BALLARD

BESPOKE EDUCATION

PEER-ON-PEER / CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE POLICY	
Reviewed by:	**Andy Marshall – Deputy Head Pastoral**
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Peer-on-Peer / Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

INTRODUCTION

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), 2019 states that 'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer-on-peer/child on child abuse and sets out how allegations of peer-on-peer/child on child abuse will be investigated and dealt with'. The document also states it is most important to ensure opportunities of seeking that the voice of the child is 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.'

Peer-on-Our whole school approach to Peer abuse is indeed part of the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, but due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with peer-on-peer abuse we have completed this separate policy.

At Ballard we continue to ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to reduce the extent of harm to the pupil, with full consideration to impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and well-being. We have a zero tolerance approach to abuse and regularly refer to the phrase, "it could happen here." Effective responses to any initial report of peer on peer/child on child abuse is crucial in either encouraging or undermining further disclosures.

We recognise that even if there are no reported cases of peer on peer/child on child abuse, such abuse may still be taking place and is simply not being reported

PURPOSE AND AIM

Children and young people may be harmful to one another in a number of ways which would be classified as peer-on-peer/child on child abuse, and such abuse can happen both inside and outside of School. The purpose of this policy is to explore the many forms of peer-on-peer/child on child abuse and include a planned and supportive response to the issues.

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

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Sexual harassment and sexual violence policy

FRAMEWORK AND LEGISLATION

This policy is supported by the key principles of the Children's Act 1989 that the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document that focuses adult thinking towards the views of the child is Working Together 2015, highlighting that every assessment of a child 'must be informed by the views of the child' and within that 'It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child when planning appropriate services (Working Together, 2015:23). This is clearly echoed by Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021 through ensuring procedures are in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

INTRODUCTION TO ABUSE AND HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR

Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in schools and settings and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed and what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual and what preventative strategies may be put in place to reduce further risk of harm.

Knowledge of abuse may not come from a direct disclosure, but it may be that staff overhear a conversation or it may be apparent from a change in a child's behaviour.

Abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'. Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender-specific; e.g. girls being sexually touched/assaulted and boys being subject to initiation/hazing type violence (KCSIE, 2019). It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

Types of Abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between peers and this list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse or prejudiced behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may include hitting, kicking, nipping, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm to another person. There may be many reasons why a child harms another and it is important to understand why a pupil has engaged in such behaviour, including accidently, before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

Sexually Harmful Behaviour/Sexual Abuse

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a pupil engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the pupil who instigates it as well as the pupil it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse.

Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic, etc.)

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be aggressive and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Young people who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.

- Repetition: Bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally or for a particular reason; e.g. size, hair colour, gender, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Cyber Bullying

Cyber bullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, email, chat rooms or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above.

It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 under Section 1 which states that electronic communications which are indecent or grossly offensive, convey a threat or false information or demonstrate that there is an intention to cause distress or anxiety to the victim would be deemed to be criminal. This is also supported by the Communications Act 2003 Section 127 which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another could also be deemed to be criminal behaviour.

If the behaviour involves the use of taking or distributing indecent images of young people under the age of 18 then this is also a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Outside of the immediate support young people may require in these instances, the school will have no choice but to involve the police to investigate these situations.

Sexting

Sexting is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video. This includes sending 'nude pics', 'rude pics' or 'nude selfies'. Pressuring someone into sending a nude picture can happen in any relationship and to anyone, whatever their age, gender or sexual preference.

However, once the image is taken and sent, the sender has lost control of the image and these images could end up anywhere. By having in their possession, or distributing, indecent images of a person under 18 on to someone else, young people are not even aware that they could be breaking the law as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Initiation/Hazing

Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation such as a private school, sports team, etc. There are a number of different forms, from relatively mild rituals to severe and sometimes violent ceremonies.

The idea behind this practice is that it welcomes newcomers by subjecting them to a series of trials which promote a bond between them. After the hazing is over, the newcomers also have something in common with older members of the organisation, because they all experienced it as part of a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment.

Prejudiced Behaviour

The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised, and which is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – in particular, prejudices to do with disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class) and sexual identity (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual).

Teenage Relationship Abuse

Teenage relationship abuse is defined as a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent (between the ages of 13 and 18) against a current or former partner. Abuse may include insults, coercion, social sabotage, sexual harassment, threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse. The abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour, in a heterosexual or same gender relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner.

EXPECTED ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY ALL STAFF

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and initiator of the harm, these simple steps can help clarify the situation and establish the facts before deciding the consequences for those involved in perpetrating harm.

It is important to deal with a situation of peer-on-peer/child on child abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts around what has occurred as soon after the child(ren) may have forgotten. It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and the parents when they become involved. For example; do not use the word perpetrator, this can quickly create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled.

It is essential to reassure all victims that they''re 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 recognise that an initial disclosure to a trusted adult may only be the first incident reported, rather than representative of a singular incident and that trauma can impact memory, and so children may not be able to recall all the details or the timeline of the abuse.
Certain children may face additional barriers in telling someone about abuse because of their disability, sex, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation.

In all cases of peer-on-peer/child on child abuse it is necessary that all staff can seek advice in dealing with such incidents, talking to young people and instigating immediate support in a calm and consistent manner. Staff should not be prejudiced, judgemental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

Gather the Facts

Speak to all the young people involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use consistent language and open questions for each account. All statements should be dated and signed by both the teacher and the pupil. The easiest way to do this is not to have a line of questioning but to ask the young people to tell you what happened as they saw it. Only interrupt the pupil from this to gain clarity with open questions, 'where', 'when', 'why', 'who'. (e.g. What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?). We must understand that some children may not find it easy to tell staff about their abuse verbally.

