

Peer abuse is the physical, emotional & sexual abuse of a child or young person by their peers on or offline:

- Bullying, including prejudice & discrimination
- Cyberbullying & youth-produced sexual imagery
- Sexual violence, harassment, comments, jokes, non-consensual sexual activity
- Non/consensual sharing of nude & semi-nude images and/or videos
- Abuse in intimate personal peer relationships
- Up-skirting (photographing genitals or buttocks for sexual gratification and/or victim distress)
- Physical abuse & assault (or threats to harm)
- Initiation & hazing rituals, humiliation & violence

Bullying can occur at any time, inside or outside a setting & should always be assessed by your safeguarding team if it involves one of your pupils.

Peer abuse can:

- Be motivated by perceived differences e.g. on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other differences
- Result in significant, long-lasting, and traumatic isolation, intimidation, or violence to the victim.

Children or young people who harm others may have additional or complex needs e.g.:

- Significant disruption in their own lives
- Domestic abuse or child abuse at home
- Educational under-achievement
- Involved in crime

Emotional bullying can be more damaging than physical harm and should be taken equally seriously.

Multi-agency approach:

All agencies have responsibilities to the victim & the alleged perpetrator; but the victim is paramount.

Separate management & assessment of the victim & alleged perpetrator is essential & should consider the:

- Nature and extent of the abusive behaviour, using expert professional advice if required
- Context of the behaviour including unmet developmental and behavioural needs
- Their family & social circumstances
- Risk to self & others, e.g. immediate & extended family, school, peer group or wider social network

Education settings should:

- Have an ethos where students & staff are respectful & understand the effect of their actions
- Openly discuss any issues that could motivate bullying with staff and students

- Address issues early between pupils which might later provoke conflict
- Address all inappropriate behaviour to prevent future problematic, abusive or violent behaviour
- Develop strategies to help to prevent bullying
- Involve students & parents to ensure they know what to do to prevent & report concerns
- Create an inclusive, safe environment where pupils can openly discuss issues without fear
- Help staff understand needs of SEND, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender pupils
- Work with the wider community & agencies to tackle issues that occur outside the setting

Your peer abuse policy should explain:

- peer abuse **IS** abuse & should **never** be tolerated
- procedures to minimise the risk of peer abuse
- how allegations will be investigated & dealt with
- the different forms this abuse can take
- how parents, students, staff respond quickly
- how victims/perpetrators are assessed/supported
- regular evaluation and updating
- resources available to help with problems
- staff training about indicators, identification & response to peer abuse, including sexual violence & harassment, & their statutory responsibilities
- clear process for pupils to report bullying & abuse & be assured that they will be listened to, taken seriously, kept safe, not made to think they are creating a problem and incidents will be acted on
- that disciplinary process will be applied fairly, consistently, reasonably, considering any special educational needs, disabilities, & vulnerability

Staff should:

- discuss all concerns (even if no complaint) with their DSL/D, who will then assess each case
- challenge all inappropriate behaviours
- not downplay behaviours as 'banter', 'having a laugh', "part of growing up" or "boys being boys"

Peer abuse can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for children & young people and at worst a culture that normalises abuse, leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

The Peer Abuse Risk Assessment guidance below will help the DSL/D to consider all aspects of the incident & decide what further action is needed.

Taking action:

- Always take complaints seriously
- Never ask a student for a written statement, it can interfere with a criminal investigation
- Assess needs of victim and perpetrator
- Consider referral to Police or Social Care
- Contribute to multi-agency assessments
- Convene a risk management meeting
- Record all incidents and all action taken

Sexual violence & harassment:

Incidents are likely to be complex & require difficult professional decisions alongside other agencies.

The DSL/D should:

- Report all concerns about sexual violence to Children's Social Care and/or the Police and complete a risk assessment
- Discuss how the alleged perpetrator will be informed and any next steps with children's social care and/or the police
- Risk-assess all reports of sexual harassment and considered if a referral to Children's Social Care or the Police is required
- Record all risk assessments and keep a copy on the individual safeguarding file for the victim and alleged perpetrator
- Regularly review & update the risk assessment with assessments from other professionals
- Liaise with the social worker, police officer or other involved practitioners as required
- The police should advise the setting about the investigation e.g. if alleged perpetrator is 'released under investigation', 'no further action' is taken, they are given bail, cautioned, or convicted

Risk assessment & safety planning:

This is the responsibility of the DSL, fulfilling the organisation's 'duty of care' to all people using the setting.

The purpose is to decide whether to re/admit a pupil with concerning behaviour & plan for the safety of the alleged/abuser, their alleged/victim, and others at the setting.

