Langley Hall Arts Academy

SSPo41

PEER ON PEER ABUSE POLICY

PROCEDURE	REFERENCE	FORM
	NSPCC- Preventing Abuse	

At Langley Hall Arts Academy, we are committed to ensuring the well-being of all members of the school community and supporting each other through times of challenge and difficulty

Peer on peer abuse is when a child might have been abused by another child.

The NSPCC explains that, “children's sexual behaviours exist on a wide continuum, from normal and developmentally expected to highly abnormal and ab

usive. [Staff] should recognise the importance of distinguishing between problematic and abusive sexual behaviour… As both problematic and abusive sexual behaviours are developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage, a useful umbrella term is harmful sexual behaviours or HSB.”

Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for his/her age, staff should always consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour (for example, whether the child is being harmed or abused by their peers) and, if so, what the concern is and how the child can be supported going forwards.

It is not always easy to tell the difference between normal sexual exploration and abusive behaviour. Children, particularly in the younger age groups, may engage in such behaviour with no knowledge that it is wrong or abusive. For this reason, it may be more accurate to talk about *harmful sexual behaviour* (HSB) rather than abuse.

It is important to have the information needed to recognise the warning signs of harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) at an early stage and seek help.

At LHAA every adult involved with children **MUST** take responsibility for preventing abuse and ensuring that those involved have the help they need.

The management of children and young people with sexually harmful behaviour is complex, and the Principal and the DSL will work with other relevant agencies to maintain the safety of the whole school community.

Young people who display such behaviour may be victims of abuse themselves and the child protection procedures will be followed for both victim and perpetrator.

There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be regarded as abusive and incidents that are more properly dealt with as bullying, sexual experimentation etc.

Children's experiences of abuse and violence are rarely isolated events, and they can often be linked to other things that are happening in their lives and spaces in which they spend their time. Any response to peer-on-peer abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of peer-on-peer abuse set out above and

capture the full context of children's experiences. This can be done by adopting a **Contextual Safeguarding** approach and by ensuring that our response to incidents of peer-on-peer abuse takes into account any potential complexity

What is Contextual Safeguarding?

This policy encapsulates a Contextual Safeguarding approach, which:

• is an approach to safeguarding children that recognises their experiences of significant harm in extra-familial contexts, and seeks to include these contexts within prevention, identification, assessment and intervention safeguarding activities;

• recognises that as children enter adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time outside of the home in public environments (including on the internet) within which they may experience abuse; and

• considers interventions to change the systems or social conditions of the environments in which abuse has occurred. For example, rather than move a child from a school, professionals could work with the school leadership and student body to challenge harmful, gendered school cultures, thus improving the pre-existing school environment.

Dealing with a concern

If one child or young person causes harm to another, this should not necessarily be dealt with as abuse: bullying, fighting and harassment between children are not generally seen as child protection issues.

However, any concern must be referred to the DSL particularly if:

• There is a large difference in power (for example age, size, ability, development) between the young people concerned; or

• The perpetrator has repeatedly tried to harm one or more other children; or

• There are concerns about the intention of the alleged perpetrator. If the evidence suggests that there was an intention to cause severe harm to the victim, this should be regarded as abusive whether or not severe harm was actually caused.

What to do if you are concerned.

If a child makes an allegation or disclosure of abuse against another child or young person, it is important that you:

- Stay calm and listen carefully.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- Do not investigate or ask leading questions.
- Let them know that you will need to tell someone else.
- Do not promise to keep what they have told you a secret.
- Inform your DSL as soon as possible
- Make a written record of the allegation on CPOMS

Signs that a child or young person may be being abused, include:

- Behaving in an inappropriate sexual way with toys or objects
- Nightmares, sleeping problems
- Becoming withdrawn or very clingy
- Becoming unusually secretive
- Sudden unexplained personality changes, mood swings and insecurity
- Regressing to younger behaviours, e.g. bedwetting
- Unexplained fear of particular places or people
- Outbursts of anger
- Appetite loss and sudden changes in eating habits
- New, adult words for body parts with no obvious source
- Talk of a new, older friend and unexplained money or gifts
- Self-mutilation (cutting or burning) in adolescents
- Physical signs e.g. unexplained soreness or bruising around the genitals or mouth; sexually-transmitted diseases, pregnancy
- Running away
- Not wanting to be alone with a particular child or young person

NB. Some of these signs, may be caused by other factors and changes in a child's life.

Recognising the signs that a child may be the victim of abuse

For many reasons children find it very difficult to tell anyone that they are being abused, whether by an adult or by another child. Nearly three-quarters of them tell no one about it at the time.

These are the most common reasons why children do not tell:

- People who abuse children may offer a combination of gifts or treats and threats about what will happen if the child says 'no' or tells someone. They may make physical threats, but more usually the threat is about what will happen if children tell.
- In order to keep the abuse secret, abusers will often play on children's fear, embarrassment or guilt about what is happening, perhaps convincing them that no one will believe them. Sometimes abusers make children believe that they enjoyed it and wanted it to happen.
- If the abuser is another child or young person, the victim may be confused about his or her feelings and be persuaded that what is happening is OK or that 'everyone is doing it'.

