

Safeguarding News



Peer on Peer Abuse

Issue 4, Date April 2021

What is Peer on Peer Abuse

Children can abuse other children. This is generally referred to as peer on peer abuse and can take many forms. This can include (but is not limited to) bullying (including cyberbullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting and initiating/hazing type violence and rituals.



Peer-on-peer abuse: some facts

- Rates of violence are higher for girls in England than in any other country.
- 1 in 3 girls have experienced sexual violence from a partner before they turn 18 years old.
- 4 in 10 teenage girls have experienced sexual coercion when they have been aged between 13 and 17 years old.
- One in five girls in England have suffered physical violence from their boyfriend.
- 48 percent of girls have experienced instances of emotional and online abuse from their partners.
- Young people have reported that physical, sexual and emotional abusing, as well as being abused by their peers, is a means of survival in gang affected neighbourhoods.

Who does it affect?

- Two thirds of contact sexual abuse experienced by children under the age of 17 was perpetrated by someone under 18 years old.
- Girls and young women are more frequently identified as those who are abused by their peers, reporting it as having a negative impact on their lives.
- Boys and young men are more likely to be identified as abusers, and less likely to say that partner abuse impacts them negatively.
- Peer-on-peer abuse tends to be experienced by children aged 10 and upwards, with those abusing them being slightly older; however, cases of eight year olds being abused, and inflicting abuse have been reported.
- Children with intra-familial abuse in their histories, or those living with domestic abuse, are more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse.
- Children in care, or those that have experienced bereavement, are more at risk of abusing, or being abused by, their peers.
- Black and minority ethnic children are often under-identified as victims, and are over-identified as perpetrators instead.

What are the impacts of abuse on a child?

Peer-on-peer abuse can manifest itself and impact a child in many ways, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Causing physical injuries
- Encouraging drug and alcohol abuse
- Going missing/running away
- Compromising their sexual health
- Committing criminal offences
- Acting disengaged from school
- Affecting their mental health and emotional wellbeing

Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children

You are probably all aware now of the website, Everyone's Invited, a platform for people to share experiences both recent and historical of sexual abuse while in school or by people from school. The website was launched in June 2020 and now has more than 14,000 testimonials on it. It is important that we remind ourselves of our responsibilities regarding Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment.

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. Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment will likely find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap, they can occur online and offline (both physical and verbal) and are never acceptable. It is important that all victims are taken seriously and offered appropriate support. Staff should be aware that some groups are potentially more at risk. Evidence shows girls, children with SEND and LGBT children are at greater risk.

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.

The response to a report of sexual violence or sexual harassment

The initial response to a report from a child is important. It is essential that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. A victim should never be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment. Nor should a victim ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report. If staff have a concern about a child or a child makes a report to them they should speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or a deputy) immediately. Do not ask questions and investigate this, leave this to the Safeguarding Team and appropriate external agencies.

For further information or guidance, on any of the topics covered in this newsletter or any Safeguarding concerns please contact a member of your Academy Safeguarding Team.