Tudhoe Learning Trust

Child on Child Abuse Policy

Approved by:	Chief Executive Officer	**Date:**	October 2026
Last reviewed on:	October 2026		
Next review due by:	October 2027		

Safeguarding Policies for Children and Young People

The safeguarding policies are in place to help prevent children and young people up to 18 years of age being at risk of harm. We advise that safeguarding policies are read in conjunction with each other. If you have any concerns or questions regarding policies, please refer to a member of your school's Senior Leadership Team or to the Trust's HR Manager at 01388 811765.

If you are **worried about a child or a young person** being at risk of harm please speak to the Head Teacher, Designated Safeguarding Lead or HR Manager in confidence. DO NOT IGNORE THE CONCERN.

For more details/information on Safeguarding refer to the following documents:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Behaviour in schools: advice for headteachers and school staff 2024
- DoE Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education
- Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice education settings working with children and young people 2024
- Trust Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy

Introduction

The Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children. We recognise that children may face different forms of abuse, and we work together to protect children from harm. As well as being abused by adults, children can be abused by other children. This is known as 'child on child abuse' or 'peer on peer abuse.'

The Trust is committed to preventing child on child abuse and will protect children that may be suffering, or at risk of suffering harm perpetrated by another child. We recognise that child on child abuse is abuse and should never be passed off as 'just banter or having a laugh'.

We appreciate that often there are barriers to reporting child on child abuse and as such, we understand that even if there are no reports it does not mean it is not happening. We maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' and act in the best interests of the child at all times

Definitions

The following terms and associated definitions will be used throughout this policy.

- Staff or member of staff refers to all teaching, non-teaching, support, supply, peripatetic, contract staff, governors, volunteers and trustees working in or on behalf of the school.
- Child/children refers to any young person under the age of 18.
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as; protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.
- Child on child abuse refers to any scenario where a child under the age of 18 abuses another child under the age of 18. It can take place online or offline. The children involved do not have to be the same age and the perpetrator may be older or younger than the victim.

Child on child abuse is most likely to include but is not limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying).
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse').
- 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).
- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence).
- Sexual harassment such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse.
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip and touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party.
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery). They can be sent using mobiles, tablets, smartphones, laptops - any device that allows you to share media and messages.
- Upskirting: typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm. It is a criminal offence and may constitute sexual harassment. It is mandatory to report cases of upskirting to the DSL.
- 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).

Sexual violence in the context of Child-on-Child sexual violence includes:

- Rape: A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
- Assault by Penetration: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.
- Sexual Assault: A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching, and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g.to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions, such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity, and each time activity occurs. Someone consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

- A child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity.
- The age of consent is 16.
- Sexual intercourse without consent is rape.
- It is also important to differentiate between consensual sexual activity between children of a similar age and that which involves any power imbalance, coercion or exploitation. Due to their additional training, the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) should be involved in leading the school or college response, in consultation with expert advice.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) is an umbrella term for behaviour that exists on a wide continuum, from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. Harmful sexual behaviour can occur online and/or offline and can also occur simultaneously between the two. Harmful sexual behaviour should be considered in a child protection context.

RSHE: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education became statutory from September 2020. The subjects should put in place the key building blocks for healthy, respectful relationships, focusing on family and friendships, in all contexts, including online. This will sit alongside the essential understanding of how to be healthy.

Online Abuse: The Trust recognises that child-on-child abuse can be perpetrated through the use of technology and may occur both inside and outside of school. This includes online sexual harassment, unwanted sexualised comments or messages, sharing or threatening to share nude or semi-nude images, image-based abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour online, cyberbullying, abuse occurring through gaming platforms and social media, and the creation or distribution of AI-generated or digitally manipulated images. The impact of online abuse can be widespread and long-lasting, particularly where images or content can be repeatedly shared. Allegations of technology-facilitated abuse will be taken seriously, investigated promptly, and managed using the same safeguarding procedures as incidents occurring in person. Support will be provided to victims and appropriate action taken to safeguard all children involved.

