

Sexual violence: rape, assault by penetration, or sexual assault (intentional sexual touching)

Sexual harassment: unwanted conduct of a sexual nature – such as sexual comments, sexual jokes or taunting, physical behaviour like interfering with clothes, or online harassment such as sexting

Sexual activity is an offence if:

- Person B (the victim) does not consent
- Person A (the perpetrator) does not reasonably believe that Person B consents

Someone consents if they:

- Agree by choice
- Have the freedom and capacity to choose

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub - MASH	01452 426565 Option 1
Gloucestershire Safeguarding Education Partnership	gsep@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Local Authority Designated Officers for Allegations LADO – Nigel Hatten and Rosalind Waters	01452 426994 amadmin@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Legal Services	01452 328746

Police

Gloucestershire Police	101
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References:
Safeguarding Network (2021) - <https://safeguarding.network/safeguarding-resources/peer-peer-abuse/>
The Key

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership



Peer-on-Peer Abuse

Information leaflet for staff

August 2021

PEER-ON-PEER ABUSE

Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms and include serious bullying, relationship abuse, domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or gender based violence.

This form of abuse occurs when there is any kind of physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse or coercive control exercised between young people. It includes bullying, cyberbullying, sexual violence, harassment and sexting.

It should be recognised that the behaviour in question is harmful to both the perpetrator (who is the young person) and the victim. Behaviour may be intimate or non-intimate.

DEFINITION: Young people can abuse other young people. 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, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers; causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent; consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi nudes images and or videos; upskirting and initiating/hazard type violence and rituals [Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2021](#)

SPOTTING THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

- absence from setting or disengagement from setting activities
- physical injuries
- mental or emotional health issues
- becoming withdrawn – lack of self esteem
- lack of sleep
- alcohol or substance misuse
- changes in behaviour
- inappropriate behaviour for age
- abusive towards others

VULNERABLE GROUPS:

- abuse can happen to anyone at any age. Both boys and girls can be victims;

- black and minority ethnic young people often under identified as victims and over-identified as perpetrators;
- young people with intra-familial abuse in their histories or those living with domestic abuse are more likely to be vulnerable;
- young people in care and those who have experienced loss of a parent, sibling or friend through bereavement;
- young people with SEND are three times more likely to be abused than their peers;
- young people who have been abused or have abused their peers.

Abusers can be younger than their victims.

It is important to remember that as with all safeguarding issues, peer-on-peer abuse can impact on young people without these characteristics. The issue facing professionals is that these characteristics will often make the young person more visible, whilst those without any of the characteristics above may be less likely to come into contact with professionals.

For example, when a young person goes missing from care (even for a small amount of time) the professional network will know about it, whilst if a young person regularly returns home later than their curfew their parents may not necessarily tell anyone.

It is therefore important to look at interlinking factors and not isolated incidents.

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING AND POWER DYNAMICS

It is important to recognise that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts as they form different relationships in their neighbourhoods, educational setting and online and these can feature violence and abuse which is often hidden to adults. Peer influence and pressure is a major factor in decisions made by young people to join groups. Keeping Children Safe in Education highlights the importance of awareness of factors across an educational setting's local community so they understand where young people are living, who they come into contact with and the dynamics at play.

Understanding the power dynamic that can exist between young people is very important in helping to identify and respond to peer-on-peer abuse – there will be a power imbalance and this may be due to age or status – social or economic – and the perpetrator in one situation may be the powerless victim in another so it is essential to try to understand the perpetrator and what is driving the behaviour before taking sanctions.