There are other reasons why children stay silent and do not tell, perhaps they feel they have no one to talk to, or there may be a lack of open communication in the family. Very young or disabled children may not have the words or means of communication to let people know what is going on

What is harmful sexual behaviour?

Harmful sexual behaviour by children and young people ranges from experimentation that unintentionally goes too far, through to serious sexual assault. It sometimes involves children as young as four or five, although most of those who sexually harm others are adolescents.

Usually, but not always, the child or young person causing the harm is older than the victim.

Often victims are uncomfortable or confused about what is happening and may feel that they are willingly involved, but not understand that the behaviour is harmful.

It is important to recognise that children are likely to engage in some forms of sexual exploration with similar age children. However, any child or young person who engages in sex play with a much younger or more vulnerable child, or who uses force, tricks or bribery to involve someone in sexual activity, is a cause for concern and staff should seek help or advice.

Warning signs of harmful sexual or abusive behaviour:-

A child or adolescent who:-

- Seeks out the company of younger children and spends an unusual amount of time in their company?
- Takes younger children to 'secret' places or hideaways or plays 'special' games with them (e.g. doctor and patient, removing clothing etc.) especially games unusual for their age?
- Insists on hugging or kissing a child when the child does not want to?
- Tells you they do not want to be alone with a child or becomes anxious when a particular child or young person is coming to visit?
- Frequently uses aggressive sexual language about adults or children?
- Sends or shows sexual material to younger children?
- Makes sexually abusive telephone calls?
- Shares alcohol or other drugs with younger children or teens?
- Views child pornography on the internet or elsewhere?
- Exposes his or her genitals to younger children?
- Forces sex on another adolescent or child?
- 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;

What is age-appropriate sexual behaviour?

Pre-school children (0-5 years)

Commonly:

• Use childish 'sexual' language to talk about body parts

• Ask how babies are made and where they come from

• Touch or rub their own genitals

• Show and look at private body parts

They rarely:

• Discuss sexual acts or use sexually explicit language

• Have physical sexual contact with other children

• Show adult-like sexual behaviour or knowledge

School-age children (6-12 years)

Commonly:

• Ask questions about menstruation, pregnancy and sexual behaviour

• Experiment with other children, often during games, kissing, touching, showing and role-playing e.g. mums and dads or doctors and nurses

• Masturbate in private

• Older children in this age range are also more likely than pre-school children to use sexual words and discuss sexual acts, particularly with their friends

They rarely:

• Masturbate in public

• Show adult-like sexual behaviour or knowledge

Adolescents (13-16 years)

Commonly:

• Ask questions about relationships and sexual behaviour

• Use sexual language and talk about sexual acts between themselves

• Masturbate in private

• Experiment sexually with adolescents of similar age

NB. About one-third of adolescents have sexual intercourse before the age of 16

They rarely:

Masturbate in public

Have sexual contact with much younger children or adults

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is by no means exhaustive and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that children present with will depend on their particular circumstances. Rather than checking behaviour against a list, staff are trained to be alert to behaviour that might cause concerns, to think about what the behaviour might signify, to encourage children to share with them any underlying reasons for their behaviour, and, where appropriate, to engage with their parents/carers so that the cause(s) of their behaviour . It should be noted that there is currently no definitive list of indicators of peer-on-peer abuse.

The above list has been drawn from Signs, symptoms and effects of child abuse and neglect (NSPCC): https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/signs-symptoms-effects/

Pornography

As well as the activities described above, staff must also have to be aware of the serious and growing problem of children and young people downloading sexual images on the internet.

Although not much is known about what effect looking at such material may have on their sexual and emotional development, but repeated viewing of adult or child pornography is certainly a cause for concern.

In addition, downloading child pornography is a criminal offence.

Young people who look at this material should be made aware that it is a crime and may need help with their behaviour. It is important that we keep a careful eye on the websites children are visiting and restrict access as necessary.

'Sexting' and On-line abuse

There is a growing problem of young people taking and sending, via the internet and mobile phones, sexually explicit pictures or videos of themselves or their peers. There could be many reasons why young people may want to take these sorts of images

At LHAA staff talk to children about sexting and the consequences.

Staff should stress that once an image has been sent or posted online, they no longer have control of it and it could end up anywhere.

Sexual images of anyone under 18 years of age are illegal.

Why some children sexually harm others.

The reasons why children sexually harm others are complicated and not always obvious. Some of them have been emotionally, sexually or physically abused themselves, while others may have witnessed physical or emotional violence at home.

For some children it may be a passing phase, but the harm they cause to other children can be serious and some will go on to abuse children into adulthood if they do not receive help. For this reason it is vital to seek advice and help as soon as possible.

Multi-agency working

The School actively engages with its local partners in relation to peer-on-peer abuse, and works closely with, for example, Slough LSCB, Slough Mash Team, Slough First Contact and neighbouring authorities, and/or other relevant agencies, and other schools. The relationships the School has built with these partners are essential to ensuring that the School is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse. They help the School

(a) to develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist;

(b) to ensure that our [pupils/students] are able to access the range of services and support they need quickly;

(c) to support and help inform our local community's response to peer-on-peer abuse;

(d) to increase our awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in our local area to enable us to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by our [pupils/students].