Trust policy on Child-on-Child Abuse

Prevention

The Trust actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of Child-on-Child abuse by:

- Educating all members of the leadership team, staff, pupils, and parents. Training and guidance

will include Contextual Safeguarding, the identification and classification of specific behaviours, including digital behaviours, the importance of taking seriously all forms of Child on Child abuse and ensuring that no form of child-on child abuse is ever dismissed as horseplay or teasing, and social media and online safety, including how to encourage children to use social media in a positive, responsible and safe way, and how to enable them to identify and manage abusive behaviour online.

- Educating children about positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via PSHE, RSHE and the wider curriculum. By the end of primary school, pupils should know how to keep themselves safe, about the characteristics of family life, including those that are different from their own, caring friendships and respectful relationships, including online relationships.
- Pupils are frequently told 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. They are regularly informed that any form of Child on Child abuse is unacceptable.
- Engaging parents by:
    - talking about them with parents, both in groups and one on one,
    - asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the Trust address those risks,
    - involving parents in the review of Trust policies and lesson plans, and
    - encouraging parents to hold the Trust to account on this issue, in part because of visibility of this policy.

- Promoting pupil welfare by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise their mental health, and by providing in-school counselling and therapy to address underlying mental health needs.

- creating a whole-school culture in which pupils aspire to, and realise, safe and healthy relationships and addressing equality issues, to promote positive values, and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all members of the Trust.

- Responding to cases of Child-on-Child abuse promptly and appropriately.

- Ensuring that all Child-on-Child abuse issues are fed back to the designated safeguarding lead so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify pupils who may need additional support.

- Conducting a risk assessment to determine the specific risks to which the pupils at the Trust are or may be exposed, assessing and monitoring these risks.

- The risk assessment should consider:
    - the nature and level of risk of the different variants of Child-on-Child abuse within the Trust,
    - the makeup of the pupil body, including specific characteristics that might affect their vulnerability to Child-on-Child abuse such as, gender, age, learning difficulties, special educational needs and/or disabilities, sexual orientation and/or religious belief,
    - which of these pupils are affected, or are more at risk of being affected, by Child-on-Child abuse,
    - any trends, and o contextual safeguarding and the risks to pupils including their peer group (both within and outside the Trust), family, the school environment, their about experience of crime and/or victimisation in the local community, and their online identities - which may impact on their behaviour and engagement in school.

Early identification

All staff should be alert to the well-being of pupils and to signs of abuse, and 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 disclose or present with behaviour(s) because of their experiences will differ.

Child on Child abuse may affect boys differently from girls because of societal norms and attitudes to femininity and masculinity. This may create barriers to disclosure. The Trust should explore the gender dynamics of Child-on-Child abuse, recognise that these will play out differently depending on the gender balance.

Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND and additional barriers can sometimes exist when recognising abuse in children with SEND. These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to a child's disability without further exploration,
- the potential for children with SEND to be disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying and harassment, without outwardly showing any signs
- communication barriers and difficulties, and
- overcoming these barriers.

Some children may be more likely to experience Child on Child abuse than others because of certain characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs.

Trust staff will use tools such as The Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool to distinguish between three levels of sexual behaviour – green, amber and red, and to respond according to the level of concern.

When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum to decide how to respond. This could include, for example, whether it:

- is socially acceptable,
- involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time,
- is socially acceptable within the peer group,
- is problematic and concerning,
- involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability,
- involves an element of coercion or pre-planning,
- involves a power imbalance between the child/ children allegedly responsible for the behaviour and the child/children allegedly the subject of that power and involves a misuse of power.

The school will always act in the best interests of the victim. The wishes of the victim will be considered when determining support and safeguarding measures, whilst balancing the Trust's duty to protect all children.

Appropriate management

Responding assertively to inappropriate behaviour is an important intervention that helps prevent challenging, abusive and/or violent behaviour in the future. Any response should:

- include a thorough investigation of the concern(s) or allegation(s), and the wider context in which it/they may have occurred: depending on the nature and seriousness of the alleged incident(s), it may be appropriate for the police and/or children's social care to carry out this investigation

- treat all children involved as being at potential risk; while the alleged perpetrator may pose a significant risk of harm to other children, s/he may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves.

