

CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE POLICY

Key document details

Equality Impact Assessment required?	Yes / No
If yes, date of EIA	Autumn 2021
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Approver:	Trust Board
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Policy statement

Pioneer Educational Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people. We have a zero-tolerance approach to child-on-child abuse in any form, including physical, emotional, sexual, and online harm. Abuse is abuse and will never be dismissed as banter, part of growing up, or boys being boys". All staff must maintain an attitude of "it could happen here" and act in the best interests of the child at all times. This policy sets out our procedures for preventing, identifying, and responding to child-on-child abuse, in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, and other statutory guidance.

1. Child-on-child / peer-on-peer abuse

All staff should be aware of safeguarding issues from child-on-child peer abuse including:

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse')
- Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and / or encourages physical abuse)
- Sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and / or encourages sexual violence)
- Sexual harassment such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
- Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and / or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery)
- Upskirting which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permissions, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm, and
- Initiation / hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element)

This 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; vulnerable adults are at particular risk of harm

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

- Significant disruption in their own lives
- Exposure to domestic abuse or witnessing or suffering abuse
- Educational under-achievement
- Involved in crime

Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is the first priority of any education setting, but emotional bullying can sometimes be more damaging than physical. Staff, alongside their Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Deputy, have to make their own judgements about each specific case and should use this policy guidance to help.

Child-on-child abuse is referenced in Pioneer Educational Trust's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The sensitive nature and specific issues involved with child on child necessitate separate policy guidance.

At Pioneer Educational Trust, 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.

2. Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this policy is to explore some forms of child-on-child abuse. The policy also includes a planned and supportive response to the issues.

At Pioneer Educational Trust, we have the following Trust policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Pioneer Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (and Allegations of Abuse Against Staff procedure)
- Pioneer Whistleblowing Policy
- Pioneer Health & Safety Policy
- Pioneer E-Safety Policy

The following school policies should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Anti-bullying Policy
- Behaviour / Culture Policy

3. Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by:

- [The Children's Act 1989](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2023](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025](#)

4. Abuse and harmful behaviour

It is necessary to consider

- what abuse is and what it looks like
- how it can be managed
- what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual
- 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'. It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

- Children are vulnerable to abuse by other children. Such abuse should be taken as seriously as abuse by adults and should be subject to the same child protection procedures.
- Children can abuse other children
- Staff should not dismiss abusive behaviour as normal between young people and should not develop high thresholds before taking action
- Staff should be aware of the potential uses of information technology for bullying and abusive behaviour between young people

- Staff should be aware of the added vulnerability of children and young people who have been the victims of violent crime (for example mugging), including the risk that they may respond to this by abusing younger or weaker children

The alleged perpetrator is likely to have considerable unmet needs as well as posing a significant risk of harm to other children. Evidence suggests that such children may have suffered considerable disruption in their lives, may have witnessed or been subjected to physical or sexual abuse, may have problems in their educational development and may have committed other offences. They may therefore be suffering, or be at risk of suffering, significant harm and be in need of protection. Any long-term plan to reduce the risk posed by the alleged perpetrator must address their needs.

5. Types of child-on-child abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between peers, and this list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse or prejudiced behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

5.1 Physical abuse

This may include hitting, kicking, nipping/pinching, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm to another person. There may be many reasons why a child harms another, and it is important to understand why a young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally before considering the action to be undertaken.

5.2 Sexual violence and sexual harassment

This must always be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead / Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.

They will give consideration as to whether to:

- Manage internally
- Refer to Early Help
- Complete a MASH referral
- Report to the police

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as to the young person it is intended towards.

Sexually harmful behaviour may include:

- inappropriate sexual language
- inappropriate role play
- sexual touching
- sexual assault/abuse.

Staff should be aware of the importance of:

- making clear that sexual violence and sexual harassment is not acceptable, will never be tolerated and is not an inevitable part of growing up
- not tolerating or dismissing sexual violence or sexual harassment as “banter”, “part of growing up”, “just having a laugh” or “boys being boys”

- challenging behaviours (potentially criminal in nature), such as grabbing bottoms, breasts and genitalia, flicking bras and lifting up skirts. Dismissing or tolerating such behaviours risks normalising them
- challenging upskirting. It is a criminal offence. Anyone of any gender, can be a victim.