The School will actively refers concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse where necessary to Slough Children's Services, services, and/or other relevant agencies. This is particularly important because peer-on-peer abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist.

It is often not appropriate for one single agency (where the incident cannot be managed internally) to try to address the issue alone – it requires effective partnership working.

Individual risk and needs assessment

Where there is an incident of peer-on-peer abuse, the School will carry out a robust risk and needs assessment in respect of each child affected by the abuse.

These risk assessments will:

- assess and address the nature and level of risks that are posed and/or faced by the child;
- engage the child's parents and draw upon local services and agencies to ensure that the child's needs are met in the long-term. Consider whether any targeted interventions are needed to address the underlying attitudes or behaviour of any child; and
- be reviewed at regular intervals in light of the child's on-going needs to ensure that real progress is being made which benefits the child. If at any stage the child's needs escalate, the DSL should contact name this will be the local MASH/First Contact in accordance with the LSCB's procedures)to determine the appropriate course of action.
- On-going proactive work to a contextual whole-school approach

The School's response to concerns/allegations of peer-on-peer abuse is part of on-going proactive work by the School to embed best practice and take a contextual whole-school approach to such abuse. As such, the School's response can become part of its wider prevention work. This response will include LHAA asking itself a series of questions about the context in which an incident of peer-on-peer abuse occurred in the School, the local community in which the School is based, and the wider physical and online environment - such as

(a) what protective factors and influences exist within the School (such as positive peer influences, examples were peer-on-peer abuse has been challenged etc.) and how can the School bolster these?;

(b) how (if at all) did the School's physical environment contribute to the abuse, and how can the School address this going forwards, for example by improving the School's safety, security and supervision?;

(c) did wider gender norms, equality issues and/or societal attitudes contribute to the abuse?;

(d) what was the relationship between the abuse and the cultural norms between staff and children, and how can these be addressed going forwards?;

(e) does the abuse indicate a need for staff training on, for example, underlying attitudes, a particular issue or the handling of particular types of abuse?;

(f) how have similar cases been managed in the past and what effect has this had?;

(g) does the case or any identified trends highlight areas for development in the way in which the School works with children to raise their awareness of and/or prevent peer-on-peer abuse, including by way of the School's SMSC and Lifeskills curriculum and lessons that address underlying attitudes or behaviour such as gender and equalities work?;

(h) are there any lessons to be learnt about the way in which the School engages with parents to address peer-on-peer abuse issues?;

(i) are there underlying issues that affect other schools in the area and is there a need for a multi-agency response?;

(j) does this case highlight a need to work with certain children to build their confidence and teach them how to identify and manage abusive behaviour?; and

(k) were there opportunities to intervene earlier or differently and/or to address common themes amongst the behaviour of other children in the School?

Further information is available on www.stopitnow.org.uk and www.parentsprotect.co.uk

FREEPHONE HELPLINE 0808 1000 900

APPENDIX A

Advice for Parents and Carers

Here are some things that you can do to help prevent harmful sexual behaviour between children:

1. Be aware of the warning signs that your child, or another child or young person, may be acting in a harmful or abusive way and seek help if you are worried Make sure you understand the signs contained in this booklet so that you are aware of what to look out for at an early stage. If you think a child you know has a sexual interest in, or may be abusing a child, seek professional help. Don't keep it a secret.

2. Talk with children, and listen to what they have to say Adults and adolescents who sexually abuse children usually rely on secrecy. They try to silence children and to build trust with adults, counting on them to be silent if they have doubts. The first step to tackling this secrecy is to develop an open and trusting relationship with your children. This means listening carefully to their fears and concerns and letting them know they should not worry about telling you anything. It is important to talk with them about sex, and to be comfortable using the words they may need.

3. Demonstrate to children that it is all right to say 'no' Teach children when it is OK to say 'no'; for example when they do not want to play, or be tickled, hugged or kissed. Help them to understand what is unacceptable behaviour and that they must always tell you if someone is behaving in a way which worries them, even if they were unable to say 'no' at the time.

4. Set and respect family boundaries Make sure that all members of the family have rights to privacy in dressing, bathing, sleeping and other personal activities. Even young children should be listened to and their preferences respected.

5. Set clear guidelines and keep a careful eye on children's internet use and the TV programmes and videos they watch Explain to children the risks associated with using the internet, restrict access to unsuitable sites and ask them to tell you if they receive messages or emails containing sexually explicit material. Check that TV programmes, films and videos are appropriate to their age.

6. Take sensible precautions about who you choose to take care of your children Be careful about who children are left with. Find out as much as you can about baby-sitters and don't leave your child with anyone you have doubts about. If your child is unhappy about spending time with a particular person, talk to the child about the reasons for this.

7. Encourage children to respect themselves and others Many young people fail to understand the importance of respecting themselves and one another. This is particularly evident in the attitude of some young men towards girls and young women and creates a climate where harmful sexual or abusive behaviour can take place. Encourage children to treat everyone with respect and be prepared to challenge their attitudes to others.

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