Peer Abuse

Peer abuse is behaviour by an individual or group, intending to physically, sexually or emotionally hurt others.

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

- Bullying (including cyber bullying)
- Gender based violence
- Sexual assaults and sexting.

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.

School staff, alongside their Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or Deputy, have to make their own judgements about each specific case and should use the guidance on this page to help.

Other useful policies in the Schools & other education settings section of the Safeguarding Sheffield Children website:

- **E-Safety & Cyber-bullying, Sept 16**
- **E-Safeguarding, Sept 16**
- **Photographs, Video's & Other Images, Sept 16**
- **Mobile Phone Use by Pupils, Sept 16**

Recognising peer 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
- What was 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

Cyber-bullying **& sexting happens 'online' through information technology with a widespread audience & devices to communicate through.**
This form of bullying can occur at any time in or outside of school or college but should be assessed by staff if it involves a student.

Taking Action:

- **Always take complaints seriously**
- **Never ask a student for a written statement, it can interfere with a criminal investigation**
- **Assess needs of victim and perpetrator**
- **Consider referral to Police or Social Care**
- **Contribute to multi-agency assessments**
- **Convene a risk management meeting**
- **Record all incidents and all action taken**

Governors should ensure that their policy:

- Includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer abuse

- Sets out how allegations will be investigated and dealt with

- Reflect the different forms this abuse can take and make clear that it is abuse and should not be tolerated

- Is clear to parents, students & staff so they are able to respond to incidents quickly

- Is clear about how victims and perpetrators will be assessed and supported

- Is regularly evaluated and updated

- Identifies resources to help with particular problems

- Addresses effective staff training which helps staff to understand their legal responsibilities, how to resolve problems, and where to seek support

- Makes it easy for pupils to report all forms of bullying so that they are assured that they will be listened to and incidents acted on

- Ensures that disciplinary processes are applied fairly, consistently and reasonably and take account of special educational needs, disabilities and vulnerability of students

Schools & colleges should:

- Have an ethos where students & staff treat each other with respect and understand how their actions affect others

- Openly discuss any issues that could motivate bullying with staff and students

- Address issues early between pupils which might later provoke conflict

- Develop strategies to help to prevent bullying

- Involve students & parents to ensure they know what to do to prevent & report concerns

- Create an inclusive, safe environment where pupils can openly discuss issues without fear

- Invest in skills to help staff understand the needs of SEND, disabled and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pupils

- Work with the wider community & agencies to tackle issues that occur outside the setting

Multi-agency approach:

If a child or young person has harmed someone, all agencies must be aware of their responsibilities to both the victim and the alleged abuser.

The needs of the victim/s must always be paramount and separate multi-agency management and assessment of both the victim and the alleged abuser is essential.

Multi-agency assessments of both the victim and perpetrator should consider the:

- Nature and extent of the abusive behaviour, using expert professional advice if required

- Context of the behaviour including unmet developmental and behavioural needs

- Child or young person's family and social circumstances

- Risk to self and to others, including household, extended family, school, peer group or wider social network

Decisions for local agencies include:

- What is the most appropriate course of action within the criminal justice system?

- Whether the victim/abuser should be the subject of a child protection conference

- What action is required from agencies to address the needs of the young abuser

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Remember: If child or young person has or is likely to suffer significant harm, refer to Police and/or Social Care immediately

A young abuser should be the subject of a child protection conference if considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm.

Useful links and resources:

- SSCB Child Protection & Safeguarding Procedures
- Working Together to Safeguard Children, DforE 2015
- Bullying UK
- Childline (NSPCC) at: **0800 1111**
- Bullying at School
- Stonewall - various resources
- Anti-Bullying Alliance
- Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre