



Child on child sexual abuse

Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges Published September 2025

The term 'child on child' sexual abuse includes:

- sexual violence, such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault
- sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be stand-alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or to cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm
- sexting (also known as 'youth-produced sexual imagery')

There are a wide variety of behaviours that children and young people report happen online. These include:

- receiving unsolicited explicit photographs or videos, for example 'dick pics'
- sending, or being pressured to send, nude and semi-nude photographs or videos ('nudes')
- being sent or shown solicited or unsolicited online explicit material, such as pornographic videos

Typical platforms for sharing material between peers tend to be WhatsApp or Snapchat.

'Keeping children safe in education' says that all staff should be aware that children are capable of abusing their peers and that they should be clear about their relevant policies and procedures to address peer-on-peer abuse.

We acknowledge that the term 'child on child' does not refer only to sexual abuse, but also to other forms of child-on-child abuse, such as bullying. The term 'child on child abuse' is helpful in focusing professionals' attention on the fact that children can abuse other children. However, in the context of sexual abuse, it could lead to professionals dismissing potentially harmful sexual behaviour as simply 'developmental', when there are power dynamics, age imbalances and other aspects that would warrant further investigation.

In terms of sexualised language, children and young people report that 'slag' and 'slut' are commonplace and that homophobic language is also used in school. Many feel that staff either are not aware of this language, dismiss it as 'banter' or simply are not prepared to tackle it.

Many also comment that they would be wary of tackling their peers' use of this language, even when they did not feel comfortable with such terms. Sometimes, children and young people themselves see the use of derogatory language as 'banter' or 'just a joke'.

Figure 1. Definition: Sexual behaviours across a continuum

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
- Developmentally expected	- Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour	- Problematic and concerning behaviour	- Victimising intent or outcome	- Physically violent sexual abuse
- Socially acceptable	- Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group	- Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected	- Includes misuse of power	- Highly intrusive
- Consensual, mutual, reciprocal	- Context for behaviour may be inappropriate	- No overt elements of victimisation	- Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance	- Instrumental violence that is psychologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator
- Shared decision-making	- Generally consensual and reciprocal	- Consent issues may be unclear	- Intrusive	- Sadism
		- May lack reciprocity or equal power	- Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given by victim	
		- May include levels of compulsivity	- May include elements of expressive violence	

Newlands Junior School Peer on Peer Abuse Action Plan

(following Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges Published 10 June 2021 Reviewed September 23 and September 2025)

Current Situation:

- The NCC Child on Child Abuse template has been used to review the school's policy.
- Staff have received training regarding child on child abuse.
- The Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges has been read and shared with staff, highlighting actions for the school.
- The statutory RSHE curriculum is planned including topics on honesty and truthfulness, permission seeking and giving, the concept of personal privacy, establishing personal space and boundaries, showing respect and understanding the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe physical, and other, contact.
- Newlands stance and strategies are developed with governors who also monitor incidents.
- School works with parents/carers if incidents occur to provide support for the perpetrator and victim.
- All instances of child on child abuse are logged on CPOMs and addressed by SLT/DSLs. Incident report forms are completed and actions followed up.
- The ethos of the school and the resources used, positively display a culture of respect and equality and pupils/parents and carers are aware any issues arising will be dealt with.

Success Criteria:

- The policy and school procedures will be followed diligently by all staff.
- Staff will be well equipped to deal with disclosures of peer on peer abuse and understand their response will determine pupil's willingness to confide in adults.
- School will constantly review how the current system of safeguarding in school enables us to listen to the voices of children when reporting sexual abuse ensuring we act upon this appropriately so that pupils see it is dealt with.
- Incidents will continue to be logged and dealt with and will remain low due to the education pupils receive and the respectful environment they are in.
- Parents will continue to work with school to deal with incidents to support victims and perpetrators.
- Pupil's will continue to be taught what constitutes "child on child abuse" (verbal, physical, online and face-to-face) and understand the impact this has on others.
- School will make use of resources e.g. Beyond Referrals Audit, TETTC, in order to continue to build on its current good practise and ensure pupils are safe with a good understanding of healthy relationships and behaviour.

1. School culture and prevention

- **Establish a zero-tolerance culture:** Create an environment where harmful behaviours are not excused as "banter" and where all staff challenge unacceptable behaviour, online and offline.
- **Promote healthy relationships:** Embed a positive whole-school ethos that promotes equality, respect, and tolerance, and includes discussions about consent in an age-appropriate way.
- **Ensure a safe environment:** Make sure the school site is safe and secure, and that policies are in place for visitors and for the safe dropping off and picking up of children.

2. Staff training and roles

- **Provide comprehensive training:** Ensure all staff and volunteers receive regular, up-to-date training on child protection and child-on-child abuse.
- **Know the procedures:** Staff must understand the school's safeguarding policy and know how to report concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or their deputies.
- **Challenge behaviour:** All staff should challenge any form of behaviour they see, recording it factually and reporting it to the DSL immediately.
- **Understand roles and responsibilities:** Staff need to be aware of the signs of abuse, be alert to changes in behaviour, and know their duty to report concerns to the appropriate authorities if a child is at risk.

