



**St John's**  
Church of England  
**Academy**

## **Peer on Peer Abuse Policy and Procedure**

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## Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021 states that, 'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with'. It also emphasises that the voice of the child must be 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 Peer abuse is referenced in the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy but due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with peer on peer abuse, we have created separate policy guidance. At St John's CE Academy we are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every pupil, both inside and outside of the school premises and are aware that abuse against children can be inflicted by other children. We implement a whole school preventative approach to managing peer-on-peer abuse, ensuring that the wellbeing of pupils is at the forefront of all action taken.

This policy sets out a clear and consistent framework for delivering this promise, in line with safeguarding legislation and statutory guidance. We will ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to minimise the extent of harm to the young person, with full consideration to impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

## Purpose and Aim

We recognise that children may be harmful to one another in a number of ways, which could 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 St John's CE Academy, we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Anti-Bullying
- Child Protection and Safeguarding
- Behaviour
- E-Safety

## Framework and Legislation

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Equality Act 2010
- Sexual Offences Act 2003

- The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019
- DfE (2021) Keeping children safe in education 2021

The policy also has regard to the following non-statutory guidance:

- DfE (2015) 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused.'
- DfE (2018) 'Information sharing.'
- DfE (2021) Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges.'
- DfE (2020) 'Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people.'

## Introduction to Abuse and Harmful Behaviour

Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in schools and it is necessary to consider what abuse is; looks like; how it can be managed; 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. Abuse 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, 2016). 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 the following 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 at St John's C of E Academy.

### 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 young person has engaged in such behaviour (including accidentally) 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 young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be equally distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language,

inappropriate role-play, sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse. 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 sexually harassing a single child or group of children. Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This is likely to adversely affect their educational attainment.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap. It can occur online and offline (both physical and verbal) and is never acceptable. It is important that **all** victims are taken seriously and offered appropriate support.

- It is more likely that girls will be the victims of sexual violence and more likely that sexual violence and harassment will be perpetrated by boys. Staff should also be aware that some other groups are potentially more at risk. Evidence shows that LGBT children or children perceived to be are at greater risk of being targeted by their peers.
- Children with special educational needs and disabilities are also more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment and additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse in these children.
- Staff should be aware of the importance of making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable. It will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up. Sexual violence or harassment will not be tolerated or dismissed as “banter”, “part of growing up”, “just having a laugh” or “boys being boys”.
- Staff should be aware of the importance of challenging behaviours (potentially criminal in nature), such as touching private parts, flicking bras and lifting up skirts. Staff should never dismiss or tolerate such behaviours as this can result in it becoming normalised.
- A whole school preventative approach is important. Many incidents can be driven by wider social factors such as sexist language and stereotypes.

## Bullying

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 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.

- 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.

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or social networking sites to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above.

It is important to state that cyberbullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 Section 1. This states that electronic communications that 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, 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, 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 academy 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.

Once an image is taken and sent, the sender loses control over the image. By having in their possession or distributing indecent images of a person under 18, young people are often unaware that they are breaking the law. 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 academy or sports team. There are several forms, from relatively mild rituals to severe and sometimes sexual or violent ceremonies.

It is incorrectly claimed that this practice welcomes newcomers by subjecting them to a series of trials, which promote a bond between them. After the hazing is over, newcomers have something in

common with older members of the organisation, because they have a shared experience as a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse and harassment.

## Prejudiced Behaviour

Prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviours including physical, emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised. It is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society. These can be prejudices to do with disabilities/special educational needs, ethnicity, cultural identity, religious beliefs, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class) and sexual identity.

## 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

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and initiator of the harm, the following steps can help to 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 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 the child (ren) may forget and this information should be collated in C-POMs under the appropriate category. The Designated Safeguarding Lead, Marco Ramsay and/or Deputy Safeguarding Lead, Melissa Baker, should be informed immediately. It is equally important to deal with situations sensitively, thinking about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and parents/carers.
- Our academy uses the Brook Traffic Light Tool to support around sexually harmful behaviour (see Appendix A).
- In all cases of peer on peer abuse, it is necessary that staff are trained 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.