Further information including an evidence-informed operational framework for children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours can be found here:

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1657/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework.pdf>

5.2a Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

Harmful sexual behaviour refers to sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, and can occur online or offline. These behaviours exist on a continuum from inappropriate to abusive and may include:

- Sexualised language or gestures beyond developmental norms
- Sexual touching without consent or understanding of boundaries
- Coercion or manipulation to engage in sexual activity
- Persistent sexualised behaviour despite intervention

All HSB must be taken seriously and never dismissed as “experimentation” or “part of growing up”. Staff should follow the same safeguarding procedures as for other forms of abuse and report concerns immediately to the DSL. DSLs should use the NSPCC Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework to assess and respond appropriately. Consider whether the behaviour indicates a safeguarding concern, a need for early help, or a referral to children’s social care and/or the police. Responses should be proportionate, trauma-informed and multi-agency, balancing safeguarding with the child’s developmental needs

Further guidance:

- NSPCC Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2020/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework>
- UKCIS Guidance on Sharing Nudes and Semi-Nudes

5.3 Bullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be intended to cause harm / hurt and include:

- An imbalance of power: Young people who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally or for a particular reason e.g. size, hair colour, gender, sexual orientation, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

5.4 Online abuse and cyberbullying

Online abuse refers to any form of harm that occurs through digital technology, including social media, messaging platforms, gaming sites, and other online environments. It can involve bullying, harassment, coercion, exploitation, or sexual harm. Online abuse must be treated as seriously as face-to-face abuse and reported immediately.

Examples of Online Abuse

- Sending abusive or threatening messages via text, email, or social media
- Posting humiliating or harmful content, including images or videos
- Sharing or pressuring others to share nude or semi-nude images (sexting)
- Online sexual harassment, including unwanted sexual comments or requests
- Grooming or coercion for sexual activity
- Exclusion from online groups or coordinated trolling
- Encouraging self-harm or harmful behaviours

Online abuse often overlaps with other forms of child-on-child abuse and must be addressed holistically. Staff must never dismiss online abuse as less serious because it occurs outside school premises. All incidents should be reported to the DSL and recorded on the school's safeguarding system.

Procedures

- **Immediate reporting:** Staff must report any disclosure or suspicion of online abuse to the DSL without delay.
- **Preserve evidence:** Do not delete messages, images, or posts. Take screenshots where possible and record URLs.
- **DSL Actions:**
 - Assess risk and consider whether the behaviour is criminal (e.g., sharing sexual images, threats).
 - Refer to **UKCIS guidance on sharing nudes and semi-nudes** for appropriate response steps.
 - Consider Early Help, social care referral, or police involvement where necessary.
- **Parental engagement:** Inform parents unless doing so would place a child at further risk.
- **Education and prevention:**
 - Deliver regular online safety education through PSHE/RSHE.
 - Promote reporting routes (e.g., CEOP, school safeguarding team).
 - Ensure filtering and monitoring systems are robust and reviewed regularly.

Further guidance

- UKCIS: *Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings*
- NSPCC: *Online safety resources for schools*
- CEOP: *Thinkuknow guidance for professionals*

5.5 Sharing nude or indecent imagery

The term 'Sharing nudes and semi-nudes/sexting' relates to the sending of indecent images, videos and/or written messages with sexually explicit content; these are created and sent electronically. They are often 'shared' via social networking sites and instant messaging services.

This must always be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

DSL will follow [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people \(2024\)](#) guidance.

5.6 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. The ceremony welcomes newcomers by subjecting them to a series of trials which promote a bond between them. After the hazing is over, the newcomers also have something in common with older members of the organisation, because they all experienced it as part of a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment.

5.7 Prejudiced Behaviour

The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised, and which is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – for example disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class), sexual identity or gender reassignment.

5.8 Teenage relationship abuse

Teenage relationship abuse is a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent (between the ages of 13 and 18) against a current or former partner. Abuse may include insults, coercion, social sabotage, sexual harassment, threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse. The abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour, in a heterosexual or same gender relationship, in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner. This abuse may be child sexual exploitation.

6. Expected staff action

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Trust Board:** Holds overall accountability for ensuring that safeguarding policies, including this one, are compliant with statutory requirements and effectively implemented across all schools.
- **Chief Executive Officer (CEO):** Provides strategic leadership and ensures that safeguarding remains a priority within the Trust.
- **Local Committees:** Monitor the implementation of this policy within their schools and hold leaders to account for safeguarding practice.
- **Headteachers:** Ensure that this policy is embedded in school culture, that staff receive appropriate training, and that all incidents are managed in line with statutory guidance.
- **Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Deputies:** Lead on all child-on-child abuse cases, including risk assessments, referrals to external agencies, and coordination of support for victims and alleged perpetrators.
- **All staff:** Have a duty to recognise, report, and respond to concerns about child-on-child abuse immediately, following the procedures outlined in this policy.

