space, children are supported to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Here are some strategies for staff to facilitate open communication:

- **Active Listening:** Practice active listening by giving survivors your full attention. Show genuine interest and empathy, and avoid interrupting or rushing the conversation. By listening attentively, you validate their experiences and demonstrate your willingness to understand their perspective.
- **Validate Feelings:** Validating survivors' feelings is crucial in creating a supportive environment. Acknowledge their emotions and assure them that their feelings are valid and understandable. Avoid minimising or dismissing their experiences, as this can hinder their healing process.
- **Empower Choice and Control:** Give survivors agency over their healing journey by respecting their boundaries and autonomy. Allow them to make decisions about the pace, direction, and timing of their healing process. Empower them to choose the therapeutic approaches or interventions that resonate with them.
- **Cultivate Trust:** Building trust is fundamental to establishing open communication. Be reliable, consistent, and transparent in your interactions. Demonstrate that you can be trusted with their sensitive information and that their confidentiality is respected.
- **Use Empowering Language:** Be mindful of the language you use when communicating with survivors. Avoid judgmental or blaming language and instead use empowering and supportive words. Focus on their strengths, resilience, and progress to instil a sense of hope and self-worth.
- **Create a Safe Space:** Provide a safe and comfortable environment where survivors feel secure to express themselves. This can be any other space that ensures some privacy, confidentiality, and emotional safety.
- **Patience and Understanding:** Healing from abuse is a complex and individualised process that takes time. Exercise patience and understanding, allowing survivors to share at their own pace. Avoid pressuring them to disclose details they may not be ready to share.
- **Non-verbal Communication:** Pay attention to non-verbal cues and body language. Often, survivors may find it challenging to express their emotions verbally. Be attuned to their non-verbal signals and create opportunities for alternative modes of expression, such as art therapy or journaling.
- **Provide Emotional Support:** Offer emotional support throughout the healing process. Let survivors know they are not alone and that you are there to listen, support, and provide resources. Encourage them to seek additional support when needed.
- **Continued Communication:** Maintain open and ongoing communication with survivors. Regularly check in with them, ask about their well-being, and provide opportunities for them to share updates or concerns. Consistent communication demonstrates your commitment to their healing journey.



In addition, KCSIE references a video on supporting children who are victims of sexual abuse:
<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/knowledge-in-practice/practice-improvement/supporting-practice-in-tackling-child-sexual-abuse/>

DfE has also worked with the NSPCC to set up a dedicated helpline to support anyone who has experienced sexual abuse in educational settings. **The dedicated NSPCC helpline number is 0800 136 663.**

The following guidance and advice for schools is available:

- [keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#)
- [how to respond to an incident: sharing nudes and semi-nudes](#)

The alleged perpetrator

When considering the support required for an alleged perpetrator, schools should take into account:

- The terminology they use to describe the alleged perpetrator or perpetrator.
- The balance of safeguarding the victim and providing the alleged perpetrator with education and support.
- The reasons why the alleged perpetrator may have abused the victim – and the support necessary.
- Their age and developmental stage.
- What a proportionate response looks like.
- Whether the behaviour is a symptom of their own abuse or exposure to abusive practices and/or materials.

When making a decision, advice should be taken from children's social care, specialist sexual violence services and the police as appropriate.

If the alleged perpetrator moves to another school (for any reason), the DSL should inform the destination school of any ongoing support needs and transfer the child protection file.

Safeguarding other children

Children who have witnessed sexual violence, especially rape and assault by penetration, should be provided with support. It is likely that children will "take sides" following a report, and the school should do everything in its power to protect the child experiencing the bullying, the child exhibiting the bullying behaviour and witnesses from bullying and harassment.

Schools should keep in mind that contact may be made between the child experiencing the bullying and the child exhibiting the bullying behaviour and that harassment from friends of both parties could take place, via social media.

As part of a school's risk assessment following a report, transport arrangements should be considered, as it is a potentially vulnerable place for both the child experiencing the bullying and the child exhibiting the bullying behaviour. Schools should consider any additional support that can be put in place. Effective preventative education can help to facilitate a supportive and respectful environment when reports are made.

See *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges*:
[Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#)



**S Greenaway
October 2024**

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

