Peer On Peer Abuse Policy

2024/2025

Nourishing the Human Potential

Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019 states that 'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse' and 'how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with'. 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, all systems and processes should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart.'

All staff should have an awareness of safeguarding issues that can put children at risk of harm. Behaviours linked to issues such as drug taking, alcohol abuse, deliberately missing education and sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery) put children in danger.

All staff should be aware that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via peer-on-peer abuse. This is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:
- bullying, including cyberbullying (refer to Anti-Bullying Policy for more detail)
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm;
- sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault;
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online harassment, which may be stand-alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse;
- upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing

without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or bottocks to obtain sexual
- gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm;
- sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery);
- initiation to dark or violent rituals/acts.

(KCSIE 2019)

At EMC we are committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse. We do that by ensuring that our school staff protect our pupils by, wherever possible, being aware of the nature and level of risk that children are exposed to, having a clear and comprehensive strategy specific to that pupil's safeguarding context and having a whole school contextual safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse. This policy is preventative in its response to peer-on-peer abuse by raising awareness of issues, supporting staff in identifying them with children, and providing appropriate response and intervention that is followed consistently across the whole school staff. This policy will also encourage parents to share information about any risk of harm to their child and be clear on the school's expectations of how this will be managed.

This policy will be updated annually.

Purpose and Aim

Prospective Applicants

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

Safeguarding Policy
Anti-Bullying Policy
Behaviour Policy
Online Safety Policy
Data Protection Policy
Attendance Policy

What is Peer-on-Peer Abuse?

Peer-on-peer abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and/or coercive control exercised between children and young people; this includes intimate and non-intimate relationships. As with many forms of abuse it rarely takes place in isolation.

Children and young people may be abusive to each other in many different settings such as school halls, on the bus, at the sports field, online, and anywhere.

Types of Peer-on-Peer Abuse

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

'Upskirting'- 'Upskirting' is a form of sexual harassment. It normally involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks. 'Upskirting' often occurs in a crowded, public place, making it hard for the victim to know that a photograph is being taken. 'Upskirting' is a criminal offence.

Sexting - Sexting is the exchange of sexual messages or sexually explicit images or videos. Young people may think sending sexual messages and imagery is normal behaviour, but they may not understand that once sent, it is no longer private.

Coercive control - Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation, exclusion, or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a victim.

Bullying/cyber bullying – Cyber bullying may take place on phones, instant messaging, email, chat rooms or social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram to harass, threaten or intimidate someone.

Initiation, also known as hazing - An initiation ceremony is where a potential new member is expected to perform a task, and on completion they will be accepted into a gang, team or group.

Measuring the Behaviour

When a type of abuse is identified, the following must be considered:

☐ does it involve a single incident or has occurred over a period of time

☐ is it socially acceptable within the peer group

☐ does it involve any obvious elements of victimization or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability

☐ does it involve an element of coercion or pre-planning

☐ does it involve a misuse of power

Behaviour which is not abusive at first may potentially become abusive quickly or over time. Intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour which may be displayed by a child is vital and could potentially prevent their behaviour from progressing on a continuum to become problematic, abusive and/or violent – and ultimately requiring (greater/more formal) engagement with specialist external intervention.

Who does it affect?

Peer-on-peer abuse can affect any young person, but there are groups of young people that are thought to be more susceptible. These groups are:

• young people who are living with domestic abuse or who have experienced domestic abuse

• children with protected characteristics, or coming from a family with protected characteristics

Peer-on-peer abuse often involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim. This can present itself in a number of ways; it may be in a controlling relationship or 'friendship' group.

The importance of understanding social norms and peer pressure

Young people spend a large part of their day either with their friends or in contact with their friends via social media. As such the individual, group or community will follow or will be expected to follow certain behaviours, or social norms. Social norms are influenced by our environment and the people with whom we socialise. Social norms are most noticeable when they are not followed. They remain stable because most people are taught to follow them and agree to do so willingly. Even if a person doesn't feel like following a social norm, he or she may do so because of the peer pressure that is placed on them to conform.

Peer pressure (influence)

A young person's peers are very influential in their lives particularly when making social decisions, often undermining the wishes of parents. Peer pressure (influence) is the pressure that friends put on a person to do something or act in a certain way. Different peer groups will follow different social rules and breaking them can put a person at risk of becoming the victim of abuse or experiencing social exclusion. Young people can be drawn into abusive situations as bystanders and may feel unable to speak out due to fears of retribution or isolation.

Peer pressure can be:
- Obvious peer pressure – "Everyone's doing it, so should you."
- Underhand peer pressure – "You don't drink, you wouldn't understand."
- Controlling peer pressure – "If you were a true friend, you would do it."

Socially acceptable behaviour

The values and actions that a young person perceives as acceptable will be influenced by:
- friendship groups
- their gender
- their age
- cultural background
- media
- family
- school
- community

Recognising signs that may indicate peer-on-peer abuse

Peer-on-peer abuse can impact children and young people in many ways. The child or young person may think that it is a part of normal friendships or relationships.

As a consequence of peer-on- peer abuse a child or young person may exhibit the following, but it is important to understand that how abuse affects a young person will vary. A child or young person may :

- not attend school
- escape from lessons
- be withdrawn
- be experiencing a breakdown of family relationships
- be anxious
- be aggressive or argumentative
- exercise self-harm
- develop eating disorders
- become involved in substance misuse.

These factors rarely occur in isolation. Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for their age, staff should always consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour.

