



George Stephenson
High School

PEER ON PEER ABUSE POLICY

Governance	Governing Body
Policy Officer	Deputy Headteacher
Adopted Date	September 2020
Review Date	July 2020
Next Review Date	September 2021

Purpose:

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.

George Stephenson High School believes that

'Peer on Peer abuse does not occur in a vacuum, it occurs in a society where there are structures and norms that shape young people's views, experiences and behaviour, as well as responses towards them' (Barnardo's).

Introduction:

This policy has been developed in response to the statutory guidance set out in **Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020**. On pages 9+10, it outlines that:

All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as peer on peer abuse). This is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying);
- abuse by intimate partners
- 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 sexual 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 buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm;
- sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery); and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

All staff should be clear as to the school's or college's policy and procedures with regards to peer on peer abuse.

At George Stephenson High School, we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

Anti-Bullying Policy

Child Protection Policy

Online Safety Policy (includes Cyberbullying)

Children Missing from Education Policy

Sex and Relationships Policy

Definition

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

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. Whilst any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment should be taken seriously, staff should be aware it is more likely that girls will be the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys. It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be regarded as abusive and incidents that are more properly dealt with as bullying etc. This is a matter of professional judgement.

However, it may be appropriate to regard a young person’s behaviour as abusive if:

- There is a large difference in power (for example age, size, ability, development) between the young people concerned; or
- The perpetrator has repeatedly tried to harm one or more other children; or
- There are concerns about the intention of the alleged perpetrator.

If the evidence suggests that there was an intention to cause severe harm to the victim, this should be regarded as abusive whether or not severe harm was actually caused.

Safeguarding Allegations

Occasionally, allegations may be made against students by others in the school which are of a safeguarding nature. Safeguarding issues raised in this way may include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. It is likely that to be considered a safeguarding allegation against a student, some of the following features will be found.

The allegation:

- Is made against an older student and refers to their behaviour towards a younger student or a more vulnerable student.
- Is of a serious nature, possibly a criminal offence.
- Raises risk factors for other students in the school.
- Indicates that other students may have been affected by this student
- Indicates that young people outside of school may be affected by this student

Examples of safeguarding issues against a student could include:

Physical Abuse

- violence, particularly pre-planned
- forcing others to use drugs or alcohol
- gender based violence

Emotional Abuse

- blackmail or extortion
- threats and intimidation

Sexual Abuse

- indecent exposure, indecent touching or serious sexual assaults
- forcing others to watch pornography or take part in sexting*

Sexual Exploitation

- encouraging other children to attend inappropriate parties,

- photographing or videoing other children performing indecent acts*

***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 stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Bullying

- **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

- Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, 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.

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 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.

Radicalisation

- Children who are at risk of radicalisation may have low self-esteem, or be victims of bullying or discrimination. Extremists might target them and tell them they can be part of something special, later brainwashing them into cutting themselves off from their friends and family.

Upskirting

- 'Upskirting' typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm. It is now a criminal offence.

Minimising the risk of safeguarding concerns re peer on peer abuse.

Children are vulnerable to abuse by their peers. Such abuse should be taken as seriously as abuse carried out by adults and should be subject to the same child protection procedures. Professionals should not dismiss abusive behaviour as normal between young people and should not develop high thresholds before taking action.

Professionals should be aware of the potential uses of information technology for bullying and abusive behaviour between young people.

On occasion, some students will present as a safeguarding risk to other students. These students will need an individual risk management/safeguarding plan to ensure that other students are kept safe and they themselves are not open to malicious allegations. There is a need to balance the tension between privacy and safeguarding.

The alleged perpetrator is likely to have considerable unmet needs as well as the potential of posing a significant risk of harm to other children. Evidence suggests that such children may have suffered considerable disruption in their lives, may have witnessed or been subjected to physical or sexual abuse, may have problems in their educational development and may have committed other offences. They may therefore be suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant

harm and be in need of protection themselves. Any long-term plan to reduce the risk posed by the alleged perpetrator must therefore also address their needs.

Protection and Action to be taken

It is not enough to respond to incidents as they arise: all agencies that work with children should strive to create an environment that actively discourages abuse and challenges the attitudes which underlie it.

Student to student incidents are usually managed through our Behaviour Policy. However some allegations against other students may be such a serious nature that they may raise safeguarding concerns.

When an allegation is made by a student against another student, members of staff should consider whether the complaint raises a safeguarding concern. If there is a safeguarding concern, our normal safeguarding procedures should apply.

- If there is a safeguarding concern the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Kathryn Williams or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, Louise Dunn, must be informed.
- A record must be made of the allegation and at this stage the DSL may contact North Tyneside Children's Services (Front Door) to discuss the case. It is possible that social services are already aware of safeguarding concerns around this young person. The DSL will follow through the outcomes of the discussion and will make a Children's Services referral where appropriate.
- The DSL will make a record of the concern, the discussion and any outcome and will keep a copy in the central file (all students involved in the allegation).
- If the allegation indicates a potential criminal offence has taken place, the police should be contacted at the earliest opportunity and parents informed (of both the student being complained about and the alleged victim/victims).
- It may be appropriate to exclude the student/perpetrator, internally or externally, for a period of time according to the school's Behaviour Policy and 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 plan should be monitored and a date set for a follow up evaluation with everyone concerned.

The guiding principles for dealing with these situations are:

- The needs of the victim and the needs of the alleged perpetrator must be considered separately and in line with the school's ethos.
- In addition to safeguarding the identified victim, agencies must consider whether the alleged perpetrator seems to pose a risk to any other children.
- Children and young people who abuse others are responsible for their abusive behaviour, and safeguarding action must include addressing their behaviour and its causes.
- There should be a co-ordinated approach by Children's Services, education and health agencies. No agency should start a course of action that has implications for any other agency without appropriate consultation.

Preventative Strategies at George Stephenson High School

The school recognises the importance of developing appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of peer on peer abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way.

We promote an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. Students can talk to any member of staff about their concerns but our Family Liaison Workers and Guidance Managers are especially skilled in dealing with these types of issues. Students are signposted to these key members of staff and external services in assemblies and in displays around the school.

We also place a high level of importance on our strong and positive PHSE/SMSC curriculum that tackles 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.

To enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure the whole workforce feels confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of young people including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, George Stephenson High School delivers whole staff training and 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 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 young person seeking no further help or advice.

We also believe that young people are part of changing their circumstances and that of the procedures within schools. George Stephenson High School therefore elects a school council which encourages our young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour'. We strongly believe that this will go far in helping to create a positive ethos in school and one where all young people understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.