



**BURTON  
BOROUGH  
SCHOOL**

# **Peer-on-Peer Abuse Policy**

<b>Policy Reviewer</b>	Ben Morgan	<b>Date of Review</b>	April 2021
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## The School's responsibilities

### Introduction

The governors, senior leadership team, and all staff at Burton Borough School are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the School. In particular, we:

- believe that in order to protect children, all schools should (a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which their students are or may be exposed and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to their specific safeguarding context; and (b) take a whole-school community, contextual Safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to peer-on-peer abuse.
- regard the introduction of this policy as a preventative measure. We (a) do not feel it is acceptable merely to take a reactive approach to peer-on-peer abuse in response to alleged incidents of it; and (b) believe that in order to tackle peer-on-peer abuse proactively, it is necessary to focus on all four of the following areas: (i) systems and structures; (ii) prevention; (iii) identification; and (iv) response / intervention.
- recognise national and increasing concern about this issue, and wish to implement this policy in order to mitigate harmful attitudes and peer-on-peer abuse in the school setting, and,
- encourage parents to hold us to account on this issue, so that if their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the school so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

### This policy

This policy:

- is the school's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the School's child protection policy and any other relevant policies including, but not limited to, bullying (including cyber-bullying), youth involved sexual imagery, online safety, IT use, data protection and retention of records, children missing in education, student behaviour and discipline, exclusions, and (where relevant) weapons.
- sets out our strategy for improving prevention and identifying and appropriately managing peer-on-peer abuse. It is the product of a comprehensive consultation – which has involved students, staff and parents, and a risk assessment.
- applies to all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff. It is reviewed annually, and updated in the interim, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which students are or may

be exposed. A number of staff and students are involved in each annual review which involves, and is informed by, an assessment of the impact and effectiveness of this policy over the previous year, recognises that abuse is abuse, and should never be passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up'

- is compliant with the statutory guidance on peer-on-peer abuse as set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (September 2018);
- does not use the term 'victim' and/or 'perpetrator'. This is because our School takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about peer-on-peer abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused, and those who are alleged to have abused their peers, in addition to any sanctioning work that may also be required for the latter. Research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of peer-on-peer abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers.

## **Understanding peer-on-peer abuse**

For these purposes, peer-on-peer abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children, and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate), friendships and wider peer associations. Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including (but not limited to): serious bullying (including cyberbullying), relationship abuse, domestic violence and abuse, child sexual exploitation, youth and serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or prejudice-based violence including, but not limited to, gender-based violence. Examples of online peer-on-peer abuse would include sexting, online abuse, peer-on-peer grooming, the distribution of youth involved sexualised content, and harassment.

## **What is Contextual Safeguarding?**

This policy:

(a) encapsulates a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which is about changing the way that professionals approach child protection when risks occur outside of the family, thereby requiring all those within a Local Safeguarding Partnership to consider how they work alongside, rather than just refer into, children's social care, to create safe spaces in which children may have encountered peer-on-peer abuse.

(b) adopts a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach, which means: being aware of and seeking to understand the impact that these wider social contexts may be having on the School's students; creating a safe culture in the School by, for example, implementing policies and procedures that address peer-on-peer abuse and harmful attitudes; promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to

gender/sexuality; hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the School; training on potential bias and stereotyped assumptions; being alert to and monitoring changes in students' behaviour and/or attendance, and contributing to local child protection agendas by, for example, challenging poor threshold decisions and referring concerns about contexts to relevant local agencies (see section titled 'multi-agency working').

## How prevalent is peer-on-peer abuse?

Research suggests that peer-on-peer abuse is one of the most common forms of abuse affecting children in the UK. For example, more than four in ten teenage schoolgirls aged between 13 and 17 in England have experienced sexual coercion. Two thirds of contact sexual abuse experienced by children aged 17 or under was committed by someone who was also aged 17 or under.

## Sexual behaviours

Simon Hackett has proposed the following continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children, which may be helpful when seeking to understand a student's sexual behaviour and deciding how to respond to it.

### Sexual behaviours continuum model

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmentally expected</li> <li>• Socially acceptable</li> <li>• Consensual, mutual, reciprocal</li> <li>• Shared decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour</li> <li>• Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group</li> <li>• Context for behaviour may be inappropriate</li> <li>• Generally consensual and reciprocal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problematic and concerning behaviour</li> <li>• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected</li> <li>• No overt elements of victimisation</li> <li>• Consent issues may be unclear</li> <li>• May lack reciprocity or equal power</li> <li>• May include levels of compulsivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victimising intent or outcome</li> <li>• Includes misuse of power</li> <li>• Coercion and force to ensure compliance</li> <li>• Intrusive</li> <li>• Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given</li> <li>• May include elements of expressive violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically violent sexual abuse</li> <li>• Highly intrusive</li> <li>• Instrumental violence which is psychologically and/or sexually arousing to the child responsible for the behaviour</li> <li>• Sadism</li> </ul>

## Other behaviour

When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff can draw on aspects of

Hackett's continuum to assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and to decide how to respond. This could include, for example, whether it:

- is socially acceptable,
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time,
- is socially acceptable within the peer group,
- is problematic and concerning, involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability,
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning,
- involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour and the child/children allegedly the subject of that power, and
- involves a misuse of power.

