



# **Burnside College**

## **Peer on Peer Abuse Policy**

### **2021 - 2022**

#### **Introduction**

Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2020 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'. The document also states it is most important to ensure opportunities of seeking the voice of the child are heard, 'Governing bodies, and school leaders should ensure the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account when determining what action to take and what services to provide'. While it is recommended that Peer on Peer abuse is part of the Child Protection Policy, due to the sensitive nature and specific issues involved with peer on peer abuse we have completed this separate policy guidance template.

At Burnside 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.

#### **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 Burnside we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Child Protection Policy

## Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in schools and outside of school (more common) and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed and what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual. Also we need to explore 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. 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. Each form of abuse or behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

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

Physical abuse may include hitting, kicking, nipping, 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 punishment to be undertaken.

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

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always planned 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 well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse. If this causes offense or upset to another child/ victim it is classified as abuse.

### Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic etc.)

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. 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.

### Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, email, chat rooms or social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above.

It is important to state that cyberbullying 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. 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. We would always encourage parents to contact the police if an incident of this nature takes place as school cannot always reduce this behaviour as minimising it depends on supervision from parents.

### **Sharing pornographic images/videos**

This happens 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. School staff would contact the police and raise a child concern in such instances.

### **Upskirting**

Upskirting 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. This is illegal and all incidents must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

### **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 idea behind this practice is that it 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 – in particular, prejudices to do with 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 (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual).

### **Teenage relationship abuse**

Teenage relationship abuse is defined as 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.

### 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.

- It is important to deal with a situation of peer abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get the true facts around what has occurred, as soon after the incident as the child may have forgotten. 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. **Please refer this directly to a member of the PL team immediately using CPOMS - under the category of PEER on PEER abuse (including deliberate and targeted name calling of a sexual or homophobic nature).**
- In all cases of peer on peer abuse it is necessary that all staff who respond to the allegation (**safeguarding leads/progress leaders**) are trained in dealing with such incidents, talking to young people and instigating immediate support in a calm and consistent manner. Staff should not be prejudiced, judgmental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.
- If from the information it is believed any young person to be at risk of significant harm or a perpetrator a risk to others **a DSL will make a safeguarding referral to social care immediately (where a crime has been committed the police should be involved also) please ensure C Jenkins of N Stephenson are contacted as a matter of urgency as well as following up with a CPOMS referral.** If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and made a decision on what will happen next then you will be informed on your 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. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take.

### 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 we will 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. If a young person is deemed to be 'Gillick Competent' following the 'Fraser' guidelines and does not wish you to share the information with parents, then the school must consider this especially for example if the young person is pregnant and this is why they are being bullied (unless this has occurred through significant harm in which case a criminal/social care case is likely or the young person is under the age of 13).

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the school should encourage the young person to share the information with their parents or even with them (they may be scared to tell parents that they are being harmed in any way). Where school can evidence they are acting in the best interests of the young person they would not be criticised, however this would not be the case if they actively breached the rights and choices of the young person. The best way to inform parents is face to face. Although this may be time consuming, the nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a young person may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another.

Points to consider:

- 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?
- 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 and appropriately resolved?

## 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 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 the support of family **(potentially through EHA/PDP)** 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. through extended tutor time. It may be that through the curriculum of PSHE 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 (learning mentor/ progress leader), support strategies for managing future issues and identified services to offer additional support. The use of learning support and allocation of a learning passport may be considered.

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 a TAF/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 (determined by police) it may be that this young person cannot be educated on site until the investigation has concluded. In which case, the young person will be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off site. Where possible we would seek a Moorbridge SSC placement.
- 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. This will also result in the need for a risk assessment.
- The school may also choose a consequence such as exclusion or internal exclusion/inclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour or whilst appropriate intervention can be put in place.

## **Preventative Strategies for Schools and Settings**

We believe it is important to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of peer on peer abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way. This can be supported by ensuring that we have an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This will be strengthened through a strong and positive RSE/lesson zero 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. We will use regular student voice activities to ensure that appropriate issues are identified and that we rapidly adapt the curriculum to meet school needs.

To enable such an open and honest environment we will work hard to ensure all staff feel confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of young people including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, it is necessary for whole staff training and CPD around abusive behaviours and talking to young people in a way that continues to create an open and honest environment without prejudice. It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. It is necessary that staff 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.

It is important that signposting is available to young people in the event that they don't feel confident raising an issue to staff or a peer. We have a student support team who can enable access to support services on a wide range of issues so young people can seek their own solutions should they wish to. We also have a school council and pupil voice to encourage

young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' to help create a positive ethos in school and one where all young people understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

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