- Staff must separately speak to all the young people involved, gain a statement of facts from them and use consistent language and open questions for each account. The easiest way to do this is to avoid open questions and to ask the young people to explain what happened.
- Intent must be considered. Try to establish whether this has been a deliberate or contrived situation attempt to harm another person.
- If, from the information you gather, you believe any young person to be at risk of significant harm, you must make a safeguarding referral to social care immediately. Where a crime has been committed, the police should also be involved. If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and made a decision on what will happen next, you will be informed of your next steps.
- If social care and the police intend to pursue the situation further, they may ask to interview the young people or ask to speak to parents. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. It may also be that social care feel it does not meet their criteria. In this case, you may challenge the decision with that individual or their line manager. If you agree with the decision, you may be required to inform parents.
- If you have agreed to inform parents or have been allocated that role from the other services involved, you need to do so as soon as possible. It is advised that you to inform parents 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 distress to parents whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another.

## Points to consider

How old are the young people involved in the incident and is there any age difference? (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 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 a what is the effect on the young people involved? Is the incident considered bullying? Are accounts different and why?

What is each of the children's own understanding of what occurred? Do the young people know/understand what they are doing? Do they have knowledge of body parts, and inappropriate

touching? 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 contrived? Does the young person 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 Initial Advice Team: 01325 406252.

Has the behaviour been happened on more than one occasion? Has the behaviour persisted after the issue has been appropriately resolved?

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, the level and nature of support they require depends on the individual young person. They may benefit from counselling or one to one support via a mentor. It may be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with support of family and friends. In this case, it is necessary that the young person continues to be monitored and offered. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the young person may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other young people or some restorative justice with those involved.

Whole class or year group interventions may be required such as a workshop on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the PSHE and SMSC curriculum, certain issues can be discussed more frequently.

If the young person feels particularly vulnerable, a risk assessment can be put in place, which includes strategies for managing future issues and identified services to offer additional support.

For the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour, 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 such cases, one to one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary. Particular support from identified services may be necessary through an early help referral, which may lead to an early help assessment, and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person has been met, it is important that the individual 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. 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, it may be that the individual cannot be educated onsite until the investigation has concluded. The young person will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site.

Following the conclusion of any investigation, the behaviour that the young person has displayed may continue to pose a risk to others and an individual risk assessment may be required. This should be completed via a multi-agency response to ensure that the needs of the young person and the risks towards others are effectively measured. Additional supervision or protective strategies may be required if the young person feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour. The academy may choose a suitable punishment such as exclusion/inclusion/seclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour.

## After care

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

## Preventative Strategies

For all schools and settings, it is important to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of peer on peer abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way.

Staff must recognise that peer on peer abuse can and will occur in any school, even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. It is important to continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in supporting young people to talk about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

This can be supported by ensuring our academy has an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This can be strengthened through a strong and positive PSHE/SMSC curriculum that tackles issues such 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.

To ensure an open and honest environment, it is necessary to ensure the whole workforce feels confident when discussing issues and challenge perceptions of young people, including the use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, it is necessary for whole staff CPD around abusive behaviours and talking to young people in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice. It is important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare those to their own experiences of childhood. It is necessary that staff consider each issue and each individual in their own right before taking action.

Noticeboards and posters around school signpost children to designated adults. Staff are informed that children may feel more comfortable disclosing information to a more familiar adult that they trust and as such, all adults are prepared for this through CPD. Support services on a wide range of issues are also displayed to enable children to seek their own solutions where appropriate. Equally, external services and support programmes are used to educate young people about specific issues in support of the prevention of peer on peer abuse.

Finally, promoting pupil voice to encourage young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' will help to create a positive ethos where all individuals understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

**Behaviours: age 0 to 5 years**

All green, amber and red behaviours require some form of attention and response. It is the level of intervention that will vary.

**Green behaviours**

- holding or playing with own genitals
- attempting to touch or curiosity about other children's genitals
- attempting to touch or curiosity about breasts, bottoms or genitals of adults
- games e.g. mummies and daddies, doctors and nurses
- enjoying nakedness
- interest in body parts and what they do
- curiosity about the differences between boys and girls

**Amber behaviours**

- preoccupation with adult sexual behaviour
- pulling other children's pants down/skirts up/trousers down against their will
- talking about sex using adult slang
- preoccupation with touching the genitals of other people
- following others into toilets or changing rooms to look at them or touch them
- talking about sexual activities seen on TV/online

**Red behaviours**

- persistently touching the genitals of other children
- persistent attempts to touch the genitals of adults
- simulation of sexual activity in play
- sexual behaviour between young children involving penetration with objects
- forcing other children to engage in sexual play

**What is green behaviour?**

Green behaviours reflect safe and healthy sexual development. They are:

- displayed between children or young people of similar age or developmental ability
- reflective of natural curiosity, experimentation, consensual activities and positive choices

**What is amber behaviour?**

Amber behaviours have the potential to be outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- unusual for that particular child or young person
- of potential concern due to age, or developmental differences
- of potential concern due to activity type, frequency, duration or context in which they occur

**What is red behaviour?**

Red behaviours are outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- excessive, secretive, compulsive, coercive, degrading or threatening
- involving significant age, developmental, or power differences
- of concern due to the activity type, frequency, duration or the context in which they occur

**What can you do?**

Green behaviours provide opportunities to give positive feedback and additional information.

