Meeting Individual Needs

Child on Child Abuse Toolkit

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Terminology

For the purposes of this resource, unless otherwise specified, for consistency, we use

the same terminology as the DfE in KCSIE as follows:

'Child', 'children': means a person/persons under the age of 18.5

'Boy(s),' 'girl(s)': means a child/children whose biological sex is male and female respectively, as well as trans boys and trans girls, whose gender identity will be different from their biological sex. It is acknowledged that there will also be some

children who identify as non-binary or gender fluid and who will not recognise the term boy or girl in respect to themselves.

'Victim' and **'alleged perpetrator'**: the DfE

states that, with respect to:

• **'victim'**: "It is a widely recognised and understood term. It is important that schools and colleges recognise that not everyone who has been subjected to abuse considers themselves a victim or would want to be described in this way. Ultimately, schools and colleges should be conscious of this when managing any incident and be prepared to use any term with which the individual child is most comfortable." We note that the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) refers to the 'child who has been harmed,' and LimeCulture refers to 'the reporter/reporting student/pupil'; and

• **'alleged perpetrator(s)'** and, where appropriate, **'perpetrator(s)'**: "These are widely used and recognised terms and the most appropriate aid to effective drafting of guidance. However, schools and colleges should think very carefully about terminology, especially when speaking in front of children, not least because in some cases the abusive behaviour will have been harmful to the perpetrator as well. As above, the use of appropriate terminology will be for schools and colleges to determine, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis.

The point at which an allegation of child-on-child abuse may become substantiated – and therefore the child-on-child incident is no longer alleged – may differ in cases. However, for ease of reference, this resource uses the terms 'alleged' and 'allegedly' throughout.

'Child-on-child abuse': the DfE states that: "All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as child-on-child abuse), and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online." Child-on-child abuse is the term chosen by the DfE and, by definition, it applies to abuse by one child of another child – regardless of the age, of stage of development, or any age differential between them. The work of Professor Carlene Firmin on Contextual Safeguarding (see below) focuses on peer-on-peer abuse, which she defines as a narrower category of abuse between peers – ie abuse between children of the same or similar age, or stage of development, and during adolescence". In that sense, peer-on-peer abuse is a sub-set of child-on-child abuse, of which practitioners

should be aware. However, for the purposes of this resource, only the term child-on-child abuse is used, as adopted by the DfE.8

'Zero tolerance': in using this term, we adopt the following principles from the UN Women's definition of zero tolerance with respect to harassment, as follows:

• "At the heart of zero tolerance practice is the certainty that the organisation will never do nothing in response to knowledge of child-on-child abuse, will always support those who report, and will proactively ensure that equality and non-discrimination inform its work.

• Zero tolerance in practice requires taking all allegations seriously. It does not mean that the same actions will always be taken if a report is upheld; instead there should be a range of options with proportionality being a principle in determining consequences.

• Zero tolerance means that the leadership will make it possible and safe for anyone, no matter their position or contractual status, to be active in shaping a climate where child-on-child abuse is never ignored, minimised or excused.

• Contradictory signals risk damaging the reputation, internal and external, of the organisation and the belief of the staff or children concerned. that there is serious intent to for positive culture to be upheld.

• In short, zero-tolerance means an ambition to create contexts and cultures where child-on-child abuse is not tolerated and taking a proportionate and appropriate response to every alleged incident. It does not necessarily mean the use of sanctions in all cases, and where sanctions may be considered, schools should ensure that they do not disproportionately impact racially minoritised children, those with disabilities and those already known to local authority children's social care.

'Child protection policy': Haughton school's 'safeguarding and child protection policy,' encompasses the promotion of the welfare of children as well as the child protection element which refers to activities undertaken to prevent children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

What is child-on-child abuse?

Child-on-child abuse can take various forms, including (but not limited to):

• Bullying – including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory (including misogyny/misandry) bullying.

• Hate incidents and hate crimes – which may also include an online element.

• Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse') – which may also include an online element.

• Physical abuse – such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm. This may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse.

• Racism – occurs when a person is treated less favourably because of their skin colour, nationality, ethnicity, or cultural group. Racist behaviour can include verbal abuse, physical attacks, exclusion from activities or opportunities and microaggressions, which can be conscious and unconscious. It can occur in person or online.

• Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals – this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element.

• Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) – is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive. HSB can occur online and/or face to face, and can also occur simultaneously between the two – and includes, for example: › Sexual violence – such as: – rape – assault by penetration – sexual assault – causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent – such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party – threatening the above behaviour, whether in person or by digital communications.

Sexual harassment – which is 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline and both inside and outside of school – can include (but is not limited to):

– sexual comments, such as: telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance, calling someone sexualised names, intrusive questions about a person's sex life, and spreading sexual rumours

– sexual "jokes" or taunting

– suggestive looks, staring or leering

– sexual gestures

– physical behaviour, such as: deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes (schools should be considering when any of this crosses a line into sexual violence

– it is important to talk to and consider the experience of the victim

– displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature

– upskirting – which is a criminal offence, involving taking a picture or film under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their underwear, genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm, and

– online sexual harassment – this may be stand-alone or part of a wider pattern of sexual violence and/or harassment.

It may include: » non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery) » sharing of unwanted explicit content » revenge pornography, which is a criminal offence » sexualised online bullying » unwanted sexual comments and messages, including on social media » sexual exploitation, coercion

and threats, and coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they are not comfortable with online.

Misogyny – commonly defined as dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against girls and women. Schools and colleges have reported a rise in the number of incidents involving misogynistic language and behaviour, including incidents of sexual harassment even among very young students. Allowing such rhetoric and behaviour to persist can lead to the acceptance or normalisation of bullying, sexual violence and sexual harassment towards girls and women, and to harmful victim-blaming narratives. Misogynistic rhetoric is also commonly connected to extreme machoism or harmful ideas about masculinity which can impose damaging and unrealistic expectations and pressures on male children. There are concerns about such content being promoted or endorsed online, for example, by online influencers using TikTok or other social media platforms. The PSHE Association has commented that "The entry point for young people's first engagement with such content can often seem quite superficial, but social media algorithms can then lead them to increasingly problematic and extreme content. This all comes at an age when young people may be particularly insecure and vulnerable to persuasive narratives. For example, much of this content taps into insecurities about body image and agency. The focus on money, success and power also plays on financial and status insecurities that may lead to risky and even illegal behaviours."

Misandry – commonly defined as dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against boys and men. It should be noted that, whilst a number of the above examples may constitute sexual harassment, they may also (where they are non-consensual) be unlawful in other respects – depending on the facts of a particular case – such as breach of laws governing the possession or sharing of indecent images, breach of privacy or data protection law, breach of the Malicious Communications Act 1988, or constitute stalking or harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
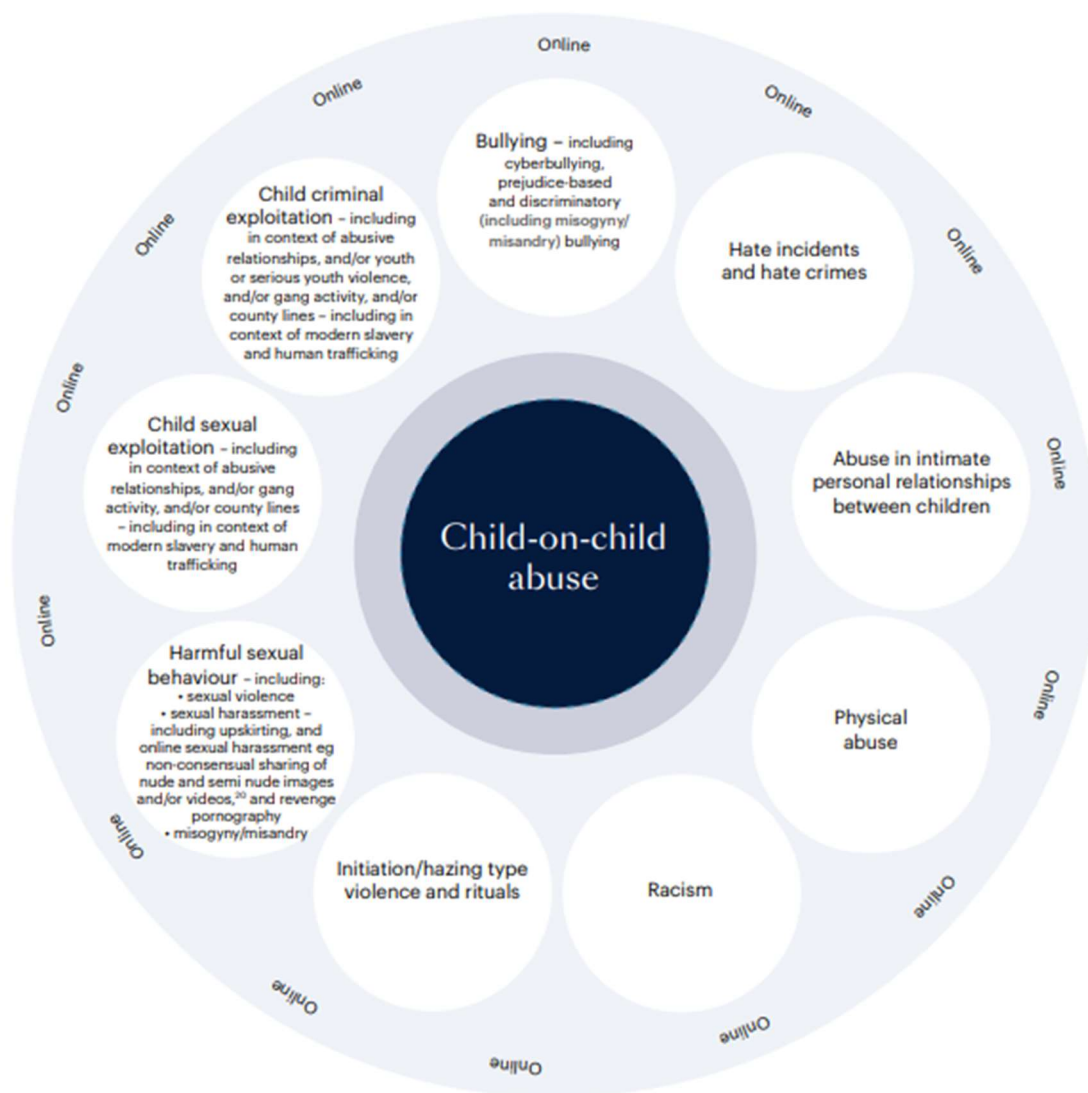
• **Child exploitation:**

- Child sexual exploitation (CSE) – including in the context of abusive relationships, and/or gang activity, and/or county lines – including in the context of modern slavery and human trafficking; and/or › Child criminal exploitation (CCE) – including in the context of abusive relationships, and/or youth or serious youth violence, and/or gang activity, and/ or county lines – including in the context of modern slavery and human trafficking. › Both CSE and CCE are forms of abuse that occur where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into taking part in sexual or criminal activity, in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or through violence or the threat of violence. CSE and CCE can affect children, both male and female, and can include children who have been moved (commonly referred to as trafficking) for the purpose of exploitation. › CSE and CCE do not always involve physical contact; CSE and CCE can also occur through the use of technology.

- Online child-on-child abuse is any form of child-on-child abuse where an element might be facilitated by digital technology, for example, consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/ or videos (sometimes called 'sexting'), online abuse, coercion and exploitation, child-onchild grooming, misogyny/misandry, threatening and hate speech delivered via online means, the distribution of sexualised content (which might be youth-produced, commercial pornography or pseudo sexual images), and harassment.

It is critical to be aware of the role that inequality and discrimination can play in child-on-child abuse. Socio-economic inequality within a school can increase bullying, and racial and ethnic minority status can be a risk factor for victimisation by peers. Children from minoritised groups are at much higher risk for poor health and behavioural outcomes as a result of discriminatory bullying. LGBTQ children may also be at greater risk of abusive behaviour from their peers.

Fig.1 Overview of child-on-child abuse

Online

Online   **Online**

Online

Bullying – including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory (including misogyny/misandry) bullying

Child criminal exploitation – including in context of abusive relationships, and/or youth or serious youth violence, and/or gang activity, and/or county lines – including in context of modern slavery and human trafficking

Hate incidents and hate crimes

Online

Child sexual exploitation – including in context of abusive relationships, and/or gang activity, and/or county lines – including in context of modern slavery and human trafficking

Child-on-child abuse

Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children

Online

Online

Harmful sexual behaviour – including:
• sexual violence
• sexual harassment – including upskirting, and online sexual harassment eg non-consensual sharing of nude and semi nude images and/or videos,[20] and revenge pornography
• misogyny/misandry

Physical abuse

Online

Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals

Racism

Online   **Online**   **Online**   **Online**   **Online**

Overview of child-on-child abuse

Different types of abuse rarely take place in isolation and often indicate wider safeguarding concerns. For example, a teenage girl may be in a sexually exploitative relationship with a teenage boy who is himself being physically abused by a family member or by older boys. Equally, sexual bullying in schools or colleges, or other settings, can result in the sexual exploitation of children by other children. For 16 and 17 year olds who are in intimate personal relationships which are abusive, what may appear to be a case of domestic abuse may also involve sexual exploitation or coercive control. Children's experiences of abuse and/or violence are rarely isolated events, and they can often be linked to other things that are happening in their lives, and to spaces in which they spend their time. Any response to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of child-on-child abuse, and to capture the full context of children's experiences. This can be done by

(i) adopting a Contextual Safeguarding approach – i.e. which understands behaviours as resulting from different systems, structures and contexts in which children may spend time; and (ii) by ensuring that a school's response to alleged incidents of child-on-child abuse takes into account any potential complexity.

How prevalent is child-on-child abuse?

By way of example, with respect to: Bullying, 2019/2020: Ditch the Label's Annual Bullying Survey 2020 found that:

• 25% of over 13,000 12 to 18 year olds across the UK reported having been bullied in the last 12 months (the number of victims has increased by 25% compared to 2019, in which a quarter of those bullied saying they'd received physical and online attacks).

• Of the 25%, 9% reported that the bullying occurred daily, 13% reported that it occurred several times a week, and 8% said weekly.

Of this 25%, 47% felt they were bullied because of attitudes towards their appearance and 11% felt it was because of attitudes towards their sexuality.

In relation to the impact of bullying, 44% of those who reported being bullied in the last 12 months said it left them feeling anxious, 36% said it left them feeling depressed, 33% had suicidal thoughts, 27% had self-harmed and 18% truanted from school/college.22 Bullying, 2021/2022: Baseline data was collected by the Anti-Bullying Alliance from 29,308 pupils aged between 4/5 to 18 years old, who attended 208 schools throughout England, between November 2021 to February 2022.

Key findings include that:

• 24% of pupils report being frequently bullied in the last few weeks.

• Pupils in receipt of Free School Meals (30%), and those with SEND (31%) are significantly more likely to be frequently bullied.

• 6% of pupils report frequently bullying others.

• 6% of pupils report frequently being bullied online.

• Both pupils that are bullied and those that report bullying others are significantly more likely to report that they don't feel they belong at school, they don't get on with their teachers, they don't feel safe at school and they don't like going to school.

• Pupils at secondary school have the poorest wellbeing compared to those at primary, infant and other schools.23 Online bullying: The Office for National Statistics Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020, found that:

• Around one in five (19%) 10 to 15 year olds experienced at least one type of online bullying behaviour – equivalent to 764,000 children. More than half (52%) of those

children who experienced online bullying behaviours said they would not describe these behaviours as bullying, and one in four (26%) did not report their experiences to anyone.

• Being called names, sworn at or insulted and having nasty messages about them sent to them were the two most common online bullying behaviour types, experienced by 10% of all children aged 10 to 15 years.

• Nearly three out of four children (72%) who had experienced an online bullying behaviour experienced at least some of it at school or during school time.

Harmful sexual behaviour: Ofsted found, in its Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, June 2021, that the girls who responded to its questionnaire indicated that the following types of harmful sexual behaviour happened 'a lot' or 'sometimes' between people their age:

Non-contact forms, but face-to-face:

• sexist name-calling – 92%

• rumours about their sexual activity – 81%

• unwanted or inappropriate comments of a sexual nature – 80% Non-contact forms, online or on social media:

• being sent pictures or videos they did not want to see – 88%

• being put under pressure to provide sexual images of themselves – 80%

• having pictures or videos that they sent being shared more widely without their knowledge or consent – 73%

• being photographed or videoed without their knowledge or consent – 59%

• having pictures or videos of themselves that they did not know about being circulated – 51%

Contact forms:

• sexual assault of any kind – 79%

• feeling pressured to do sexual things that they did not want to – 68%

• unwanted touching – 64%

Ofsted states that: "these findings are strongly supported by existing research into harmful sexual behaviour between peers."

What is Contextual Safeguarding?

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to creating safety for children outside of their homes. Taking a Contextual Safeguarding approach means understanding how behaviours like child-on-child abuse take place in different contexts, and can be prevented or driven by wider structural, systemic or cultural factors. In schools this means understanding how the school context can facilitate or inhibit harm, and how relations such as friendships and peers can be sources of strength but also harm.

