

Introduction

The staff at Testlands are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the setting. In particular, we:

- believe that in order to protect children, we should (a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which our students are or may be exposed, and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to our specific safeguarding context; and (b) take a whole-setting community contextual safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child 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 child-on-child abuse in response to alleged incidents of it; and (b) believe that in order to tackle child-on-child 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 child-on-child abuse in the setting 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 setting so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

This policy: is the setting's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute child-on-child abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the setting's child protection policy and any other relevant policies including, but not limited to, behaviour and anti bullying policy. sets out our strategy for improving prevention, and identifying and appropriately managing child-on-child abuse. It is the product of a comprehensive consultation – which has involved students, staff and parents applies to all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff. It is reviewed biannually, 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. 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 2023), does not use the term 'victim' and/or 'perpetrator'.

This is because our setting takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about child-on-child 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 child-on-child abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers, uses the terms 'child' and 'children', which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18. should, if relevant, according to the concern(s) or allegation(s) raised, be read in conjunction with the DfE's advice on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Between Children in settings and Colleges (DfE's Advice) (May 2018), and any other advice and guidance referred to within it, as appropriate, and should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

WHAT IS CHILD ON CHILD ABUSE

Child-on-child 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.

Child-on-child abuse can take various forms, including (but not limited to): serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), 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)

Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

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 Relationship abuse Child sexual exploitation Harmful sexual behaviour Serious youth violence Prejudice-based violence Bullying Multiple perpetrator rape Normal Inappropriate Problematic Abusive

- Victimising intent or outcome
- Includes misuse of power
- Coercion and force to ensure compliance
- Intrusive
- Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given
- May include elements of expressive violence
- Developmentally expected
- Socially acceptable
- Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Problematic and concerning behaviour
- Consensual, mutual, reciprocal
- Shared decision making
- Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group
- Context for behaviour may be inappropriate
- Generally consensual and reciprocal
- Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected
- No overt elements of victimisation
- Consent issues may be unclear
- May lack reciprocity or equal power
- May include levels of compulsivity they work alongside, rather than just refer into, children's social care, to create safe spaces in which children may have encountered child-on-child abuse. (b) adopts a whole-setting 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 setting's students,
 - creating a safe culture in the setting by, for example, implementing policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes; promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/ sexuality; hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the setting; training on potential bias and

stereotyped assumptions,

- being alert to and monitoring changes in students' behaviour and/or attendance,
- contributing to local child protection agendas by, for example, challenging poor threshold decisions and referring concerns about contexts to relevant local agencies.

HOW CAN CHILD ON CHILD

Things to look out for in victims of child-on-child abuse: Regularly feeling sick or unwell in the morning
Reluctance to make the journey to and from setting Money or possessions going missing Clothes or setting bag torn Wanting extra pocket money for no particular reason Unexplained cuts and bruises Taking different routes to setting Unexplained behaviour changes, e.g. moody, bad tempered, tearful Unhappiness Nightmares Not wanting to leave the house Reluctance to talk openly about setting friends and playtimes If you are concerned your son/daughter is the victim of peer on peer abuse you should contact the setting as soon as possible to report the issues through the appropriate channels. Sometimes children have not reported the issues to anyone in setting.

ARE SOME CHILDREN MORE VULNERABLE THAN OTHERS

Any child can be vulnerable to child-on-child 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 child-on-child 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 child-on-child abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers. Research suggests that: child-on-child 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, settings need to explore the gender dynamics of child-on-child 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 child-on-child abuse than others as a result of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs.

RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

It is essential that all concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our setting environment. Testlands will respond to concerns or allegations by: (i) include a thorough investigation of the concern(s) or allegation(s), and the wider context in which it/they may have occurred – depending on the nature and seriousness of the alleged incident(s), it may be appropriate for the police and/or children's social care to carry out this investigation (ii) treat all children involved as being at potential risk while the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves.

The setting should ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it, and additional sanctioning work may be required for the latter, (iii) 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 setting); family; the setting environment; their experience(s) of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children's online presence. (iv) consider the potential complexity of child-on-child abuse and of children's experiences, and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While children may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited, they are not consenting (v) obtain the views of the child/children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL should discuss the proposed action with the child/ children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made.

The setting should manage the child/children's expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so. It is particularly important to take into account the wishes of any child who has allegedly been abused, and to give that child as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and how they will be supported. If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay (in accordance with the child protection policy) so that a course of action can be agreed.

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.

The DSLs will always use their professional judgement to: (a) assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour, 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. Where the DSL considers or suspects that the alleged behaviour in question might be abusive or violent or where the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question might otherwise require it, the DSL should contact children's social care and/or the police immediately.

The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the agency and agree on a course of action, which may include: (i) Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible. Where support from local agencies is not available, the setting may need to handle concerns or allegations internally. In these cases, the setting will engage and seek advice from external specialists (either in the private and/or voluntary sector). (ii) Undertake/contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted early help services provided to address the assessed needs of

the child/children and their family. These services may, for example, include family and parenting programmes, responses to emerging thematic concerns in extra familial contexts, a specialist harmful sexual behaviour team, BeeU and/or youth offending services. (iii) Refer the child/children to children's social care for a section 17/47 statutory assessment.

Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to children's social care (and, if appropriate, a report to the police) is made immediately. This referral will be made to children's social care in the area where the/each child lives.

Depending on the safeguarding procedures issued by the Local Safeguarding Partnership in that area, there will normally be an initial review and assessment of the referral, in accordance with that area's assessment framework.

As a matter of best practice, if an incident of child-on-child abuse requires referral to and action by children's social care and a strategy meeting is convened, then the setting will hold every professional involved in the case accountable for their safeguarding response, including themselves, to both the/each child who has experienced the abuse, and the/each child who was responsible for it, and the contexts to which the abuse was associated. (iv) Report alleged criminal behaviour to the police.

Alleged criminal behaviour will ordinarily be reported to the police. However, there are some circumstances where it may not be appropriate to report such behaviour to the police. All concerns or allegations will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and considering the wider context.

Last reviewed: August 2024

Date of next review: August 2025

Signed by: B. Stanley