



ERNESFORD GRANGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Peer on Peer Abuse

Policy and Procedure

Autumn 2021

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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' (page 23). 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.'

At Ernesford Grange Primary School 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 policy is to explore the many forms of peer on peer abuse and include a planned and supportive response to the issues.

At Ernesford Grange Primary School we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

Anti-Bullying Policy

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Behaviour Policy

Legislation

This policy is supported by the key principles of the **Children's Act, 1989** that the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document that focuses adult thinking towards the views of the child is **Working Together, 2015**, highlighting that every assessment of a child, 'must be informed by the views of the child' and within that '*It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child when planning appropriate services. (Working Together, 2015:23)* This is clearly echoed by '**Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2018**' through ensuring procedures are in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in schools and settings and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed, 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, 2016). 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; the majority are covered in the school safeguarding and child protection policy. In relation to this policy:

Physical abuse e.g. biting, hitting, kicking, hair pulling etc.

Sexually harmful behaviour/sexual abuse e.g. inappropriate sexual language, touching, sexual assault etc.

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 for the same reasons as stated above.

It is important to state that cyber bullying can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the **Malicious Communications Act 1988 under section 1** 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 the **Communications Act 2003, Section 127** which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again 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**. Outside of the immediate support young people may require in these instances, 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. By having in their possession, or distributing, indecent images of a person under 18 on to someone else, young people are not even aware that they could be breaking the law as stated as these are offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Initiation/Hazing

Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation such as a private school, sports team etc. There are a number of different forms, from relatively mild rituals to severe and sometimes violent ceremonies.

Expected action taken from all staff

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 perpetrating harm.

As a school we will deal with any situation of peer abuse immediately and sensitively. We 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. We will 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; we will 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 key staff are trained in dealing with such incidents, talking to young people and instigating immediate support in a calm and consistent manner. Staff will not be prejudiced, judgemental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

Gather the Facts

We will discuss the concerns separately with all involved, 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 us what happened. We will 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?

As a school we will consider and question:

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? In relation to sexual exploration, children under the age of 5, in particular 1-4 year olds who are learning toileting skills, may show a particular interest in exploration at around this stage. This, however should not be overlooked if other issues arise. See following:

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 for example, in which case regular and repetitive? Is the version of one young person different from another and 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 an 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 Children's Services Social Care.

Repetition

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered whether or not the behaviour continued after the issue had already been discussed or dealt with and appropriately resolved?

Course of action

If from the information that we gather we believe any young person to be at risk of significant harm you must make a safeguarding referral to social care immediately (where a crime has been committed the police should be involved also). If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and made a decision on what will happen next then we will be informed of our 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. We will 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 we may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager. If on discussion however, we agree with the decision, we may then be left to inform parents.

Informing parents

If, once appropriate advice has been sought from police/social care we have agreement to inform parents or have been allocated that role from the other services involved then we need to inform the parents as soon as possible. If services are not going to be involved then equally, this information may need to be shared with parents.

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 they require 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 support of family and friends. In which case, it is necessary that this young person continues to be monitored 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 groups/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 a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PHSE and SMSC that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

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 through CAF/strengthening families/early help referral and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person has been met, it is important that young person receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the form of restorative justice e.g. making amends with the young person they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. 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 offending 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. This may mean additional supervision of the young person or protective strategies if the young person feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

The school may also choose a punishment as a consequence, such as exclusion or internal exclusion/inclusion/seclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their 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 than the incident. 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 (e.g. self-harm). In which case, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative.

Preventative Strategies for Schools and Settings

Firstly, and most importantly, Ernesford Grange recognises that peer on peer abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms.

We have an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This is strengthened through a strong and positive PHSE/SMSC curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one on one opportunity to be harmful to one another.

To enable such an open and honest environment we ensure the whole workforce feels confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of young people including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. Staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. Staff will consider each issue and each individual in their own right, before taking action. If staff minimise the concerns raised it may result in a young person seeking no further help or advice.

Signposting is available to young people in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer.