For school professionals working contextually has two key elements:

• Creating safe school contexts by addressing factors beyond individual children that may undermine safety. For example, school notices, policies, staff training, wider school culture and prevention of harm etc. Ensuring that school professionals, and all those within a Local Safeguarding Partnership, work alongside, rather than just refer into, children's social care, to create safe spaces in which children may have encountered child-on-child abuse.

This may differ to traditional child protection responses where the focus is on families. In addition, it is an approach to understanding, and responding to, the risk of harm to which children can be exposed, and/or harm which they can experience, in extrafamilial contexts, and seeks to include these contexts within prevention, identification, assessment and intervention safeguarding activities. Recognises that as children enter adolescence, they spend increasing amounts of time outside of the home in public environments (including those online) within which they may be exposed to risk of harm and/or experience abuse, and that the different relationships that children form in their neighbourhoods, schools, and online can feature violence, coercive control, and abuse. Parents can have little influence over these contexts, and the risk of harm to which children can be exposed, and/or harm which they can experience, outside of the family, can undermine parent-child relationships; and considers interventions to change the systems or social conditions of the environments in which abuse has occurred. For example, rather than move a child from a school, professionals could work with the school leadership and the children to challenge harmful, gendered school cultures, thus improving the pre-existing school environment.

Therefore, children's educators and social care practitioners, alongside wider safeguarding partnerships, need to engage with individuals and sectors that do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, and recognise that assessment of, and intervention with, these extra-familial contexts is a critical part of safeguarding practices.

Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that children are vulnerable to, and can experience, abuse in a range of social contexts. When adopted by a wider safeguarding partnership, a Contextual Safeguarding approach supports services to respond to different forms of extra-familial harm (including child-on-child abuse) across four 'system-domains'.

These domains require that systems:

1. Target the contexts in which extra-familial harm occurs.

2. Use a child protection and wider child welfare lens in response to extra-familial harm.

3. Feature partnerships with individuals and organisations that have a reach into, or influence over, extra-familial contexts where harm occurs.

4. Measure the contextual impact of their responses to extra-familial harm.

The Contextual Safeguarding Network states that: "'Extra-familial harm' refers to a broad category of harm types, including [child-on-child] harm, sexual and criminal exploitation and bullying. Often these different harm types share overlapping drivers, methods and consequences for young people. Schools can be settings in which young people are harmed and exploited and they can also be settings that support positive peer relationships and safety."

Fig.2 Contextual Safeguarding approach
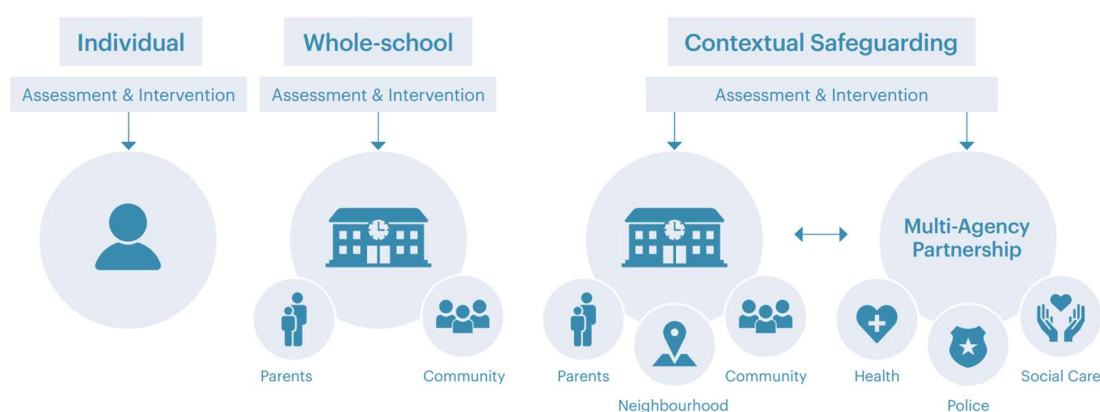
What does Contextual Safeguarding mean for schools and colleges?

As part of their efforts to prevent and address child-on-child abuse, schools and colleges can encapsulate a Contextual Safeguarding approach in their child protection policy, and adopt a whole-school/college community Contextual Safeguarding approach (see Fig.2 above) – which means:

• being aware of and seeking to understand the impact that these wider social contexts may be having on their children;

• creating and embedding a safe culture in the school by, for example, fostering an environment in which all types of extra-familial harm (including child-on-child abuse) are promptly identified and appropriately responded to; effectively implementing policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes; promoting positive and healthy relationships and attitudes to difference (including sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexuality, disability); hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the school or college; training on potential bias and stereotyped assumptions;

• being alert to and monitoring changes in children's' behaviour and/or attendance; and

• contributing to local child protection agendas by, for example, challenging poor threshold decisions about children at risk of harm in extra-familial settings but who are relatively safe within their families; as well as referring concerns about contexts to relevant local agencies (see section entitled 'multi-agency working').

Fig.2 (above) demonstrates that this whole school community approach is by definition already part of a contextual safeguarding approach. As schools embed a whole school community Contextual Safeguarding approach, outlined in this resource, it assists them in working towards the four system-domains outlined above.

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality is the recognition that people's experiences are shaped by their multi-layered identities. A person's interactions with the world are shaped by their ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, class and abilities, and these aspects of a person's identity interrelate. Someone may experience racism, sexism and ageism collectively or individually at different times and in different environments. For example, a teenage Black boy may experience discrimination based on the fact that he is both Black and male.

The effect of his experiences may influence whether he is comfortable accessing support if he is a victim of child-on-child abuse. One aspect of intersectionality that is particularly relevant to managing child-on-child abuse is adultification.[32] This is a form of racial prejudice in which children from minoritised groups are treated as more mature than they actually are by a reasonable social standard of development. This may lead to a failure to recognise victims of child-on-child abuse and to respond appropriately to the experiences of children from minoritised ethnic groups. Whilst adultification can impact all children in certain ways it is important that there is an acknowledgement that it specifically affects Black children. Their behaviour may also attract a harsher disciplinary response than the same behaviour in white peers of the same age. To address this risk, behaviour policies should be applied consistently and behaviour sanctions regularly reviewed for evidence of discrimination against children from minoritised ethnic groups.

"Using [an intersectional] approach provides a framework for professionals to better understand the oppressions Black children may experience. It may also support a cultural shift in safeguarding practice, where Black boys are treated with care rather than suspicion."

Safeguarding policies, procedures and practice

General principles

Relevant extracts from KCSIE 2024

"What school and college staff need to know All staff should be aware of systems within their school or college which support safeguarding, and these should be explained to them as part of staff induction.

This should include the:

• child protection policy (which should amongst other things also include the policy and procedures to deal with child-on-child abuse)

• behaviour policy (which should include measures to prevent bullying, including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)

• staff behaviour policy (sometimes called a code of conduct) should amongst other things, include low-level concerns, allegations against staff and whistleblowing

• safeguarding response to children who are absent from education, particularly on repeat occasions and/or prolonged periods and

• role of the designated safeguarding lead [DSL] (including the identity of the [DSL] and any deputies)…"

"All staff should know what to do if a child tells them they are being abused [or] exploited… Staff should know how to manage the requirement to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality. This means only involving those who need to be involved, such as the [DSL] (or a deputy) and local authority children's social care. Staff should never promise a child that they will not tell anyone about a report of any form of abuse, as this may ultimately not be in the best interests of the child. All staff should be able to reassure victims 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 any form of abuse…Nor should a victim ever be made to feel ashamed for making a report. All staff should be aware that children may not feel ready or know how to tell someone that they are being abused [or] exploited…, and/or they may not recognise their experiences as harmful. For example, children may feel embarrassed, humiliated, or…threatened. This could be due to their vulnerability, disability and/or sexual orientation or language barriers. This should not prevent staff from having a professional curiosity and speaking to the [DSL] if they have concerns about a child. It is also important that staff determine how best to build trusted relationships which facilitate communication with children and young people."

It is important for all the governors, senior leadership team, and staff to be committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse both within and beyond the school or college. In particular:

• in order to protect children, all schools and colleges should (a) be aware of the nature and level of risk to which their students are or may be exposed, and put in place a clear and comprehensive strategy which is tailored to their specific safeguarding context; and (b) take a whole-school/college community Contextual Safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse; it is not acceptable merely to take a reactive approach to child-on-child abuse in response to alleged incidents of it. In order to tackle child-on-child abuse proactively, it is necessary to focus on all five of the following areas: (i) systems and structures, (ii) prevention, (iii) identification, (iv) response/intervention, and (v) culture context; and

• parents should be encouraged by schools and colleges to hold them to account on this issue. If their child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of another child, and/or

because of the wider school/college context, they should inform the school/college so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response. Schools and colleges are encouraged not to restrict their approach to child-on-child abuse to just children, but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of their safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all students, regardless of their age.

