



Elm C of E Primary School & Pre-school Prevention of Child on Child Abuse Policy September 2025

Introduction- What is Child on Child Abuse?

Child-on-child sexual abuse is sexual abuse that happens between children of a similar age or stage of development. It can happen between any number of children, and can affect any age group (Department for Education (DfE), 2021a).

It can be harmful to the children who display it as well as those who experience it.

Children can experience peer-on-peer sexual abuse in a wide range of settings, including:

- at school
- at home or in someone else's home
- in public spaces
- online

(NSPCC, 2018).

It can take place in spaces which are supervised or unsupervised. Within a school context, for example, peer-on-peer sexual abuse might take place in spaces such as toilets, the playground, corridors and when children are walking home (Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2020).

As children develop healthily, it's normal for them to display certain types of sexualised behaviour. It's important that adults at Elm C of E who work or volunteer with children can identify if any sexualised behaviour has become harmful or abusive, and respond proportionally to keep all the children involved safe.

Recognising child-on-child sexual abuse

It can be difficult to work out if a child is displaying appropriate, inappropriate, problematic or abusive sexual behaviour.

Examples of sexually abusive behaviour may include:

- inappropriate or unwanted sexualised touching
- pressurising, forcing or coercing others to perform or take part in sexual acts

- pressuring, forcing or coercing someone to share nude images ([sexting](#))
- sharing sexual images of a person without their consent
- taking a picture under a person's clothing, without their consent ('upskirting')
- sexual harassment
- sexual or sexist name calling

(Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2020).

If you're concerned about a child's sexualised behaviour, you can use our resources to help work out whether the behaviour may be harmful or abusive.

[> Find out more about harmful sexual behaviour](#)

[> Read more about how to spot if a child may be displaying harmful sexual behaviour, and what action to take](#)

[> Find out more about the healthy sexual development of children and young people](#)

Signs that a child has experienced peer-on-peer sexual abuse

Indicators that a child has experienced peer-on-peer sexual abuse may be physical or behavioural. A child or young person may appear withdrawn, frightened or begin to act differently from usual.

They may also display physical signs such as noticeable discomfort in their genital or anal area.

[> Find out more about recognising the signs of sexual abuse](#)

Barriers to disclosure

Children do not always feel able to speak out about their experiences of peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

They may be afraid of:

- being considered a 'snitch'
- getting in trouble themselves
- how they will be perceived by others
- teachers or other adults not being discrete
- their parents being informed

(Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2020).

If a child is unsure about whether or not they have been sexually abused, they might be worried about causing a fuss or getting someone else in trouble for 'no reason'.

Children's understanding of child-on-child sexual abuse

Children may not always understand that they have experienced or carried out peer-on-peer sexual abuse. This might be because:

- they don't understand what constitutes appropriate, inappropriate, problematic or abusive sexualised behaviour
- they have experienced sexual abuse themselves and don't realise that what happened to them was wrong
- they don't know whether consent was given
- the abuse happened between friends or partners
- the abuse took place online
- they blame themselves for the abuse they received
- younger children lack knowledge of sex and sexuality as they are less likely to have received any relationships and sex education

(NSPCC, 2018).

Some children and young people who have viewed pornography may want to emulate what they have seen (Martellozzo et al, 2016).

Some children and young people who experience abuse may begin to understand that they have experienced abuse over time, as they grow older and learn more about sex and healthy relationships (NSPCC, 2018).

Responding to child-on-child sexual abuse

If a child experiences peer-on-peer sexual abuse or there are concerns a child might be displaying harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), you need to take child protection action.

Reporting

- **Follow Elm C of E child protection procedures:**
 - Log your concerns onto CPOMS and immediately alert either Jackie Mills DSL or in her absence Emma Duncan/Kim Summers DDSL.
 - If a child is in immediate danger, the DSL will contact the police on **999**. If worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, concerns will be shared via a referral to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Children's Services
 - <https://www.safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk/concerned/>
- **Report to the police as appropriate** (for example, if an allegation of rape, sexual assault or sexual offence is made). This should happen alongside a making a referral to children's social care, following local authority guidelines.

- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Where trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.
- **Contact the Report Abuse in Education Helpline** if you work in a school setting on 0800 136 663 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.
- **Contact your local child protection services.** Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.

≥ Find out more about responding to harmful sexual behaviour

≥ Read about how to spot if a child might be displaying harmful sexual behaviour, and what action to take

Protecting all the children involved

At Elm C of E we balance the duty to safeguard the child who has experienced abuse with the need to support the child who has displayed harmful sexual behaviour.

Children who witnessed the abuse or are friends of those involved may also be affected and need support.

Each incident of or concern about peer-on-peer abuse will be different: once all the facts are gathered, the DSL will assess any risks and make decisions on a case-by-case basis. This will help the DSL understand who needs to be involved to make sure all children are appropriately protected and supported.

Any child who has experienced or been involved in sexual abuse in a school setting can contact our **Report Abuse in Education Helpline** on 0800 136 663 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.

≥ Read information about best practice on managing allegations made against a child

Supporting the child who has experienced abuse

Every child who has experienced abuse should receive tailored support to meet their needs. At Elm C of E there are things we do to help a child feel safe and supported.

- Listen carefully to the child and reassure them that you are taking them seriously.
- Record the incident, noting all the relevant facts as fully as possible. Write down the language used by the child. This will help you record precisely what happened and understand how the child has been affected.
- Consider what support the child may need in the short-term, for example making sure they won't come into contact with the child who has displayed abusive behaviour.
- Consider what long-term support the child may need to help them recover from the trauma of what they have experienced. This may include therapeutic support.
- Understand the child's support network and consider what help they need to protect and care for the child.

- Include the child in any decisions that affect them.

Supporting the child who has displayed abusive or harmful sexual behaviour

It's important to protect and support children who have displayed abusive or harmful sexual behaviour.

- Consider any risks to the child's safety and what multi-agency responses are needed to support the child and their family.
- Talk calmly to the child. Remember that they may not realise they have behaved abusively and avoid using language that may make them feel judged or criminalised.
- Consider appropriate sanctions in light of your organisation's behaviour policy.
- Work with the child and their support network to put measures in place that will help the child change their behaviour.
- Consider what targeted therapeutic support the child may need.

≥ [Find out more about managing harmful sexual behaviour in schools](#)

Multi-agency responses

Our Designated Safeguarding leads will work with relevant agencies to protect and support all the children involved in an incident of peer-on-peer sexual abuse. This includes children's social care and the police if necessary.

≥ [Find out about best practice for multi-agency working](#)

Local areas can use our harmful sexual behaviour framework to develop a coordinated, evidence-based multi-agency response to HSB.

≥ [Read the harmful sexual behaviour framework](#)

Preventing peer-on-peer sexual abuse

At Elm C of E we recognise it is important to create a healthy and safe environment for all children and young people and challenge societal norms that may allow peer-on-peer sexual abuse to take place.

Policies, procedures and codes of conduct

Our safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures include information about peer-on-peer sexual abuse. These have been shared with everyone in our organisation, as well as parents and carers. And can be found available on our school website. This will help adults understand what they need to do to prevent and tackle peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

Our codes of conduct which clearly set out what behaviour is and is not appropriate for adults and children. Young people know what behaviour is suitable for our setting and what the consequences will be if they breach the rules.

Helping children speak out

Children might not feel able to talk to adults about peer-on-peer sexual abuse. But there are things we can do to make it easier.

- Children may feel more confident speaking out if they have a positive, trusting relationship with a trusted adult. This can be done by encouraging them to share their thoughts and opinions, responding to their concerns, and respecting and listening to them.
- If children can see a culture within your organisation that challenges inappropriate behaviour, they may feel more confident that any concerns they raise will be responded to appropriately.
- Having specialist staff in pastoral care or counselling roles can make it easier for children to share their concerns.

(Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2020).

Safe environments

At Elm C of E we have put a lot of thought into how we have made our environment safe for children and young people. We have identified any locations where there are concerns or could lead to issues about peer-on-peer sexual abuse taking place. This includes toilets, unsupervised corridors and areas that are poorly lit or hidden from adult view. At Elm c of E we overcome these potential environmental issues by increasing supervision levels in certain areas and times of the day.

≥ [Find out about creating safer environments for children and young people](#)

Talking with children about abuse and harassment

It's important to talk with children and young people about peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

Through our PSHE curriculum we work with children to have discussions about sex and healthy relationships. All year groups are involved in lessons on relationships, sex and sexuality as set out in our SRE policy. These are a good way of helping children learn about topics such as appropriate sexual behaviour, trust, consent, boundaries and responsibility.

Topics could also include where appropriate:

- what healthy sexual activity and respectful relationships look like (both online and offline)
- gender stereotypes and perceptions of gender roles
- pornography and how it presents sexual behaviour
- consent and withdrawing consent

(Department for Education (DfE), 2021a; DfE, 2020).

Throughout all our work at Elm C of E we make sure children know who they can talk to if they are concerned about anything or have experienced something upsetting.

Childline has produced age-appropriate information and advice for children and young people about sexual abuse, which includes information about peer-on-peer sexual abuse. We may signpost children to Childline for support, or use some of these examples to help start a conversation.

[≥ Childline's information about sexual abuse for children and young people](#)

[≥ Read our advice on how to have difficult conversations with children](#)

[≥ Find out more about how to promote healthy relationships, from early years through to older children](#)

Training

All the adults at Elm C of E are trained to recognise and respond to peer-on-peer sexual abuse. This will help them understand what is normal, inappropriate or abusive sexual behaviour and what action to take.

[≥ Find out more about managing harmful sexual behaviour in schools](#)

Legislation and guidance

Across the UK there is guidance to help professionals recognise and respond to harmful sexual behaviour.

[> Read about legislation and guidance relating to harmful sexual behaviour](#)

There is also specific guidance to help practitioners respond proportionately and effectively to peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

In **England**, the Department for Education (DfE) has published guidance on [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#). People in other sectors and other nations may also find the principles of best practice in this guidance helpful.

The guidance states that schools and colleges should develop policies and procedures on responding to child-on-child sexual violence and harassment. They should consider how to reflect this in a whole-school approach to safeguarding and child protection. Guidance is provided on:

- schools' and colleges' legal duties and responsibilities
- responding to reports of child-on-child sexual violence and harassment
- effective ongoing responses

(DfE, 2021a).

[≥ Read our CASPAR briefing on the guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#)

Part five of the statutory child protection guidance [Keeping children safe in education](#) also contains information on:

- responding to reports of child-on-child sexual violence and harassment
- risk assessment
- actions to take following a report of child-on-child sexual violence and/or harassment
- ongoing responses

(DfE, 2021b).

Useful Links

Contextual Safeguarding Network (2020) [Beyond referrals: harmful sexual behaviour in schools](#). Bedfordshire: Contextual Safeguarding Network.

Department for Education (DfE) (2021a) [Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#). London: DfE.

Department for Education (DfE) (2021b) [Keeping children safe in education: statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#). London: Department for Education.

Department of Health (DoH) (2017) [Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland](#). Belfast: Department of Health. Northern Ireland.

Mortellozzo, E., Monaghan, A., Adler, J.R., Davidson, J., Leyva, R. and Horvath, M.A.H. (2016) [I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it](#). London: NSPCC.

NSPCC (2018) ["Is this sexual abuse?": NSPCC helplines report about peer sexual abuse](#). London: NSPCC.