**What can you do?**

Amber behaviours signal the need to take notice and gather information to assess the appropriate action.

**What can you do?**

Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action.

## Behaviours: age 5 to 9 years

All green, amber and red behaviours require some form of attention and response. It is the level of intervention that will vary.

### ● Green behaviours

- feeling and touching own genitals
- curiosity about other children's genitals
- curiosity about sex and relationships, e.g. differences between boys and girls, how sex happens, where babies come from, same-sex relationships
- sense of privacy about bodies
- telling stories or asking questions using swear and slang words for parts of the body

### ● Amber behaviours

- questions about sexual activity which persist or are repeated frequently, despite an answer having been given
- sexual bullying face to face or through texts or online messaging
- engaging in mutual masturbation
- persistent sexual images and ideas in talk, play and art
- use of adult slang language to discuss sex

### ● Red behaviours

- frequent masturbation in front of others
- sexual behaviour engaging significantly younger or less able children
- forcing other children to take part in sexual activities
- simulation of oral or penetrative sex
- sourcing pornographic material online

#### What is green behaviour?

Green behaviours reflect safe and healthy sexual development. They are:

- displayed between children or young people of similar age or developmental ability
- reflective of natural curiosity, experimentation, consensual activities and positive choices

#### What is amber behaviour?

Amber behaviours have the potential to be outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- unusual for that particular child or young person
- of potential concern due to age, or developmental differences
- of potential concern due to activity type, frequency, duration or context in which they occur

#### What is red behaviour?

Red behaviours are outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- excessive, secretive, compulsive, coercive, degrading or threatening
- involving significant age, developmental, or power differences
- of concern due to the activity type, frequency, duration or the context in which they occur

#### What can you do?

Green behaviours provide opportunities to give positive feedback and additional information.

#### What can you do?

Amber behaviours signal the need to take notice and gather information to assess the appropriate action.

#### What can you do?

Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action.

## Behaviours: age 9 to 13 years

All green, amber and red behaviours require some form of attention and response. It is the level of intervention that will vary.

### Green behaviours

- solitary masturbation
- use of sexual language including swear and slang words
- having girl/boyfriends who are of the same, opposite or any gender
- interest in popular culture, e.g. fashion, music, media, online games, chatting online
- need for privacy
- consensual kissing, hugging, holding hands with peer

### Amber behaviours

- uncharacteristic and risk-related behaviour, e.g. sudden and/or provocative changes in dress, withdrawal from friends, mixing with new or older people, having more or less money than usual, going missing
- verbal, physical or cyber/virtual sexual bullying involving sexual aggression
- LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) targeted bullying
- exhibitionism, e.g. flashing or mooning
- giving out contact details online
- viewing pornographic material
- worrying about being pregnant or having STIs

### Red behaviours

- exposing genitals or masturbating in public
- distributing naked or sexually provocative images of self or others
- sexually explicit talk with younger children
- sexual harassment
- arranging to meet with an online acquaintance in secret
- genital injury to self or others
- forcing other children of same age, younger or less able to take part in sexual activities
- sexual activity e.g. oral sex or intercourse
- presence of sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- evidence of pregnancy

#### What is green behaviour?

Green behaviours reflect safe and healthy sexual development. They are:

- displayed between children or young people of similar age or developmental ability
- reflective of natural curiosity, experimentation, consensual activities and positive choices

#### What can you do?

Green behaviours provide opportunities to give positive feedback and additional information.

#### What is amber behaviour?

Amber behaviours have the potential to be outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- unusual for that particular child or young person
- of potential concern due to age, or developmental differences
- of potential concern due to activity type, frequency, duration or context in which they occur

#### What can you do?

Amber behaviours signal the need to take notice and gather information to assess the appropriate action.

#### What is red behaviour?

Red behaviours are outside of safe and healthy behaviour. They may be:

- excessive, secretive, compulsive, coercive, degrading or threatening
- involving significant age, developmental, or power differences
- of concern due to the activity type, frequency, duration or the context in which they occur

#### What can you do?

Red behaviours indicate a need for immediate intervention and action.