There may be some different considerations when responding to child-on-child abuse in relation to a child's age. For example, a child aged under 10 (as set out above), or a student aged 18 or over, in terms of how local agencies and/or partners respond. This, for example, is likely to be different on the part of local authorities, given that their safeguarding duties are limited, in the case of local authority children's social care – save for a number of specific exceptions – to children and, in the case of adult social care services, to adults with care and support needs. Similarly, a school's or college's response to incidents involving the consensual/nonconsensual sharing of nude/semi-nude images and/or videos will need to differ depending on the age of the students involved. There is also likely to be a more significant criminal justice response in relation to any student responsible for abuse who is aged 18 or over. Schools and colleges should adopt a zero tolerance policy towards all forms of child-on-child abuse, and ensure that no form of any such abuse (no matter how 'low level' it may appear) is ever dismissed as a joke or banter.

Schools and colleges should identify and handle cases sensitively, appropriately, and promptly. They should ensure that they have effective policies, procedures and practices in place to prevent, identify, and appropriately respond to cases of child-on-child abuse. The content on child-on-child abuse within a school's or college's child protection policy should set out its strategy for improving prevention, and identifying and appropriately managing such abuse. This should be the product of a comprehensive consultation involving students, staff and parents, and a risk assessment. A robust child protection policy which is effectively implemented, training for staff on identifying and managing cases of child-on-child abuse (see further below), and providing resources to staff to assist in the consistent identification and recognition of such abuse, are also key.

Schools and colleges should consider how much of their wider equalities approach to issues such as gender equality, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and religious affiliation supports their content on child-on-child abuse within their child protection policy. In order to provide an appropriate response to child-on-child abuse, schools and colleges (i) should pose themselves a number of questions on gender and other equality issues that can help to inform the nature of the phenomena; and (ii) may need to consider gender and other equality issues including, for example, the extent to which girls access STEM subjects (if the school or college is a mixed provision), or the extent to which behaviours displayed by boys are perceived as aggressive or not, and how boys or children from different ethnic backgrounds are responded to differently – including evidence that disproportionate disciplinary sanctions are applied to Black Caribbean boys and Gypsy, Roma and Traveler children.

Schools may also wish to consult the Respectful School Communities Self-Review and Signposting Tool (designed for school senior leadership teams) which has been designed to

support schools to develop a whole-school approach which promotes respect and discipline, in order to combat bullying, harassment and abuse of any kind.

Safeguarding policies, procedures and practice

Relevant extracts from KCSIE 2024

"Safeguarding policies and procedures Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure there are appropriate policies and procedures in place in order for appropriate action to be taken in a timely manner to safeguard and promote children's welfare. These policies should include individual schools and colleges having:

• an effective child protection policy which:

› reflects the whole school/college approach to child-on-child abuse…

› reflects reporting systems…

› describes procedures which are in accordance with government guidance

› refers to locally agreed multi-agency safeguarding arrangements put in place by the safeguarding partners…

› includes policies as reflected elsewhere in Part two of [KCSIE 2024], such as online safety…, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)…

› is reviewed annually (as a minimum) and updated if needed, so that it is kept up to date with safeguarding issues as they emerge and evolve, including lessons learnt; and

› is available publicly either via the school or college website or by other means.

• a behaviour policy, which includes measures to prevent bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)

• staff behaviour policy (sometimes called the code of conduct) which should, amongst other things, include low-level concerns, allegations against staff and whistleblowing, plus acceptable use of technologies (including the use of mobile devices), staff/ pupil relationships and communications including the use of social media

• appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place to respond to children who are absent from education, particularly on repeat occasions and/or for prolonged periods…"

Online safety policy

Online safety and the school or college's approach to it should be reflected in the child protection policy which, amongst other things, should include appropriate filtering and monitoring on school devices and school networks. Considering the 4Cs (above) [ie content, contact, conduct and commerce] will provide the basis of an effective online policy. The school or college should have a clear policy on the use of mobile and smart technology,

which will also reflect the fact that many children have unlimited and unrestricted access to the internet via mobile phone networks (ie 3G, 4G and 5G). This access means some children, whilst at school or college, sexually harass, bully, and control others via their mobile and smart technology, share indecent images consensually and non-consensually (often via large chat groups) and view and share pornography and other harmful content. Schools and colleges should carefully consider how this is managed on their premises and reflect this in their mobile and smart technology policy and their child protection policy."

Child-on-child abuse

All staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing other children (including online). All staff should be clear about their school's or college's policy and procedures with regard to child-on-child abuse.

Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes:

• procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse

• the systems in place (and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible) for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously

• how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated, and dealt with

• clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other children affected by child-on-child abuse will be supported

• a recognition that even if there are no reported cases of child-on-child abuse, such abuse may still be taking place and is simply not being reported

• a statement which makes clear there should be a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, and it should never be passed off as "banter," "just having a laugh," "part of growing up" or "boys being boys" as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for children

• recognition that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators, but that all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously, and

• the different forms child-on-child abuse can take, such as: › bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying) › abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (also known as teenage relationship abuse)

› physical abuse which can include hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm

› sexual violence and sexual harassment. Part five of [KCSIE 2024] sets out how schools and colleges should respond to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment

› consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery): the policy should include the school or

college's approach to it. The [DfE] provides Searching, Screening and Confiscation Advice for schools.

The UKCIS Education Group has published Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people which outlines how to respond to an incident of nude and/or semi-nude images and/or videos being shared

› causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party

› upskirting (which is a criminal offence)…, and

› initiation/hazing type violence and rituals." An effective child protection policy should therefore reflect the whole school/college approach to child-on-child abuse – including online safety, and should (amongst other things) include the policy and procedures to deal with child-on-child abuse.

Appropriate cross-reference should be made, and consistency ensured, between other relevant policies in the school's/college's suite of safeguarding policies and procedures – eg the behaviour policy – which should include measures to prevent bullying (including cyberbulling, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying), online safety policy, and the school's/college's safeguarding response to children who are absent from education.

Information sharing, data protection and record keeping

Relevant extract from KCSIE 2024

"Information sharing Information sharing is vital in identifying and tackling all forms of abuse…, and in promoting children's welfare, including in relation to their educational outcomes. Schools and colleges have clear powers to share, hold and use information for these purposes. As part of meeting a child's needs, it is important for governing bodies and proprietors to recognise the importance of information sharing between practitioners and local agencies. This should include ensuring arrangements are in place that set out clearly the processes and principles for sharing information within the school or college and with local authority children's social care, the safeguarding partners and other organisations, agencies, and practitioners as required.

School and college staff should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children, whether this is when problems are first emerging, or where a child is already known to the local authority children's social care.

It is important that governing bodies and proprietors are aware that among other obligations, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) place duties on organisations and individuals to process personal information fairly and lawfully and to keep the information they hold safe and secure."

Data protection practices relating to child-on-child abuse should be in line with the school's and college's data protection policies and notices. By the same token, the school's and

college's policies and notices need to reflect and allow sufficiently for safeguarding practices. This includes setting out clearly to parents and students what these practices are, and why they are needed, in a privacy notice.

Multi-agency working

Relevant extracts from KCSIE 2024

"[WTSC] is very clear that all schools (including those in multi-academy trusts) and colleges in the local area should be fully engaged, involved, and included in safeguarding arrangements. It is expected that, locally, the safeguarding partners will name schools and colleges as relevant agencies. Safeguarding partners will set out in their published arrangements which organisations and agencies they will be working with, and the expectations placed on any agencies and organisations by the arrangements. Once named as a relevant agency, schools and colleges, in the same way as other relevant agencies, are under a statutory duty to co-operate with the published arrangements. They must act in accordance with the safeguarding arrangements.

It is especially important that schools and colleges understand their role within the local safeguarding arrangements. Governing bodies, proprietors, and their senior leadership teams, especially their [DSLs], should make themselves aware of and follow their local arrangements. Governing bodies and proprietors should understand the local criteria for action and the local protocol for assessment and ensure they are reflected in their own policies and procedures.

They should also be prepared to supply information as requested by the safeguarding partners." "Effective safeguarding practice is demonstrated when schools and colleges are clear, in advance, about what local processes are in place and what support can be accessed when sexual violence or sexual harassment has occurred. It is important to prepare for this in advance and review this information on a regular basis to ensure it is up to date…"

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Prevention

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"Equality Act 2010 Schools and colleges have obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (the Equality Act). According to the Equality Act, schools and colleges must not unlawfully discriminate against pupils or students because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, or sexual orientation (protected characteristics).