Procedures and Reporting

Immediate Action

- All staff must treat any disclosure or suspicion of child-on-child abuse seriously and act without delay
- Staff should **not investigate** but must **report concerns immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL**

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm, staff must contact the DSL and, if necessary, call emergency services (999)

Reporting Process (see Annex A)

1. **Record the concern promptly and factually:**
 - Use the school's safeguarding system (e.g., CPOMS) or designated reporting form (for volunteers or visitors)
 - Include the child's own words in quotation marks
 - Avoid euphemisms; use correct anatomical terms for body parts if relevant
 - Note date, time, location, and any witnesses
2. **Inform the DSL without delay:**
 - Do not wait until the end of the day
 - If the DSL is unavailable, contact a Deputy DSL or Headteacher
3. **DSL Actions:**
 - Assess the nature and seriousness of the incident
 - Consider the needs of both the victim and alleged perpetrator
 - Decide on next steps, which may include:
 - Internal management with support and monitoring
 - Early Help referral
 - Referral to Children's Social Care via MASH
 - Police involvement for criminal behaviour (e.g., sexual violence, upskirting)
 - Complete a risk assessment for both parties and implement safety measures
4. **Parental Engagement:**
 - Inform parents/carers of both the victim and alleged perpetrator unless doing so would place a child at further risk
 - Provide clear information about support and next steps
5. **Multi-Agency Working:**
 - Work with social care, police, and other agencies as required
 - Share information lawfully and proportionately under safeguarding legislation

Recording and Monitoring

- All incidents must be logged on CPOMS (or equivalent) and reviewed regularly by the DSL
- Maintain a chronology of incidents to identify patterns or escalating concerns
- Governors should receive anonymised safeguarding reports termly via the Local Committee dashboard

Timescales

- Initial response: **Immediate.**
- DSL decision on next steps: **Same day.**
- Referral to external agencies: **Within 24 hours** of decision.

Confidentiality

- Information should be shared only with those who need to know to safeguard children.
- All records must be stored securely in line with GDPR and safeguarding requirements.

7. 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.

7.1 Support for a child or young person who has been harmed

What 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.

Children who have experienced sexual violence display a very wide range of responses to their experience, including in some cases clear signs of trauma, physical and emotional responses, or no overt signs at all. Schools should remain alert to the possible challenges of detecting those signs and show sensitivity to the needs of the child (e.g. about attendance in lessons) irrespective of how overt the child's distress is.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group for example a speaker on online bullying, relationship abuse etc.

7.2 Support for and actions to take in respect of the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour

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 an 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 the 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 elsewhere.

It may be that 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 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 consequence such as suspension or internal exclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour.

7.3 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). For this reason, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative.

8. Preventative Strategies

Child-on-child abuse can occur in any setting, even where robust safeguarding systems exist. Prevention is therefore a key priority. We adopt a proactive, whole-school approach to reduce the risk of harm and create a culture of safety and respect.

Key preventative measures

- **Curriculum integration:**
 - Deliver a strong and age-appropriate PSHE/RSHE curriculum that addresses consent, healthy relationships, respect, online safety, and prejudice-based behaviours
 - Include explicit teaching on recognising harmful sexual behaviour and how to seek help
- **Pupil voice and participation:**
 - Engage pupils in shaping school culture through school councils, peer mentoring, and feedback mechanisms
 - Promote pupil-led initiatives on respect and inclusion
- **Staff training:**
 - Provide annual safeguarding training for all staff, including specific training on child-on-child abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, and online safety
 - Ensure staff understand how to challenge inappropriate language and behaviour consistently
- **Safe environment:**
 - Maintain clear behaviour expectations and a positive school ethos where abuse is never tolerated
 - Ensure supervision in high-risk areas (e.g., corridors, playgrounds, online platforms)
- **Reporting and support systems:**
 - Promote accessible reporting routes for pupils (e.g., anonymous reporting tools)
 - Ensure pupils know who the DSL and safeguarding team are and how to contact them
- **Digital safety:**
 - Implement robust filtering and monitoring systems for school devices and networks
 - Educate pupils and parents on safe online behaviour and reporting concerns
- **Targeted interventions:**
 - Use data (e.g., behaviour logs, safeguarding records) to identify patterns and provide early intervention for vulnerable pupils
 - Offer small-group or one-to-one sessions for pupils at higher risk of harm

Whole-school culture preventative strategies are most effective when embedded in the school's ethos. Leaders must model respectful behaviour, celebrate diversity, and ensure pupils feel safe to speak out. Regular assemblies, workshops, and campaigns reinforce these messages.

9. Monitoring arrangements

We are aware of the need to monitor and evaluate this policy regularly to ensure that the systems are in place to allow all of our pupils to achieve their full potential in a safe environment with appropriate and relevant support.

Equality Impact Assessment completed and can be seen as requested from the People Team at Pioneer Educational Trust.

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees every year.

**PART FOUR:
RESPONSE TO REPORTS**
Summary of responses