Risk assessment identifies the impact of:

- alleged/abuser & victim being educated at the setting & around other people
- Of using strategies to minimise identified risks, help staff to respond clearly & reduce risks to a manageable level

Settings should follow the education settings 'Information Sharing' policy in [Education policies, procedures & guidance, Safeguarding Sheffield Children](#) website) to ensure sensitive & appropriate communication with other agencies.

All agencies should agree how to communicate with the alleged/victim, alleged/abuser, parents/carers, staff & pupils, whilst ensuring that this does not prejudice any investigation and maintains individual confidentiality.

Process - risk assessments should be:

- recorded and included on the child's safeguarding file (& linked to SEND file if appropriate)
- regularly reviewed e.g. through TAF or other meetings, and updated with any changes

A risk assessment should consider information from all agencies about:

- What the concerning behaviour is
- When & why the alleged/abuser may have behaved this way e.g. warning signs & triggers
- Any cultural context for the behaviour
- Related issues e.g. child exploitation, disability, abuse & neglect, substance/alcohol misuse
- Any language & interpretation needs of the alleged abuser/victim & their families to ensure full understanding of the safeguarding issues
- Age & understanding of alleged/abuser/victim
- Previous education experiences of the alleged/abuser (e.g. relationships, attainment)
- Views of parents/carers/family, their response, anxieties, level of cooperation/compliance
- Alleged/abusers' cooperation, responsibility taken, understanding of allegations & victim's viewpoint
- Impact of social media
- Positive and negative friendship groups inside & the setting and in the community
- Mapping others at risk at the setting e.g. people related to concerns e.g. alleged/victim's siblings
- Alleged/abusers' capacity to change, resilience, goals, attitudes, opportunities, engagement, participation
- Therapeutic support & other assessments from agencies & whether outcome has been positive
- Training needed to develop staff safeguarding & other skills e.g. behavioural understanding, disability, SEN, Team Teach

Conclusions of DSL/D risk assessment:

Manage internally:

- victim & alleged perpetrator not in need of early help or statutory intervention
- incident can be dealt with through e.g. behaviour policy & pastoral support

Early help:

- victim and/or alleged perpetrator may benefit from early help e.g. to address non-violent harmful sexual behaviour & prevent escalation

Referral to Children's Social Care:

- victim has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger
- A young perpetrator should also be referred and should be the subject of a child protection conference if considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm
- setting informs parents/carers unless doing so will put child at additional risk
- DSL/D & social workers coordinate support for victim, alleged perpetrator & other children
- Setting actions do not jeopardise a statutory investigation
- If children's social care decide statutory intervention is not appropriate, DSL/D should:
- refer again if they believe child remains at risk of harm
- re-consider early help, specialist & pastoral support

Safety planning:

This considers risk reduction & should include agreed measures & interventions to support the alleged/abuser & alleged/victim effectively e.g.:

- Writing a behaviour management plan, or a MyPlan, EHC Plan, which addresses current and future behaviour, likelihood, and impact
- Internal support interventions for situations that the alleged/abuser/victim identifies as difficult
- Assessment of related safeguarding needs e.g. though an FCAF for alleged/abuser/victim
- Discussion & advice for practitioners to develop support for the alleged/abuser/victim
- Referrals for the alleged/abuser/victim e.g. restorative justice, mental health support, Sheffield Safeguarding Hub, Community Youth Team, Speech & Language, Educational Psychologist

- Support & monitoring arrangements for alleged/abuser/victim and their families
- Frequency of contact between the child and family and supporting agencies
- Agreeing what work will be done by each practitioner
- Process for sharing information with agencies & the family e.g. Team Around the Family or other meetings
- What to do if the child goes missing e.g. monitoring attendance, staff contact
- Searches for weapons/substances/phones (see 'Reasonable Force' in [Education policies, procedures & guidance, Safeguarding Sheffield Children](#) website)
- Clarity for the alleged/abuser/victim about un/acceptable behaviour & consequences in and outside the setting

If child/young person is at risk of or suffering significant harm, immediately ring:

- **Police tel. 999 and/or**
- **Children's Social Care tel. 0114 2734855**

Useful links and resources:

- [SCSP Child Protection & Safeguarding Procedures](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE 2019](#)
- [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges, DfE 2017](#)
- [Bullying UK](#)
- [Childline \(NSPCC\) tel.: 0800 1111](#)
- [Stonewall - various resources](#)
- [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)
- [Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre](#)
- [Peer Abuse](#) information, NSPCC

Other related policies & guidance are available on the [Safeguarding Sheffield Children website](#):

- [Education > Toolkit](#): Education settings safety plan, Sept 21
- [Professionals & volunteers > Information & resources](#): Sexualised Behaviour, Child Exploitation, Bullying, Peer Abuse etc