The Trust should ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for victims and the alleged perpetrator, and additional sanctioning work may be required for the latter

The Trust should consider:

- that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for any of the children involved and consider and address the effect of wider sociocultural contexts – such as the child's/ children's peer group (both in and outside the Trust); family; the Trust environment; their experience of crime and victimisation in the local community; and the child/children's online presence. Consider what changes may need to be made to these contexts to address the child/ children's needs and to mitigate risk, and
- the potential complexity of Child-on-Child abuse and of children´s experiences, and consider the interplay between power, choice and consent. While children may appear to be making choices, if those choices are limited, they are not consenting,
- the views of the children affected. Unless it is considered unsafe to do so (for example, where a referral needs to be made immediately), the DSL should discuss the proposed action with the child/ children and their parents and obtain consent to any referral before it is made.

The Trust should manage the child/children's expectations about information sharing, and keep them and their parents informed of developments, where appropriate and safe to do so. It is particularly important to consider the wishes of any child who has allegedly been abused, and to give that child as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding how any investigation will be progressed and how they will be supported.

Child on Child abuse that involves sexual assault, and sexual violence must always result in a multiagency response. As well as supporting and protecting the victim, professionals need to consider whether the alleged perpetrator could be a victim of abuse too. Children who develop harmful sexual behaviour have often experienced abuse and neglect themselves.

Children affected by sexual assault and sexual violence must receive the help they need. A typical response will involve:

- Children's social care
- The police
- Specialist services that support children who demonstrate harmful sexual behaviour
- The family
- Any other professionals who know or who have had contact with the child.

If the children are in the same class, the Trust should separate them while the concerns are being investigated. In situations of alleged rape and assault by penetration, the alleged perpetrator must always be removed from classes they share with the victim.

The Trust should consider how best to keep the alleged perpetrator and victim apart while they are on the same premises, as well as on transport to and from the Trust. Separation arrangements must be continued for as long as is necessary to make sure children are safe. This includes beyond the investigation even if it is inconclusive. Lack of conviction is not the same as the allegation being unfounded.

When the school considers safeguarding risks, a risk assessment should be prepared along with a preventative, supervision plan. The plan should be monitored, and a date set for a follow-up evaluation with everyone concerned.

Disciplinary action

The Trust should consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved.

In cases when a member of staff or headteacher suspects criminal behaviour, the Trust will make an initial assessment of whether an incident should be reported to the police only by gathering enough information to establish the facts of the case. These initial investigations should be fully documented, and the Trust will make every effort to preserve any relevant evidence. Once a decision is made to report the incident to police, the Trust will ensure any further action they take does not interfere with any police action taken. However, the Trust retains the discretion to continue investigations and enforce their own sanctions so long as it does not conflict with police action. However, if there are police proceedings underway, or there could be, it is critical that the Trust works in partnership with the police and/or children's social care.

Where a matter is not of interest to the police and/or children's social care, the Trust may still need to consider what is the most appropriate action to take to ensure positive behaviour management. Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, including to:

- ensure that the child/children take responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour
- demonstrate to the child/children and others that Child on Child abuse can never be tolerated; and
- ensure the safety and wellbeing of other children.

Record keeping

The Trust will retain records evidencing compliance with this policy, as set out in the Trust's Data Retention Policy.

When responding to concerns or allegations of Child-on-Child abuse, the Trust will:

- always consider carefully, in consultation with children's social care, the police and other relevant agencies (where they are involved), how to share information about the concern or allegation with the children affected, their parents, staff, and other children and individuals,
- Keep secure contemporaneous records of all information provided in statements, of actions taken including the rationale of these actions such as the advice received from external agencies. The records should also include evidence where possible actions have been considered but rejected with the rationale for this decision.
- record the information that is necessary for the Trust and other relevant agencies (where they are involved) to respond to the concern or allegation and safeguard everyone involved,
- keep a record for the legal purpose of sharing the information with any third party, including relevant authorities, and ensure that the third party has agreed to handle the information securely and to only use it for the agreed legal purpose.

Reporting and Consequences of Non-Compliance

The Head Teacher must inform the Chief Executive Officer of any serious safeguarding incident in accordance with Trust safeguarding procedures.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Trust Safeguarding Lead. At every review, the policy will be approved by the Chief Executive Officer on behalf of the Trust Board of Directors.