Whilst all of the above protections are important, in the context of safeguarding, [KCSIE 2024], and the legal duties placed on schools and colleges, in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, governing bodies and proprietors should carefully consider how they are supporting their pupils and students with regard to particular protected characteristics – including disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and race. Provisions within the Equality Act allow schools and colleges to take positive action, where it can be shown that it is proportionate, to deal with particular disadvantages affecting pupils or students with certain protected characteristics in order to meet their specific need. A school or college, could, for example, consider taking positive action to

support girls if there was evidence they were being disproportionately subjected to sexual violence or sexual harassment. There is also a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people."

Children requiring mental health support

"Schools and colleges have an important role to play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils. Mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse…, or exploitation. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure they have clear systems and processes in place for identifying possible mental health problems, including routes to escalate and clear referral and accountability systems."

Children with special educational needs and disabilities or health issues

"Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) or certain medical or physical health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges both online and offline. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy reflects the fact that additional barriers can exist when recognising abuse…in this group of children. These can include:

• assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's condition without further exploration

• these children being more prone to peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children

• the potential for children with SEND or certain medical conditions being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs…

• communication barriers and difficulties in managing or reporting these challenges.

• cognitive understanding – being unable to understand the difference between fact and fiction in online content and then repeating the content/behaviours in schools or colleges or the consequences of doing so.

Any reports of abuse involving children with SEND will therefore require close liaison with the [DSL] (or deputy) and the SENCO or the named person with oversight for SEND in a college Schools and colleges should consider extra pastoral support and attention for these children, along with ensuring any appropriate support for communication is in place."

Children who are lesbian, gay, bi, or trans (LGBT)

"The fact that a child or young person may be LGBT is not in itself an inherent risk factor for harm. However, children who are LGBT can be targeted by other children. In some cases, a child who is perceived by other children to be LGBT (whether they are or not) can be just as vulnerable as children who identify as LGBT.

Risks can be compounded where children who are LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced

and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff.

LGBT inclusion is part of the statutory Relationships Education, Relationship and Sex Education and Health Education curriculum and there is a range of support available to help schools counter homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and abuse."

Are some children particularly vulnerable to abusing or being abused by other children?

Any child can be vulnerable to child-on-child abuse – including due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence, and staff should be alert to signs of such abuse amongst all children. Individual and situational factors can increase a child's vulnerability to abuse by other children. For example, an image of a child could be shared, following which they could become more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse due to how others now perceive them, regardless of any characteristics which may be inherent in them and/or their family. Peer group dynamics can also play an important role in determining a child's vulnerability to such abuse.

For example, children who are more likely to follow others and/or who are socially isolated from their peers may be more vulnerable to child-on-child abuse. Children who are questioning or exploring their sexuality or gender identity may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers due to the dominance of homophobic attitudes. Research suggests that:

• child-on-child abuse may affect boys differently from girls, and that this difference may result from societal norms (particularly around power, control and the way in which femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological make-up. Barriers to disclosure will also be different. As a result, schools and colleges need to explore the gender dynamics of child-on-child abuse within their settings, and recognise that these will play out differently in single sex, mixed or gender-imbalanced environments;

• children with SEND are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND, and – as above – additional barriers can sometimes exist when recognising abuse in this group of children;

some children may be more likely to experience child-on-child abuse than others as a result of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, trans status, disability, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs;

• children and young people with mental health difficulties may not only be at greater risk of being targeted, but bullying can exacerbate their mental health needs;

• LGBTQ children and young people experience significantly higher levels of verbal, physical and sexual abuse than their peers.

Schools and colleges should be mindful that such abuse can also occur due to the power structures and contexts where biases and discrimination are dominant, and not necessarily because of the above individual traits.

Being alert to and monitoring changes in student behaviour

Maintaining and monitoring behaviour incident logs provides one route to a summary assessment of any behavioural trends that may be emerging across a cohort of students, at a particular time of day or in a specific location. It is important that the language used to describe alleged student behaviour is clear and avoids using euphemisms which can prevent potential patterns from being identified.

Behaviour incident logs can also provide a summary account of the nature of the actions that staff take to address such behaviours – particularly those on the inappropriate and problematic end of the behaviours spectrum.

The school's or college's safeguarding team should regularly review behaviour incident logs which can help to identify any changes in behaviour and/or concerning patterns or trends at an early stage.

Proactive assessment

Schools and colleges should:

1. Conduct a proactive assessment to determine the risks to which their students are or may be exposed, as well as any protective factors which may exist, and monitor those risks and protective factors. The assessment should consider:

• the nature and level of risk of the different variants of child-on-child abuse within the school or college;

• the makeup of the student body, including specific characteristics that might affect their vulnerability to child-on-child abuse such as, for example, gender, age, learning difficulties, special educational needs and/ or disabilities, sexual orientation, ethnicity and/or religious belief;

• whether the particular setting of the school or college provides the potential for any specific online harms (for example, where there are boarders);

the fact that students may not always understand that they have experienced or carried out child-on-child abuse, for example, because:

› they do not know what constitutes inappropriate sexualised behaviour,

› they have experienced sexual abuse and do not realise that what happened to them was wrong,

› they do not know whether consent was given,

› they are younger and therefore lack knowledge of sex/sexuality as they are less likely to have received sex or relationships education, or the abuse happened between friends or partners;

• which of these students are affected, or are more at risk of being affected, by child-on-child abuse;

• any trends;

• the various sociocultural contexts to which those students are associated including, for example, their peer group (both within and outside the school or college), family, the school environment, their experience(s) of crime and/or victimisation in the local community, and their online identities, including a consideration of the nature of online material which students may be accessing (for example pornography, misogynistic/misandrist content) – which may impact on their behaviour and engagement in school or college; and the levers and barriers within the school or college environment that will affect your ability to respond to child-on-child abuse – ie systems and structures, prevention, identification, response and intervention, and culture context.55 It should be noted that such abuse can be harmful to children who engage in it as well as those who experience it, and schools and colleges must balance their duties to both. In addition, there may be barriers to a child disclosing abuse, such as a culture of "no snitching," how the child thinks they will be perceived, and/or thinking that their parents will be informed.

It should be noted that this assessment:

• is a proactive assessment of the general risks facing the student body, and any protective factors which may exist with respect to them. It is distinct from any responsive risk and needs assessment(s) that may be required following a concern or allegation of child-on-child abuse (which are discussed later in this resource);

• should inform the child-on-child abuse content within the child protection policy; and

• should feed into and inform (i) the governors' oversight of safeguarding, to provide strategic challenge to test and assure themselves that the safeguarding policies and procedures in place in their school/college are effective and support the delivery of a robust wholeschool/college approach to safeguarding, and (ii) any safeguarding risk register(s) that they may choose to put in place.

2. Put in place action plans to address any identified risks and keep these under regular review.

Multi-agency working

Schools and colleges should actively engage and work closely with their local partners in relation to child-on-child abuse. For example, they should

(i)   request any updates on local trends relating to child-on-child abuse that might be impacting upon students;

(ii)   ask the local authority whether they have access to any resources associated with child-on-child abuse that can be used to strengthen their curriculum; and

(iii)   seek out the education representative who sits on local multi-agency operational or strategic groups where child-on-child abuse is discussed. The relationships that schools and colleges build with their local partners are essential to enabling them to prevent, identify early, and appropriately handle cases of child-on-child abuse.

They should help schools and colleges to:

• develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in their local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist; ensure that their students are able to access the range of services and support they need quickly;

• support and help inform their local community's response to child-on-child abuse;

• increase their awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in their local area to enable them to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by their students; and

• work alongside each other to ensure the inclusion of students vulnerable to abuse.

Education, training and practice

Relevant extracts from KCSIE 2024

Opportunities to teach safeguarding

"Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that children are taught about how to keep themselves and others safe, including online. It should be recognised that effective education will be tailored to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individual children, including children who are victims of abuse, and children with [SEND].

In schools, relevant topics will be included within Relationships Education (for all primary pupils), and Relationships and Sex Education (for all secondary pupils) and Health Education (for all primary and secondary pupils). In teaching these subjects schools must have regard to the statutory guidance…Colleges may cover relevant issues through tutorials.

Schools and colleges play a crucial role in preventative education. Preventative education is most effective in the context of a whole-school or college approach that prepares pupils and students for life in modern Britain and creates a culture of zero tolerance for sexism, misogyny/ misandry, homophobia, biphobic and sexual violence/harassment. The school/ college will have a clear set of values and standards, upheld and demonstrated throughout all aspects of school/college life.