Raising awareness

To help prevent peer-on-peer abuse and understand how to respond to it, EMC adopts a contextual safeguarding approach. This means considering the culture of the community and assessing the risks that young people may be exposed to, both inside and outside of the school. It takes into account all forms of peer-on-peer abuse across a wide spectrum of behaviours. It recognises the different relationships that young people have outside of their family; for example, within school or whilst online, these may act as protective factors but may also present a risk of harm.

Identified risks are assessed, monitored, and recorded, such that patterns are recognized.

What to do when you suspect Peer-on-Peer Abuse

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, or is at risk of or experiencing peer-on-peer abuse, or that child is abusing their peers:
- Fill a Cause for Concern Form
- Report your concerns to your designated safeguarding lead (DSL).
  - If the DSL is not available. You must refer to a DDSL.

so that a course of action can be decided.

A decision should be made on whether to:
- report to social care and/or the police
- manage internally with or without external agency support.

When dealing with Peer-on-Peer Abuse it is important that the victim's welfare is the priority.

Guidelines for Designated Safeguarding Leads

- Any identified incident is immediately reported to the DSL.
- The DSL will make the decision of the plan of action.
- Wherever possible, parents are informed, unless to do so may place a pupil at risk of significant harm, impede any police investigation and/or place a member of staff or others at risk.
- One possible action is to request the help of a child therapist to perform observations of the pupil and help with the assessment of the situation.
- The child may be referred to external child services such as:
  - Touche pas a mon Enfant
    https://www.assohelp.org/asso-37-association-touche-pas-a-mon-enfant
  - Internet Watch Foundation
    report.iwf.org/uk/ma
  - Espace Maroc Cyber Confiance
    www.cyberconfiance.ma
- The case could be referred to the police

All information and actions taken, including the reasons for any decisions made, should be fully documented.

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Managing Peer-on-Peer Abuse internally

When dealing with Peer-on-Peer Abuse you should:
- Act quickly and sensitively
- Gather the information from all parties concerned to obtain all the facts
- Only ask open questions to obtain clarity:
- What happened?
- Who saw what happened?
- What was seen and heard?
- Did anyone intervene?
- Decide on the next course of action. In doing so, you should consider:
  - Was the act deliberate and with the intent to cause physical or emotional harm?
  - Has the child experienced this abuse before?
  - Has the child done this before?
  - Does the child understand the impact of their behaviour on others?
- Follow the Peer-on-Peer Abuse Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

Informing Parents

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the school
should encourage the young person to share the information with their parent(s). In the event
they are scared to tell their parents that they are being harmed, the school can assist them in
informing their parents.
The best way to inform parents is face to face. Although this may be time consuming, the
nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a young person may be suffering can cause
fear and anxiety to parents whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed
another.

Points to consider:

What is the age of the children involved?
*How old are the young people involved in the incident and is there any age difference
between those involved? (In relation to sexual exploration, children under the age of 5, in
particular 14- year olds who are learning toileting skills may show a particular interest in
exploration at around this stage. This, however should not be overlooked if other issues
arise (see following)*

Where did the incident or incidents take place?
*Was the incident in an open, visible place to others? If so, was it observed? If not, is more
supervision required within this particular area?*

What was the explanation by all children involved of what occurred?
*Can each of the young people give the same explanation of the incident and also what is
the effect on the young people involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying for example, in
which case regular and repetitive? Is the version of one young person different from another
and why?*

What is each of the children's own understanding of what occurred?
*Do the young people know/understand what they are doing? E.g. do they have knowledge
of body parts, of privacy and that it is inappropriate to touch? Is the young person's
explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about that has
prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and constructed? Does the young
person have understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person?*

Repetition

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered has the behaviour persisted to an individual after the issue has already been discussed or dealt with and appropriately resolved?

Outcomes

The outcome of the investigation will follow one of these levels of intervention:

Level 1: Handle the incident (s) internally
Level 2: Identify additional services/intervention that are non-statutory
Level 3: Refer to either the police/social care for a full investigation.

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 (alleged victim)

What support they require depends on the individual young person. It may be that they wish to seek counselling. 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.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group - for example a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc.

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 (alleged perpetrator)

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. Particular support such as counselling may be necessary.

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. In which case, the young person will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site.

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 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 consequence such as exclusion or suspension for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour.

Safety Planning

Safety planning is a positive way of supporting a child who may benefit from a planned approach; this may be either the alleged victim or the alleged perpetrator.

Safety plans support the child by considering the behaviours that may be risky and plan ways to manage triggers and to seek support from adults and peers. They are inclusive of parents and staff and are a planned intervention to support young people in feeling secure in the school/setting, helping young people identify behaviours that may leave them feeling anxious or at risk and have strategies that they can apply to keep themselves feeling safe. The language of safety planning is more positive than risk assessment and can give security to the child that a joined up approach is being followed by all in school.

Disciplinary Action

In some circumstances, the school may need to consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved – any such action should address the abuse, the causes of it, and attitudes underlying it.

Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including (a) to ensure that the child/children take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour; (b) to demonstrate to the child/children and others that peer on peer abuse can never be tolerated; and (c) to ensure the safety and wellbeing of other children. However, these considerations must be balanced against the child›s/children›s own potential unmet needs and any safeguarding concerns. Before deciding on appropriate action the school will always consider its duty to safeguard all children from harm; the underlying reasons for a child›s behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the peer on peer abuse and the causes of it.

The school will, where appropriate, consider the potential benefit, as well as challenge, of using managed moves or exclusion as a response, and not as an intervention, recognising that even if this is ultimately deemed to be necessary, some of the measures referred to in this policy may still be required. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the School.