



Bedford Inclusive Learning and Training Trust

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Child on Child Abuse Policy

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Context and Definition

Child-on-Child abuse is behaviour by an individual or group, intending to physically, sexually or emotionally hurt others. All staff should recognise that children can abuse other children. This is generally referred to as child-on-child abuse and can take many forms.

We recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers. Abuse will never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh' or 'part of growing up'; this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for pupils.

Whilst we recognise the gendered nature of child-on-child abuse, all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously.

Most cases of pupils hurting other pupils will be dealt with under our school's behaviour policy, but this child protection and safeguarding policy will apply to any allegations that raise safeguarding concerns. This might include where the alleged behaviour:

- Is serious, and potentially a criminal offence
- Could put pupils in the school at risk
- Is violent
- Involves pupils being forced to use drugs or alcohol
- Involves sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment, such as indecent exposure, sexual assault, upskirting or sexually inappropriate pictures or videos (including the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes)

Within BILTT we are aware that child-on-child abuse is not necessarily carried out with intent due to the child's SEND needs and level of vulnerability, therefore it is essential that we gather the facts within the initial stage to ensure that the incident is being dealt with appropriately in relation to development stage and understanding of the pupil/s involved.

Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this policy is to explain some forms of child-on-child abuse and how to respond. At BILTT we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Online Safety Policy
- Behaviour policy including anti-bullying
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by the:

- Key principles of the Children's Act, 1989 that the child's welfare is paramount
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025

Creating a supportive environment in school and minimising the risk of child-on-child abuse

We recognise the importance of taking proactive action to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse, and of creating a supportive environment where victims feel confident in reporting incidents.

To achieve this, we will:

- Challenge any form of derogatory or sexualised language or inappropriate behaviour between children, including requesting or sending sexual images
- Be vigilant to issues that particularly affect different genders – for example, sexualised or aggressive touching or grabbing towards female pupils, and initiation or hazing type violence with respect to boys
- Ensure our curriculum helps to educate pupils about appropriate behaviour and consent
- Ensure pupils can easily and confidently report abuse using our reporting systems
- Ensure staff reassure victims that they are being taken seriously
- Be alert to reports of sexual violence and/or harassment that may point to environmental or systemic problems that could be addressed by updating policies, processes and the curriculum, or could reflect wider issues in the local area that should be shared with safeguarding partners

Support children who have witnessed sexual violence, especially rape or assault by penetration. We will do all we can to make sure the victim, alleged perpetrator(s) and any witnesses are not bullied or harassed

Consider intra-familial harms and any necessary support for siblings following a report of sexual violence and/or harassment.

Ensure staff are trained to understand:

How to recognise the indicators and signs of child-on-child abuse, and know how to identify it, respond and report.

- That even if there are no reports of child-on-child abuse in school, it does not mean it is not happening – staff should maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here'.
- That if they have any concerns about a child's welfare, they should report them on my concern immediately, and that victims may not always make a direct report. For example:
 - Children can show signs or act in ways they hope adults will notice and react to
 - A friend may make a report
 - A member of staff may overhear a conversation
 - A child's behaviour might indicate that something is wrong

That certain children may face additional barriers to telling someone because of their vulnerability, disability, gender, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation.

That a pupil harming a peer could be a sign that the child is being abused. themselves, and that this would fall under the scope of this policy.

The important role they play in preventing child-on-child abuse and responding where they believe a child may be at risk from it.

That social media is likely to play a role in the fall-out from any incident or alleged incident, including for potential contact between the victim, alleged perpetrator(s) and friends from either side.

Be aware that children can abuse other children online through:

- Abusive, harassing, and misogynistic messages
- Non-consensual sharing of indecent nude and semi-nude images and/or videos, especially around chat groups.
- Sharing of abusive images and pornography, to those who don't want to receive such content which is also a criminal offence.
- Sharing of misinformation or disinformation.

- 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.
- Recognise that any 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.

Safeguarding issues linked to child-on-child abuse include;

- Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying).
- Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm, which can include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse,
- Sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault, which can 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 stand alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse,
- Up skirting which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification or cause the victim humiliation distress or alarm.
- Sending nudes or semi-nudes; the consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos,
- Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals which can include an online element,
- Exploitation of others by peers: criminal, financial, sexual.
- Poor emotional well-being.
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers,
- 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,

Please see Appendix 1 for details.

This abuse can:

- occur between children of different ages
- 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 for example:
 - o significant disruption in their own lives
 - o exposure to domestic abuse or witnessing or suffering abuse
 - o educational under-achievement
 - o 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. The Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Deputy, have to make their own judgements about each specific case and should use this policy, and the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy to guide them.

Responsibility

All staff must fulfil their role identified in the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy. Child-on-child abuse is referenced in the BILTT Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. The sensitive nature and specific issues involved with child-on-child abuse necessitate separate policy guidance.

At BILTT 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 wellbeing.

Procedures for dealing with allegations of child-on-child abuse

If a pupil makes an allegation of abuse against another pupil:

- You must record the allegation on My concern and tell the DSL, but do not investigate it
- If you cannot contact a DSL/ DDSL and a child is in significant, immediate danger call 999.