These will be underpinned by the school's/ college's behaviour policy and pastoral support system, as well as by a planned programme of evidence-based RSHE delivered in regularly timetabled lessons and reinforced throughout the whole curriculum. Such a programme should be fully inclusive and developed to be age and stage of development appropriate (especially when considering the needs of children with SEND and other vulnerabilities). This program will tackle, at an age-appropriate stage, issues such as:

healthy and respectful relationships

• boundaries and consent

• stereotyping, prejudice and equality

• body confidence and self-esteem

• how to recognise an abusive relationship, including coercive and controlling behaviour

• the concepts of, and laws relating to – sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse…, and how to access support, and

• what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable."

"It is effective safeguarding practice for the [DSL] (and their deputies) to have a good understanding of HSB. This could form part of their safeguarding training. This will aid in planning preventative education, implementing preventative measures, drafting and implementing an effective child protection policy and incorporating the approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment into the whole school or college approach to safeguarding."

A whole-school/college approach School/college environment

Relevant extracts from KCSIE 2024

"Governing bodies and proprietors should have a senior board level (or equivalent) lead to take leadership responsibility for their school's or college's safeguarding arrangements.

Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that all governors and trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection (including online) training at induction. This training should equip them with the knowledge to provide strategic challenge to test and assure themselves that the safeguarding policies and procedures in place in schools and colleges are effective and support the delivery of a robust whole school approach to safeguarding. Their training should be regularly updated. Governing bodies and proprietors should be aware of their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, (including the Public Sector Equality Duty), and their local multiagency safeguarding arrangements."

Schools and colleges should actively seek to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by:

• Educating all governors, their senior leadership team, staff, students, and parents about this issue. This includes: training all governors, the senior leadership team, and staff on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify, and respond to it.

This includes

(i) Contextual Safeguarding,
(ii) the identification and classification of specific behaviours, including digital behaviours,
(iii) the importance of taking seriously all forms of child-on-child abuse (no matter how 'low level' they may appear) and ensuring that no form of child-on-child abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay, banter or teasing, and
(iv) social media and online safety, including how to encourage children to use social media in a positive, responsible and safe way, how to enable them to identify and

manage abusive behaviour online, and how to critically assess the content they may be exposed to, including recognising and challenging negative influences.

In terms of governor, senior leadership team and staff training, there are questions that schools and colleges should pose themselves – including, for example, "do we think we have a good awareness and understanding of child-on-child abuse?" We suggest that staff themselves develop relevant and engaging case studies. Resources, including webinars, for general staff awareness training are available on the Contextual Safeguarding Network; and guidance for school leaders is available from The Key.

Training on child-on-child abuse should also be incorporated into wider safeguarding training, and schools and colleges should give careful consideration as to how to include key messages and principles applicable to the content on child-on-child abuse within their child protection policy.

• Educating children:

about (a) the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, and about healthy relationships, via PSHE and the wider curriculum; and

(b) consent, including teaching them basic facts such as

(i) any sexual activity with a child under the age of 13 is a criminal offence

(ii) the age of consent is 16;

(iii) the age of consent for sexual activity with persons in positions of trust, such as teachers and sports coaches, is 18; and sexual activity without consent is a criminal offence;

in cases where harmful narratives are perpetuated by specific sources (for example, online influencers, websites or groups), schools and colleges should challenge the underlying principles or assumptions rather than the individuals. Where possible, staff should avoid naming harmful influencers or sites, as this can inadvertently promote them or facilitate access by students. Clicking on links or searching for names can impact the student's algorithms, increasing the likelihood of harmful content being promoted to them. The PSHE Association says that "[s]peaking in general terms also helps pupils to understand that [the] advice applies to any problematic influencers in future, and not just those currently causing concern." › frequently telling them what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it, and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse; and about the school's or college's routes for disclosures for students who have concerns around online harms; and regularly informing them about the school's or college's approach to such issues, including its zero-tolerance policy (and explaining exactly what that means) towards all forms of child-on-child abuse (including online).

• Engaging parents on these issues by:

› talking about them with parents, both in groups and one to one;

› addressing these issues in newsletters and other school communications as appropriate;

› asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the school/college address those risks;

› involving parents in the review of relevant school or college policies and lesson plans; and

› encouraging parents to hold the school or college to account on this issue, in part as a result of visibility of the child protection policy.

- Supporting and promoting the on-going wellbeing and mental health of the student body by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise student wellbeing, resilience and mental health, and by providing in-school/ college counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs. These interventions can be 'de-clinicised' and brokered through a positive relationship with the school or college and its staff. All staff should be trained to meet low-level mental health difficulties within the students.
- Working with governors, senior leadership team, and all staff, students and parents to address equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the school or college community.
- Working with appropriately qualified external experts where necessary, for example in relation to challenging or specialised issues such as countering misogyny/misandry.
- Creating an inclusive and equitable school or college culture where students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds feel safe and can thrive. Schools and colleges should ensure that they actively promote equality of gender, ethnicity and other characteristics, positive values and healthy relationships, and incorporate work on child-on-child abuse into their curriculum. Show Racism the Red Card, for example, offers resources and training for students and staff on the causes and consequences of racism.
- Creating conditions in which students can aspire to, and realise, safe and healthy relationships – fostering a whole-school/ college culture: › which is founded on the idea that every member of the school or college community is responsible for building and maintaining safe and positive relationships, and helping to create a safe school or college environment in which violence and abuse are never acceptable; › in which students are able to develop trusting relationships with staff, and in which staff understand, through regular discussion and training, the importance of these relationships in providing students with a sense of belonging, which could otherwise be sought in problematic contexts; › in which students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to; which (i) proactively identifies positive qualities in students; (ii) nurtures these qualities; (iii) teaches and encourages students to think about positive hopes for the future; and (vi) supports students in developing small-scale goals that enable realistic ambitions; and › which provides supervised activities to students that give them the experience of having their needs met that might otherwise apparently be met in

abusive circumstances. These can include experiencing (i) status; (ii) excitement; and (iii) a degree of risk.

- Responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately
- Ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the school's or college's safeguarding team so that they can (i) ensure that any referrals which may be necessary are made to the relevant statutory services as appropriate, (ii) spot and address any concerning trends, (iii) identify students who may be in need of additional support, and (iv) address any locations in or around the school or college in need of attention. This can be done by way of a weekly staff meeting at which all concerns about students (including child-on-child abuse issues) are discussed; challenging the attitudes that underlie such abuse (both inside and outside the classroom).

The internet and social media

The internet can provide students with extraordinary positive opportunities, including for learning, sharing information and developing key skills, but it can also facilitate harm. Schools and colleges should focus on enabling and empowering their students, staff and parents to navigate the online world in a safe, responsible and positive way via relevant, accurate and engaging training and education. With respect to students, this should involve developing their understanding and education about social media from an early age, and before they start to engage with social media platforms.

This can be done gradually by, for example, weaving age-appropriate discussions into their curriculum, and encouraging safe and positive use of social media. Any such discussions should:

• reinforce (as appropriate) that most social media platforms require users to be at least 13 years of age before they sign up (and some sites have raised this age limit to 16),61 and acknowledge that a significant number of children, in some cases young children, nevertheless access these platforms by providing a false date of birth;

• explain these age limits (as appropriate) to children, the reasons for them, and the consequences of breaching them. The Data Protection Act 2018 states that children who are aged 13 years or older are capable of giving consent for data collection online. Although not illegal for the children, underage use of social media constitutes a breach of the platform's terms and conditions. It can also mean that these children are exposed to material that is not appropriate for their age, and to safeguarding risks. Where a child provides a false age of 18 or over, it can mean that they access sites without the additional protections that some sites provide to users under the age of 18. It also means that any liability for harm from the service provider can be waived, because the user has invalidated terms and conditions. If discovered, it can also lead to the child's profile, and any content that they shared, being deleted;

• celebrate difference. Not all children want to be on social media and children should never feel pressured into making choices that are not right for them;

• always encourage children to share any concerns they may have from using the online environment, including social media – even if they are accessing a site that they should not and, where possible, provide reassurance to them that they will not be punished for doing so; as part of their education on (i) managing online information, and (ii) exploring how social media platforms can share similar types of content ('rabbit holes') and amplify similar views ('echo chambers'), explain the importance of students understanding how these platforms work, and why they are seeing different types of content. Project EVOLVE has a wide range of resources on managing online information; and

• provide children with advice on how to: (i) share their concerns with staff in school or college – and provide a number of routes for disclosure: this might be a trusted adult in the classroom (it is important to include staff at all levels in safeguarding training because teaching assistants can also provide this role). However there might also be value in an anonymous disclosure system to provide a route for children who have a concern but are not sufficiently confident to disclose in person – for example, Whisper Anonymous Reporting, and Tootoot; (ii) report inappropriate or harmful online content or contact to a platform provider or an independent agency – for example, The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Take It Down service, and the Internet Watch Foundation's (IWF) and NSPCC's Report Remove tool; and (iii) seek support and advice if they are worried, either from the school or college, or from an external body. Children should know that they will not get into trouble for disclosing a concern.

Schools and colleges should have a comprehensive and age-appropriate plan to address social media use, which may include, for example:

- developing online and/or social media charters or agreements with students and parents. Charters are a set of agreements which everyone should feel comfortable adhering to. They can be used to (i) encourage kind, safe, and responsible internet use; and (ii) provide a useful reference point for students, parents, and staff if any concerns or allegations should subsequently arise by enabling the school or college to revisit what was previously agreed. A useful starting point for creating a charter can be a school's or college's set of values and/or any behaviour/relationship codes. Involving children in the creation of these documents has two benefits. First, it helps them take ownership of what they do online, and second, it can provide an opportunity to open up useful group discussions. Further information on, and examples of social media charters, can be found here;
- holding in-class discussions about the social media sites and applications that children like and why. The age at which these discussions are introduced will vary depending on the particular context of individual settings and their students. It may need to be lowered where, for example, staff become aware that children are accessing sites at an earlier age, and
- drawing on engaging and accurate resources and content where possible.

It is also vital to educate, train and empower staff and parents (as above), so that they are equipped to help students to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the internet, and to navigate the online world safely.

Identifying and assessing behaviour

Relevant extract from KCSIE 2024

"Mental Health All staff should be aware that mental health problems can, in some cases, be an indicator that a child has suffered or is at risk of suffering abuse…or exploitation.

Only appropriately trained professionals should attempt to make a diagnosis of a mental health problem. Education staff, however, are well placed to observe children day-to-day and identify those whose behaviour suggests that they may be experiencing a mental health problem or be at risk of developing one. Schools and colleges can access a range of advice to help them identify children in need of extra mental health support, this includes working with external agencies.

If staff have a mental health concern about a child that is also a safeguarding concern, immediate action should be taken, following their child protection policy, and speaking to the [DSL] or a deputy."

How can a child who is being abused by another child be identified?

All staff should be vigilant in respect of the dynamics of peer groups in their school or college, and should be alert to the wellbeing of students and to signs of abuse. They should engage with these signs, as appropriate, to determine whether they are caused by child-on-child abuse. However, staff should be mindful of the fact that the way(s) in which children will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ.

Signs that a child may be suffering from child-on-child abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse and can include – for example:

• being afraid of particular places and/or situations and/or making excuses to avoid particular people

• being afraid/reluctant to go to school, being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school

• running away or regularly going missing from home, care or education

• experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or emotional wellbeing

• becoming nervous, anxious, distressed, clingy or depressed

• becoming isolated from peers/usual social networks, losing confidence and becoming withdrawn • self-harming or having thoughts about suicide

• having problems eating (including developing eating disorders) and/or sleeping (including suffering from nightmares)

• regularly wetting the bed or soiling their clothes

• belongings getting 'lost' or damaged

• asking for, or stealing, money (to give to a bully)

• unexplained gifts, money or new possessions (eg clothes and/or mobile phone)

• unexplained physical injuries and other signs of physical abuse

• changes in appearance – eg weight loss

• changes in performance and/or behaviour at school

• knowing about or being involved in 'adult issues' which are inappropriate for their age or stage of development, for example, alcohol, drugs and/or sexual behaviour

• involvement in abusive relationships

• involvement in gangs or gang fights

• having angry outbursts, or behaving aggressively or abusively (including displaying HSB) towards others

Abuse affects children very differently. The above list is by no means exhaustive, and the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that children present with will depend on their particular circumstances. Concerns may also of course be raised by parents, peers, and others. Rather than checking behaviour against a list, staff should be trained to be alert to behaviour that might cause concerns, to use their professional curiosity and think about what the behaviour might signify, to encourage children to share with them any underlying reasons for their behaviour (by asking open questions at the right time to prompt discussion) and, where appropriate, to engage with their parents so that the cause(s) of their behaviour can be investigated. Where a child exhibits any behaviour that is out of character or abnormal for their age, staff should always consider whether an underlying concern is contributing to their behaviour (for example, whether the child is being harmed or abused by their peers) and, if so, what the concern is and how the child can be supported going forwards.

The power dynamic that can exist between children is also very important when identifying and responding to their behaviour: in all cases of child-on-child abuse a power imbalance will exist within the relationship. This inequality will not necessarily be the result of an age gap between the child responsible for the abuse and the child being abused. It may, for example, be the result of their relative social or economic status. Equally, while children who abuse may have power over those who they are abusing, they may be simultaneously powerless to others.

All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.

Sexual behaviour

Primary school aged children

As explained by the NSPCC, Research in Practice and Professor Simon Hackett in their harmful sexual behaviour framework (HSB framework) "it should be standard professional practice to view the sexual behaviours of children and young people along a continuum, ranging from normal to abusive…It is vital that professionals consider the continuum in line with children's development. Some behaviours that are considered normative in earlier childhood, may be highly abnormal and inappropriate in adolescence. Similarly, some behaviours that are part of normal adolescent sexual development are highly problematic if expressed by younger children…In particular, younger children (under 12) exhibiting harmful or problematic sexual behaviours should be identified early to prevent the possible establishment of persistent patterns later…Guidance indicates that professionals should avoid analysing single behaviours, and instead consider the sexual behaviour within a wider context…Assessment should consider wider welfare needs and concerns, including family issues, and social, economic, and developmental factors…and should be dealt with differently to adolescents, who are likely to have different motivations for their behaviour… Professionals should notice any changes in the sexual behaviour of younger children that appear to be out of step with their developmental stage and level of understanding as such behaviours may be reflective of sexual victimisation, physical abuse, family violence, neglect, poor parenting or exposure to sexually inappropriate material…"

The distinction between sexual behaviours

The HSB framework explains the distinction between problematic and abusive sexual behaviours:

• "Problematic behaviours don't include overt victimisation of others [sic] may be disruptive to the child's development and can cause distress, rejection or increase victimisation of the child displaying the behaviour. They include behaviours involving sexual body parts that are developmentally inappropriate or potentially harmful to the child or others.

They range from problematic self-stimulation and nonintrusive behaviours, to sexual interactions with other children that include behaviours more explicit than sex play, and aggressive sexual behaviours. Sometimes, the term 'problematic sexual behaviour' is used to describe behaviours that may be developmentally appropriate but that are expressed inappropriately in a given context. When this type of behaviour appears to be trauma-related – for example when symptoms originate from sexual abuse the child has experienced – the behaviour may be termed sexually reactive. Sexually reactive and sexually problematic behaviours are more commonly associated with children in the pre-adolescent age range…

• Abusive behaviours involve an element of coercion or manipulation and a power imbalance that means the victim cannot give informed consent, and where the behaviour has potential to cause physical or emotional harm. Power imbalance may be due to age, intellectual ability, disability or physical strength. Abusive sexual behaviour may or may not have resulted in a criminal conviction or prosecution. Such behaviours are more commonly associated with young people over the age of criminal responsibility or those in puberty…"

The HSB framework also states that: "it is vital for professionals to distinguish normal from abnormal sexual behaviours. Chaffin [et al, 2002]…suggest a child's sexual behaviour should be considered abnormal if it: › occurs at a frequency greater than would be developmentally expected › interferes with the child's development › occurs with coercion, intimidation, or force › is associated with emotional distress › occurs between children of divergent ages or developmental abilities › repeatedly recurs in secrecy after intervention by caregivers."

Alongside the notion of a continuum of HSB, the Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool and training can help professionals to identify, understand and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours in children. As explained in the HSB framework, in broad terms the categories in Hackett's continuum of sexual behaviour and the Brook Traffic Light Tool "relate to each other in the following way:

• Green behaviours (Brook) are those that constitute normal behaviours on the continuum model.

• Amber behaviours (Brook) are those that are likely to [constitute] inappropriate or problematic behaviours on the continuum model.

• Red behaviours (Brook) are likely to be those classified as abusive or violent behaviours on Hackett's continuum.

Once identified harmful sexual behaviour (ie those behaviours that are not part of a child's normal sexual development) should be viewed within a child protection context and Children's Services should be contacted to provide assessment and recommendations if more specialist help is need. In some cases, children's HSB may be a marker of their own histories of abuse that need to be addressed."