### **How can a child who is being abused by their peers be identified?**

All staff should be alert to the well-being of students and to signs of abuse, and should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by peer-on-peer abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ. The School's safeguarding team should regularly review behaviour incident logs which can help to identify any changes in behaviour and/or concerning patterns or trends at an early stage.

### **Are some children particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by their peers?**

Any child can be vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. For example, an image of a child could be shared, following which they could become more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to how others now perceive them, regardless of any characteristics which may be inherent in them and/or their family. Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, children who are more likely to follow others and/or who are socially isolated from their peers may be more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.

Research suggests that peer-on-peer abuse may affect boys differently from girls, and that this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological make-up. Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, schools need to explore the gender dynamics of peer-on-peer abuse within their settings and recognise that these will play out differently

in single sex, mixed or gender-imbalanced environments. Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND, and additional barriers can sometimes exist when recognising abuse in children with SEND.

These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to a child's disability without further exploration;
- the potential for children with SEND to be disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying and harassment, without outwardly showing any signs;
- communication barriers and difficulties, and overcoming these barriers;
- some children may be more likely to experience peer-on-peer abuse than others as a result of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs.

## **A whole school approach**

The School actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by:

- educating all governors, its senior leadership team, staff, students, and parents about this issue. This includes training all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff on the nature, prevalence and effect of peer-on-peer abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it. This includes (i) Contextual Safeguarding, (ii) the identification and classification of specific behaviours, including digital behaviours, (iii) the importance of taking seriously all forms of peer-on-peer abuse (no matter how 'low level' they may appear) and ensuring that no form of peer-on-peer abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing, and (iv) social media and online safety, including how to encourage children to use social media in a positive, responsible and safe way, and how to enable them to identify and manage abusive behaviour online. Training includes case studies which the staff design themselves.
- educating children about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse, positive, responsible, and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via PSHE and the wider curriculum.
- supporting the on-going welfare of the student body by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise student mental health, and by providing in-school counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs.
- working with governors, senior leadership team, and all staff, students and parents to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the School community.
- creating conditions in which our students can aspire to, and realise, safe and healthy relationships

- responding to cases of peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately and ensuring that all peer-on-peer abuse issues are fed back to the School's safeguarding team.
- The School actively engages with its Local Safeguarding Partnership in relation to peer-on-peer abuse, and works closely with, for example, children's social care, the police, and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures, and other schools.
- The School actively refers concerns and allegations of peer-on-peer abuse where necessary to children's social care, the police, and/or other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures

## **Responding to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse**

### General principles

It is essential that all concerns and allegations of peer-on-peer abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately, and promptly in line with our safeguarding policy.

- It must take into account that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved, and consider and address the effect of wider sociocultural contexts – such as the child's/children's peer group (both within and outside the School); family; the School environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children's online presence

## **How will the School respond to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse?**

The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the member of staff who has reported it/them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child/all children affected.

Where any concern(s) or allegation(s) indicate(s) that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL should consider what urgent action can be taken in addition to the actions and referral duties set out in this policy, to seek specialist help in preventing the images spreading further and removing the images from the internet. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), for example, has a trained team that can evaluate and remove illegal images from the internet when the images are reported to them quickly. They will also share the image with the National Crime Agency's CEOP Command to facilitate an investigation. Any report to IWF will be made in consultation with the police. DSLs should always use their professional judgement to: (a) assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour,

71 and (b) determine whether it is appropriate for the alleged behaviour to be to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required.

## **Safety plans and risk assessment**

The School will always carry out a safety plan in respect of:

- any child who is alleged to have behaved in a way that is considered to be abusive or violent,
- any child who has reportedly been abused or affected by the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another child, or
- any child who may be at risk due to the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another child as deemed appropriate by the DSL.
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Where it is alleged that a child has behaved in a way that is considered to be inappropriate or problematic (as opposed to abusive or violent), the DSL will use their professional judgment – based on the particular concern(s) and/or allegation(s) raised, and the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question – to determine whether (as explained above) it would be appropriate to contact children’s social care, and to carry out a safety plan and risk assessment.