



Aysgarth School

Peer on Peer Abuse Policy (10a)

Responsibility of Paul Barlow
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Peer on Peer Abuse Policy and Procedure

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 that ‘*Governing bodies, proprietors and school or college leaders should ensure the child’s wishes and feelings are taken into account when determining what action to take and what services to provide. Systems should be in place for children to express their views and give feedback. Ultimately, any system and processes should operate with the **best** interests of the child at their heart.*’

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.

At Aysgarth School 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 for that individual child’s emotional and mental health and well-being. The school is clear that abuse should never be tolerated or passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh” or “part of growing up”.

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.

The following procedures are in place to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse;

- allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other child affected by peer on peer abuse will be supported. During the Covid-19 period of home learning a focus of peer on peer abuse through social media was the main focus of learning and education.

At Aysgarth School we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

Counter Bullying Policy

Child Protection Policy

Aysgarth Acceptable Use Policy & Code of Conduct Policy

Framework and Legislation

This policy is supported by the key principle of the Children Act, 1989 that the child's welfare is paramount. Another key document that focuses adult thinking towards the views of the child is Working Together (2018), highlighting that every assessment of a child, '*must be informed by the views of the child*' and within that '*It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child when planning appropriate services.*' This is clearly echoed by Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2020 through ensuring procedures are in place in schools and settings to hear the voice of the child.

Introduction to abuse and harmful behaviour

All staff should be aware that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via peer on peer abuse. This is most likely to include, but may not be limited to, bullying (including cyberbullying), sexual violence, sexual harassment and sexting. All staff should be clear as to the schools policy and procedures with regards to peer on peer abuse.

Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in schools and settings 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 and 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'. There must be recognition of the gendered nature of peer on peer abuse (i.e. that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators), and that all peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously; Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender specific e.g. boys being sexually touched/assaulted and boys being subject to initiation/hazing type violence (KCSIE 2020). It is important to consider the forms of abuse that may take place 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 prejudiced 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 violence and sexual harassment, upskirting)

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 well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language or inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse. For more information on Sexual violence and harassment please refer to the Aysgarth School Child Protection Policy

Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic etc.)

Bullying is unwanted, 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 those 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.**

Cyber bullying

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter 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. This is also supported by the Communications Act 2003, Section 127, which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive, indecent, obscene, menacing or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another, could

also be deemed to be criminal behaviour.

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.

Sexting

Sexting is 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.

Serious Violence

Children are at risk from, or are involved with serious violent crime. These may include increased absence from school, and changing friendships or relationships with older individuals or groups, a significant decline in performance, signs of self harm or a significant change in wellbeing, or signs of assault or unexplained injuries. Unexplained gifts of new possessions could also indicate that children have been approached by, or involved with individuals associated with criminal networks or gangs.

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, emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised. This is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality, 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 - 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. 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. In all cases of peer on peer abuse it is necessary that all staff 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, judgemental, dismissive or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

Gather the Facts

Speak to all the young people involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them (**Aysgarth worry form to be used**) and use **consistent language** and **open questions** for each account. 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 the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?)

All of this must be recorded on an 'Aysgarth Worry Form' and handed into the Headmaster or the Deputy Headmaster.

Consider the Intent (begin to Risk Assess)

Has this been a deliberate or contrived situation for a young person to be able to harm another?

Decide on your next course of action

If from the information that you gather you believe any young person to be at **risk of significant harm, then the Safeguarding Lead/Deputy Safeguarding Lead/Yourself must make a safeguarding referral to social care immediately (where a crime has been committed the police should be involved also)**. If this is the case, once social care has been contacted and a decision has been made, 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 pupils and or parents. It may also be that social care feel that it does not meet their criteria in which case you may challenge that decision, with that individual or their line manager. If on discussion, however, you agree with the decision, you may then be left to inform parents.

Informing parents

If, once appropriate advice has been sought from police/social care you have agreement to inform parents, or have been allocated that role from the other services involved, then the Headmaster will need to 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 the right course of action.

Points to consider:

What are the ages 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, is it 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?

In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear cut. If you are concerned or unsure as to whether or not there is any risk involved, please seek advice from Children's Services Social Care.

Repetition

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? Furthermore, it must be considered, has the behaviour persisted 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 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 in improving peer

groups/relationships with other young people, or some solution focused approach work with all those involved may be required. (Please see the Aysgarth Countering Bullying policy)

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group for example a speaker on cyber bullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PSHE/REW 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/welfare plan can be put in place for them whilst in school, so that they have someone named that they can talk to and provide support strategies for managing future issues and identify services to offer additional support.

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 CAF/School Counselling/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 as set out in the school behaviour policy.

The school may also choose a punishment as a consequence such as exclusion or internal exclusion/seclusion for a period of time/full exclusion.

This may be in the form of a solution focused approach 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 whilst off site.

After care

It is important that following the incident the young people 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). In which case, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative.

Preventative Strategies for Aysgarth School

Aysgarth School works hard to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of peer on peer abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way.

Firstly, and most importantly for Aysgarth School is recognition that peer on peer abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. It is important to continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in supporting young people, so they talk about any issues and share information with all staff. All staff have continued CPD training with the school counsellor on these issues. All boarding staff, including the matron team, receive further training on peer on peer abuse.

This can be supported by ensuring that there is an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them. This is strengthened through a strong and positive PSHE/SMSC/REW 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. All pupils in forms 4 and 5 have Teenagers Translated sessions on a termly basis in which such issues are raised and discussed.

To enable such an open and honest environment Aysgarth School ensures the whole workforce feels confident and enabled to talk about issues, and challenge perceptions of young people including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. 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.

Finally, pupils at Aysgarth have the opportunity (school council) to reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding policies within the school. Having a pupil voice and encouraging young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour', helps to create a positive ethos in the school and one where all young people understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

All pupils in school annually complete an online survey (living together) which is used to target and address key areas within the school community.