It should be noted, as explained by Brook, that in order to access their Traffic Light Tool, professionals must complete training on it – "to ensure safe use of the Tool. The Tool cannot be shared with people who have not completed the training. Both the Tool and training are designed to complement existing safeguarding processes and should not be considered a replacement for your organisation's safeguarding procedures."

The HSB framework states that it should be used alongside the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline [NG55] on harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people, which "makes recommendations about the roles of universal services, early help assessment and risk assessment, supporting families and the key principles and approaches for intervention;" and "aims to ensure that children and young people who display HSB, are offered early support so that their sexual behaviour problems don't escalate and possibly lead to them being charged with a sexual offence. It also aims to ensure that children are not referred to specialist services unnecessarily."

NSPCC guidance and resources The NSPCC highlights that a child's behaviour can change depending on the circumstances they are in, and sexual behaviour can move in either direction along the continuum, so it is important to look at each situation individually, as well as considering any patterns of behaviour.

 The NSPCC has produced a range of resources on harmful sexual behaviour – including, for example, guidance on understanding sexualised behaviour in children, on the stages of developmentally typical sexual development and behaviour in children, on learning about healthy sexual development in children, on responding to an incident of HSB, and on how to prevent HSB in children; and offers online training courses to help manage harmful sexual behaviour in primary and secondary schools in the UK. It has also produced, in partnership with Professor Hackett, Durham University and NHS

Health Education England, a continuum 'quick guide' Responding to children who display sexualised behaviour.

The NSPCC explains that this is a tool to support objective decision making about a child's sexual behaviour, and does not replace professional judgement or policy and legislation. Schools will note the slightly different terms used by the NSPCC and which feature within the continuum guide, as follows:

• 'developmentally typical' – to describe green behaviours on the continuum – ie 'healthy', 'normal' or 'developmentally expected';

• 'problematic sexual behaviour (PSB)' – used by the NSPCC as an umbrella term for all amber behaviours on the continuum – ie 'inappropriate' and 'problematic'; and 'harmful sexual behaviours' – used by the NSPCC as an umbrella term for all red behaviours on the continuum – ie 'abusive' and 'violent'.

In terms of identifying the sexualised behaviour, and what to consider in deciding where it sits on the continuum, the NSPCC suggests the following:

• The age of the child or young person who has displayed the sexual behaviour.

• The age of the other children or young people involved.

• Is the behaviour unusual for that particular child or young person?

• Have all the children or young people involved freely given consent?

• Are the other children or young people distressed?

• Is there an imbalance of power?

• Is the behaviour excessive, degrading or threatening?

• Is the behaviour occurring in a public or private space? It also states that other behaviours might give cause for concern if they are particularly secretive or are being carried out in private after intervention from adults.

Approaches to HSB assessment The HSB framework highlights that there is a wide range of approaches to HSB assessment across different agencies in the UK, and that core considerations in the assessment of all children and young people displaying HSB include:

• working within a multi-agency, multidisciplinary context

• close attention to child protection concerns

• use of evidence-based assessment models

• risks and needs based, not just focused on the HSB

• effective inter-professional communication

• analysis of the behaviour in quality written reports

It also highlights the distinction made by NICE, in its aforementioned guideline, between early help assessments and more specific HSB risk and needs assessments ie that:

• "An 'early help' assessment is warranted when a child's sexual behaviours are indicated at the level of 'inappropriate' on the continuum. NICE suggests that a designated lead practitioner acts as a single point of contact for the child and family, coordinates early help and develops a care plan to deliver agreed actions. A NICE early help assessment would take into account the child or young person's development status, gender and any neurodevelopmental or learning disabilities. The purpose of the assessment is to ascertain whether the child's needs can be met by universal services or whether a referral for a more specialist HSB risk and needs assessment is necessary.

• For children and young people whose sexual behaviours are more indicative of abusive and violent categories on the continuum model, a more specific assessment of risk and need is likely to be required.

NICE recommends that professionals responsible for risk assessments should consider using tools judiciously, taking into account the child or young person's age, neurodevelopmental disabilities and gender…"

A number of the specific recommendations made by NICE with respect to appropriate risk assessment tools are also set out. It should be noted that, in the NICE guideline, the term 'risk assessment tool' is used "for tools that estimate the risk of sexual re-offending or the level of supervision needed, and helps users decide what action to take. It includes tools such as J-SOAP-11 and ERASOR, which are North American tools designed to assess the risk of sexual reoffending. The AIM assessment model was developed in the UK and considers the level of management and supervision needed for people displaying [HSB]."

The HSB framework contains a continuum of HSB assessment – listing key behavioural elements, assessment levels indicated, possible frameworks and tools, and likely intervention focus.80 Local authorities use a range of assessment and intervention frameworks and tools which can be very helpful in assessing where any given behaviour falls on a continuum. The AIM Project assessment models are one example.

Sharing nudes and semi-nudes

It is a criminal offence to make, share or possess indecent images of persons under the age of 18. The term 'indecent images' can include photos and videos involving nudity or of a sexual nature. Making an indecent image can include downloading from the internet or an email attachment. It is unlawful regardless of whether the subject of the image consents to the making, sharing or possession of the image.

Where a person discloses private sexual images or videos without consent and with intent to cause the subject distress, this could constitute the criminal offence of 'revenge pornography'. Forwarding or retweeting private material can amount to a criminal offence in those circumstances. The (non-statutory) Sharing nudes and seminudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people, produced by the UK Council for Internet Safety (UKCIS) Education Group, outlines how to respond to an incident of nudes and semi-nudes being shared, and states that:

"The types of incidents which this advice covers are:

• a person under the age of 18 creates and shares nudes and semi-nudes of themselves with a peer under the age of 18

• a person under the age of 18 shares nudes and semi-nudes created by another person under the age of 18 with a peer under the age of 18

• a person under the age of 18 is in possession of nudes and semi-nudes created by another person under the age of 18 This advice does not cover:

• the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes of under 18s by adults (18 and over) as this constitutes child sexual abuse and education settings should always inform their local police force as a matter of urgency

• children and young people under the age of 18 sharing adult pornography or exchanging sexual texts which do not contain images In response to these issues, education settings should follow their local authority's guidance and schools and colleges should also refer to [KCSIE]."

The UKCIS guidance explains, in terms of:

• "Understanding motivations and behaviours: Nudes and semi-nudes can be shared by, and between, children and young people under a wide range of circumstances, and are often not sexually or criminally motivated. An education setting's response to an incident will differ depending on the motivations behind the incident and the appropriateness of the child or young person's behaviour. In order to ensure an appropriate and proportionate response to an incident of nudes and semi-nudes being shared, education settings can use the tools set out below"; and

• "Defining the incident: Finkelhor and Wolak's typology of youth-produced imagery cases [(see Fig.4 above)] can be used to define and assess incidents according to motivations.

• Incidents can broadly be divided into two categories: › aggravated: incidents involving additional or abusive elements beyond the creation, sending or possession of nudes and semi-nudes.

These can further be sub-categorised into:

– adult involved: adult offenders attempt to develop relationships by grooming children and young people, in criminal sex offences even without the added element of nudes and semi-nudes. Victims may be family friends, relatives, community members or contacted via the Internet. The images may be solicited by adult offenders

– youth only – intent to harm: these cases can arise from interpersonal conflict, such as break-ups and fights among friends, or criminal/abusive conduct such as blackmail, threats or deception, sexual abuse or exploitation by young people

– youth only – reckless misuse: no intent to harm but images are taken or sent without the knowing or willing participation of the young person who is pictured. In these cases, pictures are taken or sent thoughtlessly or recklessly and a victim may have been harmed as a result.

experimental: incidents involving the creation and sending of nudes and seminudes with no adult involvement, no apparent intent to harm or reckless misuse. These can further be subcategorised into: – romantic: incidents in which young people in ongoing relationships make images for themselves or each other, and images were not intended to be distributed beyond the pair – 'sexual attention seeking': the phrase 'sexual attention seeking' is taken directly from the typology however it is important to note that incidents within this category can be a part of normal childhood. A child or young person should not be blamed for taking and sharing their image

– other: cases that do not appear to have aggravating elements, like adult involvement, malicious motives or reckless misuse, but also do not fit into the Romantic or Attention Seeking sub-types. These involve either young people who take pictures of themselves for themselves (no evidence of any sending or sharing or intent to do so) or pre-adolescent children (age 9 or younger) who did not

appear to have sexual motives Annex B sets out an exercise that education settings can use within staff training to illustrate the different types of [child-on-child] sharing incidents that can occur and highlight that an appropriate and proportionate response needs to be considered for each incident.