The DSL/DDSL will

- Always take complaints seriously
- Assess needs of victim and alleged perpetrator, listening to their views and those of any witnesses
- Inform parents/ carers as appropriate, telling them what action will be put in place to prevent further incidents
- Contact the local authority children's social care team and follow its advice, as well as the police if the allegation involves a potential criminal offence
- Put a risk assessment and support plan into place for all children involved (including the victim(s), the child(ren) against whom the allegation has been made and any others affected) with a named person they can talk to if needed. This will include considering school transport as a potentially vulnerable place for a victim or alleged perpetrator(s) and work with these staff.
- Contact the children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), if appropriate

Take the lead role in planning support and any disciplining of the alleged perpetrator(s). We will provide support at the same time as taking any disciplinary action.

Ensure preventative strategies are put in place to reduce the risk of further harm

Recording Sexualised Behaviour on My Concern

- Be clear, explicit and non-avoidant, and avoid vague statements or euphemisms
- Record as soon as possible, as you can quickly forget or confuse detail

Follow the prompts on My Concern

- Use proper names for body parts but record exactly any language or vocabulary used by the child. Use the child's exact words in quotation marks
- Note where and when the incident happened and whether anyone else was around

After Care

It is important that following the incident the children 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 children following the incident(s) are imperative.

If Harmful sexual behaviours are involved, support may utilise the Lucy Faithfull Foundation's tool kit [Home - Shore](#)

Preventative Strategies

Child- on-child abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most robust policies and support processes. It is important to develop appropriate strategies to proactively prevent peer on peer abuse. This school has an open environment where children and young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them – in a way that is appropriate to their individual needs and levels of understanding. There is a strong and positive curriculum that tackles such issues as prejudiced behaviour and gives children an open forum to talk things through rather than seek one on one opportunities to be harmful to one another. Staff will 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. Guidance can be found:

[HSB framework and audit | NSPCC Learning](#)

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding is based on understanding, and responding to the risk of harm to which children can be exposed, and/or harm which they can experience, beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that children form in their communities, schools, and online can feature violence, coercive control, and abuse. Parents can have little influence over these contexts, and the risk of harm to which children can be exposed, and/or harm which they can experience, outside of the family, can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore, BILTT will work closely with families, social care practitioners, police. Early Help and voluntary agencies to engage with individuals and sectors that do have influence over/within extra familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these extra-familial contexts is a critical part of safeguarding practices. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that children are vulnerable to, and can experience, abuse in a range of social contexts.

Appendix 1 Types of Abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between children 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.

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 or consequence to be undertaken.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment

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

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 or 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'; and
- 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.

Bullying

Bullying is intentional unwanted, repeated, 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 aggressive 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

Online Bullying / Cyber bullying

Online Bullying / Cyberbullying is the use of technology (social networking, messaging, text messages, e-mail, chat rooms etc.) to harass threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above.

- Online bullying can take many forms:
- Abusive or threatening texts, emails or messages
- Posting abusive comments on social media sites
- Sharing humiliating videos or photos of someone else
- Stealing someone's online identity
- Spreading rumours online
- Trolling – sending someone menacing or upsetting messages through social networks, chatrooms or games
- Developing hate sites about another person
- Prank calls or messages
- Group bullying or exclusion online
- Anonymous messaging
- Encouraging a young person to self-harm
- Pressuring children to send sexual messages or engaging in sexual conversations

Sharing nudes or semi nudes (previously known as sexting)

In the latest advice for education settings (UKCIS, 2025), this is defined as the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images, videos or live streams online by young people under the age of 18. Nudes and semi-nudes can be shared online via social media, gaming platforms, chat apps, forums, or involve sharing between devices using offline services. Alternative terms used by children and young people may include 'dick pics' or 'pics'. The motivations for taking and sharing nude and semi-nudes are not always sexually or criminally motivated.

This advice does not apply to adults sharing nudes or semi-nudes of under 18-year olds. This is a form of child sexual abuse and must be referred to the police as a matter of urgency. Further details can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-how-to-respond-to-an-incident-overview>

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, gang 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.

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) and sexual identity.

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.

Recognising Child-on-Child Abuse

An assessment of an incident between peers should be completed and consider:

- Chronological and developmental ages of everyone involved
- Difference in their power or authority in relation to age, race, gender, physical, emotional or intellectual vulnerability
- All alleged physical and verbal aspects of the behaviour and incident
- Whether the behaviour involved inappropriate sexual knowledge or motivation
- The degree of physical aggression, intimidation, threatening behaviour or bribery
- The effect on the victim
- Any attempts to ensure the behaviour and incident is kept a secret
- The child or young person's motivation or reason for the behaviour, if they admit that it occurred
- Whether this was a one-off incident, or longer in duration

It is important to deal with a situation of child-on-child abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts. It is equally important to 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. Avoid language that may create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled. Staff will talk to the children in a calm and consistent manner. Staff will not be prejudiced, judgmental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

Appendix 2: Points to consider

What are the Ages and Needs of the Children Involved?

How old are the young people involved in the incident and is there any age difference between those involved? Speak to all staff who were present and children dependant on age and understanding, using **consistent language** and **open questions**. The easiest way to do this is not to have a line of questioning but to ask the young people to tell you what happened? Only interrupt the young person from this to gain clarity with open questions, "where, when, why, who". What happened? Who observed/saw the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene? Consider using different communication strategies dependant on the child's needs.

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? Think around language used regarding non-verbal pupils? 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 understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person?

Repetition?

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered has the behaviour persisted to an individual after the issue has already been discussed or dealt with?

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?

What support they require depends on the individual young person?

- It may be that they wish to seek one to one support via a staff member, or they may want time away from the class.
- 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 within the school improving peer groups/relationships with other children

Some restorative justice work with all those involved may be required.

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?

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 to consider whether it is appropriate to receive 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.