Consider the Intent (begin to Risk Assess)

Has this been a deliberate or contrived situation for a pupil to be able to harm another?

Decide on your Next Course of Action

If, from the information that you gather, you believe any pupil to be at risk of significant harm you must make a myconcern referral immediately and speak to the DSL. The DSL will contact Children's Services (where a crime has been committed the police should also be involved). If this is the case, once Children's Services has been contacted and a decision on what will happen next has been made you will then be informed on your next steps.

If Children's Services and the police intend to pursue this further they may ask to interview the pupil in school or they may ask for parents to come to school to also be spoken to. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take.

It may also be that Children's Services feel that it does not meet their criteria in which case you may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager. If on discussion, however, you agree with the decision, you may be required to inform the parents.

Informing Parents

If, once appropriate advice has been sought from police/social care you have agreement to inform parents or have been allocated that role from the other services involved then you need to inform the parents as soon as possible. If services are not going to be involved then, equally, this information may need to be shared with parents. If a pupil is deemed to be Gillick Competent following the Fraser Guidelines and does not wish you to share the information with parents, then the school must consider this especially for example if the pupil is pregnant and this is why they are being bullied (unless this has occurred through significant harm in which case a criminal/social care case is likely or the pupil is under the age of 13).

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the school should encourage the pupil to share the information with their parents. Where the child may be scared to tell parents that they are being harmed in any way you may offer to accompany them when telling their parents. Where school can evidence they are acting in the best interests of the pupil they would not be criticised, however this would be the case if they actively breached the rights and choices of the pupil.

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 pupil 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 pupils 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 1-4 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 by others? If not, is more supervision required within this particular area?

Are there other related issues to consider?
Do we need to consider other related issues and the wider context; e.g. are there any links to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation?

What was the explanation by all children involved of what occurred?

Can each of the pupils give the same explanation of the incident and also what is the effect on the pupils involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying for example, in which case is it regular and repetitive? Is the version of one pupil different from another and, if so, how and why?

What is each of the children's own understanding of what occurred?

Do the pupils 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 pupil's explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the pupil have understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person?

In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear cut. If you are concerned or unsure as to whether or not there is any risk involved, please seek advice from Children's Services Social Care.

Repetition

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

Next Steps

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 pupil who has been harmed

What support they require depends on the individual pupil. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or one-to-one support via a mentor. It may also be that the pupil feels 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 pupil continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the pupil may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other pupils or some restorative justice work with all those involved may be required.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group; for example, a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse, etc. could be introduced. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PSHE and SMSC that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

If the pupil 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 pupil who has displayed harmful behaviour

In this circumstance it is important to find out why the pupil has behaved in such a way. It may be that the pupil is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have been harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases, one-to-one mentoring or counselling support may also be appropriate. Particular support from identified services may be necessary through an early help referral and the pupil may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the pupil has been met, it is important that the pupil receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the form of restorative justice; e.g. making amends with the pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil cannot be educated on-site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the pupil will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst away from school.

Following the conclusion of any investigation the behaviour that the pupil has displayed may continue to pose a risk to others in which case an individual risk assessment may be required. This should be completed via a multi-agency response to ensure that the needs of the pupil and the risks towards others are measured by all of those agencies involved including the pupil and their parents. This may mean additional supervision of the pupil or protective strategies if the pupil feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

The school may also choose a punishment as a consequence, such as exclusion or internal exclusion for a period of time to allow the pupil to reflect upon their behaviour.

After care

It is important that following the incident the young people involved continue to feel supported and receive help even if they have stated that they are managing the incident. Sometimes the feelings of remorse, regret or unhappiness may occur at a much later stage than the incident. It is important to ensure that the pupil does not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). As such, regular reviews with the pupil following the incident(s) are imperative.

PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS AND SETTINGS

We feel it is important to develop appropriate proactive strategies in order to prevent the issue of peer-on-peer/child on child abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way.

We recognise that peer-on-peer/child on child abuse can and will occur at any school even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. Therefore, it is important to continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in supporting pupils to talk about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

We have a whole school approach in developing an open environment where pupils feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This is strengthened through a strong and positive PSHE curriculum and a strong assertive behaviour policy that tackle such issues as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one-on-one opportunities to be harmful to one another. We understand the importance of our curriculum which tackles such issues as:

- Healthy and respectful relationships
- What respectful behaviour looks like
- Consent
- Stereotyping, equality
- Body confidence and self-esteem
- Prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour
- Addressing cultures of sexual harassment
- Understanding sexual harassment and sexual violence is always wrong

To enable such an open and honest environment we encourage the whole staff to feel confident and able to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of pupils including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, we talk to pupils in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice. It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. It is necessary that staff consider each issue and each individual in their own right before taking action. If staff minimise the concerns raised it may result in a pupil seeking no further help or advice.

It is important that signposting is available to pupils in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer. We have a search resource with support services on a wide range of issues so pupils can seek their own solutions should they so wish.

Finally, it is useful to ensure pupils are part of changing their circumstances and that of the procedures within schools. Having a school council helps our pupils to support changes and develop our key values. We feel this creates a positive ethos in school and one where all pupils understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

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