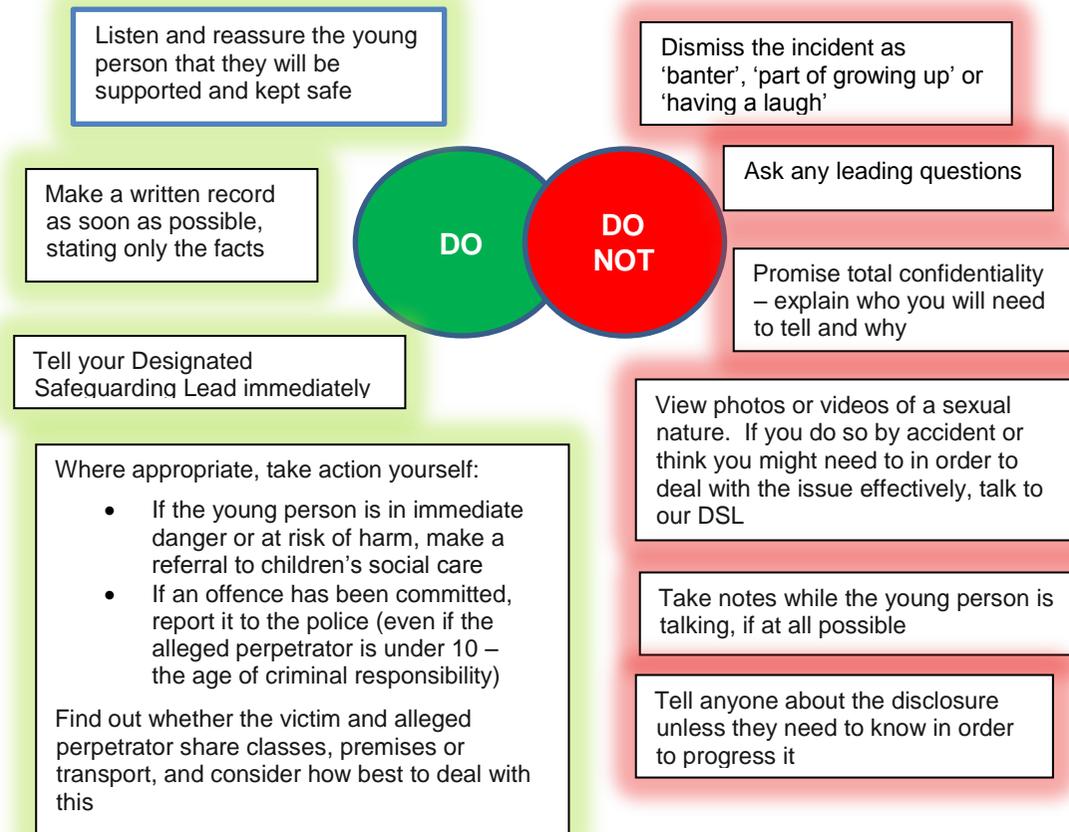
A thorough investigation of the concerns should take place to include any wider contexts which may be known. However, the victim should always be made to feel safe and actions will need to be taken to separate victim and perpetrator and ensure that the abuse is not allowed to continue. The issues of the interplay between power, choice and consent should be explored with young people.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Create an environment based on equality and informed choice** allowing young people to know their rights, what to do if they are unhappy with something and what it means to give true consent.
- **It could happen here** – staff having the attitude to believe that is happening in your setting even without disclosures.
- **Understand your local community** and the context in which young people at your setting are growing up.
- **Ensure young people know the risks** – talk about peer-on-peer abuse in an age appropriate way. Create opportunities for young people to weigh up risks and recognise that sometimes this means they will take risks we as adults and professionals disagree with. Our role is to be influencing young people to be making the healthiest long-term choices and keeping them safe from harm in the short-term.
- **Check young people have safe relationships** – in their family, with their peers and with your staff. Create the environment where it is OK to talk, even about the most difficult things.
- **Spot the signs and know what to do** – use the checklists above along with your safeguarding procedures and be confident to raise peer-on-peer as a possibility.

Child on Child Sexual Abuse What to do if a young person makes a disclosure:

Make sure you understand your child protection/safeguarding policy and procedures for dealing with peer-on-peer abuse, and follow these.



DEFINITIONS:

Child-on-child sexual abuse: when a young person (anyone under the age of 18) commits an act of sexual violence or harassment against another young person