



Thirsk School

& Sixth Form College

Guidance Document on Peer on Peer Abuse

visions

TOLERANT

HAPPY

INSPIRATIONAL

RESILIENT

SUCCESSFUL

KNOWLEDGEABLE

T	H	I	R	S	K
TOGETHERNESS	HONESTY	INCLUSIVITY	RESPECT	SUPPORT	KINDNESS
					values

Guidance Document on Peer on Peer Abuse

Document Status			
Date of Next Review	November 2024	Implemented by	Governing Board
Origin of Policy	Adapted		
Date of Policy Adoption by Governing Board: 23 rd November 2021		<p>Signed</p> <p></p> <p>Emma Lambden Headteacher</p> <p></p> <p>Nick Horn Chair of Governors</p>	

Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2018 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*'. 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, any system and processes should operate with the **best** interests of the child at their heart.*'

While it is recommended that Peer-on-Peer abuse is part of the Child Protection Policy, due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with peer-on-peer abuse we have completed this separate guidance document.

At Thirsk School and Sixth Form College 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 young person, with full consideration to the impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and well-being.

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 abuse. The purpose of this document is to explore the many forms of peer on peer abuse and to outline the response to the issues.

The following documents should be read in conjunction with this guidance document:-

- Child Protection Policy
- Anti-Bullying Strategy
- Online Safety Strategy

Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

Abusive behaviour can happen to students in schools and other educational 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. 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, 2018). 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 young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally, before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

Sexually harmful behaviour/sexual abuse

There may be reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may include inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, sexually touching another person or sexual assault/abuse.

Bullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour 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. 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, cultural background, social background 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. It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under Section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 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 section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene, menacing or false, used 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. In such cases, 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. As stated above, by having in their possession, or distributing, indecent images of a person under 18 on to someone else, young people could be breaking the law as stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (see Outcome 21).

Initiation/Hazing

Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation. 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 behaviour 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 relating to 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.

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 taken by staff

If members of staff become aware of any form of peer-on-peer abuse taking place involving students of Thirsk School and Sixth Form College, they should consider how best to deal with the situation. The issue should **always** be referred on to the student's Form Tutor, Head of Year, Head of School or one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads or Parent Support Adviser in the absence of a DSL. The Head of Year or School should then refer to the Behaviour Management Policy and follow any appropriate sanction steps. The following guidance is provided for any member of staff who may be involved in dealing with cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

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 causing 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 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.

In all cases of peer on peer abuse it is necessary that any staff dealing with such incidents should talk to the young people/person and instigate 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. 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. Only interrupt the young person from this to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?)

Consider the intent (begin to risk assess)

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

Decide on your next course of action

If, from the information that you gather, you believe any young person to be at risk of significant harm you must make inform a DSL or the Parent Support Adviser immediately, who will make a safeguarding referral to Social Care (and the police if a crime has been committed). If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and has made a decision on what will happen next then you will be informed on your next steps.

If Social Care and the Police intend to pursue this further, they may ask to interview the young people in school, or they may ask for parents to come to school to be spoken to also. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. It may also be that social care feel that it does not meet their criteria in which case the DSL may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager.

Informing parents/carers

Parents/carers should be informed of any cases of peer-on-peer abuse as soon as possible. It may be that appropriate advice needs to be sought from the police/other services before this can happen. If the police/other services are not going to be involved then equally, this information may need to be shared with parents/carers. If a young person 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 young person 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 young person 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 young person to share the information with their parent/carer or even with them (they may be scared to tell parents/carers that they are being harmed in any way). Where school can evidence, they are acting in the best interests of the young person they would not be criticised, however this would be the case if they actively breached the rights and choices of the young person.

Depending on the severity of the case, the best way to inform parents/carers may be 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/carers whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another.

Point to consider when dealing with a case of peer-on-peer abuse

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?

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 (regular and repetitive)? Is the version of one young person different from that of another and if so, 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 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 the DSL (or deputy DSL in his absence), who in turn may seek advice from Children's Social Care.

Repetition

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? Has the behaviour recurred 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 young person who has been harmed

The support required depends on the individual young person. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or one-to-one support via a mentor. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with the support of family and friends. In such cases it is necessary that this young person continue to be monitored in school and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the young person may need support in improving peer group relationships with other young people 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, through the responsive nature of the PSHCE curriculum. 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

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. In such cases support such as one-to-one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary. Particular support from identified services may be necessary and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person is in place, it is important that the young person receives a consequence for their behaviour. Every case is individual, so there is no one consequence that will be appropriate for all. The usual school behaviour systems may be used; this may include an exclusion or an internal isolation for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour. It may also be appropriate to employ a restorative justice approach 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 Justice 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 should be completed via a multi-agency response to ensure that the needs of the young person and the risks towards others are measured by all of those agencies involved, including the young person and their parents/carers. This may mean additional supervision of the young person or protective strategies if the young person is believed to be at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful 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. 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. It is therefore important that the young person has someone in school they can talk to about the incident(s).

Preventative Strategies

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.

Firstly, and most importantly is recognition that peer-on-peer abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms.

Secondly, it is important to ensure that young people in school feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. At Thirsk School and Sixth Form College, this is achieved in part through a strong and positive PSCHÉ curriculum that tackles issues such as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through.

This can be supported by ensuring that the school has an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them.

It is also necessary to ensure the whole workforce feels confident and enabled to talk about issues and to challenge perceptions of young people, including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, staff should receive training around abusive behaviours and should be clear that issues must not be dismissed 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 by young people, it may result in a young person seeking no further help or advice.

In some cases, young people do not feel confident raising an issue with a member of staff or with a peer. It is important that support mechanisms are in place in such cases. At Thirsk School and Sixth Form College we have set up a confidential online reporting service for those young people who do not feel ready or confident to speak with staff face to face. All reports can be seen and actioned by the DSLs. In addition, signposting must be available to these young people.

At Thirsk School and Sixth Form College, there are specific assemblies delivered to each year group relating to this issue and tutors are given resources to help discuss the issues raised. There are also resources available in the inclusion unit. These provide details of support services on a wide range of issues so that young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to. In addition, external services/support programmes are sometimes used in school to support young people in the prevention of peer-on-peer abuse.

Finally, it is useful to ensure that young people feel they have a voice in school through strong systems of student voice. At Thirsk School and Sixth Form College, form reps, year councils and the school council are all part of the student voice structure. Initiatives such as the Anti-Bullying Pledge, signed by all members of the school community also helped to raise issues such as this. Through this, students have helped to develop and agree to 'rules of acceptable behaviour'; this goes 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.