Action plan components

- **Whole-setting approach:** A clear, zero-tolerance policy that includes all staff and students. This means harmful behaviours will not be dismissed as "banter" and will be addressed with fair action.
- **Safeguarding culture:** Foster a secure environment where children feel safe to express concerns and know they will be listened to.
- **Training and education:** Ensure staff are trained to recognize signs of abuse and understand their responsibility to act. Educate children about mutual respect, equality, and making informed choices to build resilience.

- **Partnership with parents:** Encourage parents to communicate with the setting to work together on a prompt and appropriate response.
- **Clear reporting procedures:** Have clear protocols for reporting concerns, including when to contact the police, the NSPCC Helpline, or local child protection services.
- **Support for all children:** Recognize that children who have caused harm may have their own complex needs and may require additional support.

What to do if a child discloses abuse

1. **Stay calm and listen:** Be patient and let the child tell you what happened without interruption.
2. **Believe the child:** Assure them they have done the right thing by telling you.
3. **Reassure them:** Tell them it is not their fault and that you are taking them seriously.
4. **Explain next steps:** Tell them what you will do next to help them.
5. **Report the incident:** Follow your organization's safeguarding procedures to report the incident to the designated person or agency, such as children's social care.
6. **Seek external advice:** Contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or your local child protection services for expert advice.

Details of action to be taken	Lead Responsibility	Resource Implications Cost	Timeline	Monitoring Arrangements
<p>1. TRAINING</p> <p>Review and recap training for staff on the continuum of harmful sexual behaviour and how to address the context behind incidents of harmful sexual behaviour, such as peer group dynamics or unsupervised spaces where poor behaviour could occur. Ensure this is part of a wider school ethos and long-term strategy for preventing abuse.</p> <p>Ensure new staff understand the definitions of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online sexual abuse, identify early signs of peer-on-peer sexual abuse and consistently uphold standards in their responses to sexual harassment and online sexual abuse.</p> <p>School policies and statutory guidance such as ‘Keeping children safe in education’ will inform practice.</p> <p>Staff will receive training to understand that the most common reason that children do not report an experience is not knowing what will happen next and the poor response by professionals which can leave children feeling out of control.</p> <p><i>Pupils’ concerns about confidentiality can be a barrier to reporting. Children and young people know that schools cannot always keep everything confidential and may need to share information with other agencies. But they want assurance that there are some things that are ‘not to be passed on’. Children do not always know ‘what will be done with the information’.</i></p> <p><i>Evidence from previous research indicates that this is the most effective way to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online.</i></p>	DSLs/SLT	N/A	September 2025	Training register
<p>2. ETHOS</p> <p>Leaders will take a whole-school approach to developing a culture where all kinds of sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are recognised and addressed. To achieve this, school will create an environment where staff model respectful and appropriate behaviour, where children are clear about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and where they are confident to ask for help and support when they need it.</p> <p><i>Even where school leaders do not have specific information that indicates sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are problems for their children and young people, they should act on the assumption that they are.</i></p>	All Staff	N/A	Ongoing	<p>Learning walks</p> <p>Pupil voice</p> <p>Observations/ conversations during unstructured times of the day</p>

<p>3. RSHE CURRICULUM</p>	<p>School will review the carefully sequenced RSHE curriculum, based on the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) statutory guidance, that specifically includes sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online. This will include time for open discussion of topics that children find particularly difficult, such as consent and the sending of ‘nudes’ Concepts will be sequenced and interwoven in an ‘age and stage’ manner, allowing for content to be revisited and built on in further depth at appropriate points in children’s learning.</p> <p>Staff will be knowledgeable about the content of their RSHE curriculum as it is updated for September 2026.</p> <p>School will use assemblies, to address concerning behaviour placing an emphasis on the importance of respect, consent and healthy relationships.</p>	<p>CB curriculum lead</p>	<p>Release time for planning subject documents and assembly rotas</p>	<p>Spring 26</p>	<p>Citizenship knowledge organiser</p> <p>RSHE planning</p> <p>Assembly rotas and weekly values</p>
<p>4. PARENTS</p>	<p>When planning the RSHE curriculum, school understands it is essential to work closely with parents and carers, talking them through areas covered, address any gaps in their understanding and equip them with the confidence to be able to have open discussions with their children.</p> <p>New parents/carers will be informed about the content of the RSHE curriculum and given guidance to support pupils. School recognises the importance of family involvement and the need to support parents and carers.</p> <p><i>Research indicates that there is a particular gap in parents’ understanding of issues around online sexual abuse. Many parents are interested in learning more about the issue through schools and online resources. They also want more support in understanding how to talk about these issues with their children.</i></p>	<p>CB curriculum lead</p>	<p>Release time for planning subject documents and information for parents</p>	<p>Summer 25 (to be reviewed for changes in Sept 26) Autumn 25</p>	<p>Parent questionnaires</p> <p>RSHE parent’s guide</p>

<p>5. RECORD KEEPING</p>	<p>Routine record-keeping and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, will continue to be vigilant. Staff will record incidents on CPOMs which will be analysed by SLT to identify patterns and intervene early to prevent abuse.</p> <p>Data from these recordings will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what the incident was • where it happened • the characteristics of the victim and their relationship to the perpetrator • the response to the incident • the incident’s impact on the victim <p>The intention of this analysis will be to identify common themes and build a broad picture of the experiences children are reporting. School will gather information about pupils’ concerns, for example through surveys, to give us a better understanding and oversight of issues. DSLs will look to build a better picture of low-level changes in behaviour or incidents may indicate a response is required, either at pupil, peer group or school level.</p> <p><i>In line with our practice for schools, Ofsted will request that college leaders supply records and analysis of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, to inspectors.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, inspectors will hold discussions with single-sex groups of pupils where this helps to understand better a school’s or college’s approach to tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online.</i></p>	<p>All staff</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Summer 26</p>	<p>CPOMs logs Child on child abuse incident form and abuse log Pupil voice</p>
<p>5. GOVERNORS</p>	<p>It is important that, governors have a good understanding of sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, so that they can provide the right level of support and challenge for school leaders and DSLs.</p> <p>Our safeguarding governor, will continue to meet regularly with the DSL and governors will be involved in reviewing incidents, safeguarding logs, behaviour logs or procedures related to harmful sexual behaviour. This will help identify wider patterns, or to check that school policies and procedures have been adhered to.</p>			<p>Termly</p>	<p>Presentation for governors Meeting minutes Link governor reports</p>

<p>6. VICTIMS' VOICE AND REPORTING</p>	<p>School will review how the current system of safeguarding in school enables us to listen to the voices of children when reporting sexual abuse whether occurring within or outside school?</p> <p>We will address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What prevents children from reporting sexual abuse? • Do victims receive timely and appropriate support from the right place? • Have actions been robust enough in relation to the issues raised? <p><i>Children and young people, especially girls, told us that they do not want to talk about sexual abuse for several reasons, even where their school encourages them to. For example, the risk of being ostracised by peers or getting peers into trouble is not considered to be worth it for something perceived by children and young people to be commonplace. They worry about how adults will react, because they think they will not be believed, or that they will be blamed. They also think that once they talk to an adult, the process will be out of their control.</i></p> <p>School will plan their response to sexual harassment and violence in order to reduce risk and to ensure pupils report such incidents.</p> <p>This will include sanctions when appropriate, to reinforce a culture where sexual harassment and online sexual abuse are not tolerated and also provide support for children who need it.</p> <p>Support will be offered to the victim and the perpetrator to prevent future incidents and tackle any underlying causes of harmful sexual behaviour. This may include counselling, pastoral support, educative approaches and the involvement of families, social care and external agencies, such as child and adolescent mental health services and specialist services.</p>	<p>CB</p> <p>Curriculum lead</p>	<p>Release time to carry out pupil voice</p>	<p>Summer 26</p>	<p>Pupil voice and actions for staff</p> <p>Peer on peer abuse policy</p>
<p>7. SELF AUDIT</p>	<p>School will investigate the use of the Beyond Referrals self-assessment toolkit to identify what we are doing well to mitigate against the risks in your school and to identify areas for development and improvement.</p> <p>This will help school to develop an environment where children and young people can talk to professionals about abuse including engaging students in small-group sessions to discuss different forms of harmful sexual behaviour and mapping the school and out-of-school spaces to identify where harmful sexual behaviour takes place.</p>	<p>SLT</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Summer 26</p>	<p>Self audit and actions</p>

BEYOND REFERRALS

The project highlights the following as important:

- children having a trusting and positive relationship with an individual staff member
- children being aware of previous positive experiences of school responses
- teachers showing that they respect students, listen and respond subtly
- having staff with a specialist role not linked to teaching or behaviour
- voices of children and young people at the heart of the approach to safeguarding. For example, one school had held 'listening events' to help children and young people share worries and speak to adults in a safe environment. Another school used an anonymous questionnaire to ask children and young people what the issues for their age group were and what language they used when discussing sexual harassment and online sexual abuse. Responses were built into staff training and helped build a culture where children and young people, leaders and teachers had a shared understanding of what sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, were. One leader explained:
 - So often, nobody is talking to young people about these things – including or especially their parents. These conversations are awkward so there has almost been a tacit agreement not to have them. This means that we risk not knowing what young people do, or think, and how what they do is affecting them.
 - In some schools, we also found evidence of how RSHE lessons had helped children and young people's understanding of these issues. This had led to a culture where children and young people felt able to talk to someone about sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, or to raise concerns about their peers. The victims' groups we spoke to also outlined the importance of creating this kind of supportive and open culture.
 - In some schools, leaders were reflecting on the testimonies on the Everyone's Invited website to critically evaluate and strengthen their processes. For example, in one school, there was a 'changing the narrative' pupil group. The group sensitively gathered information from other children and young people, talked about issues and informed leaders of their findings. In another school, leaders were trialing different reporting methods such as private messages through Teams chat. There was a whole-school approach to educating children and young people and encouraging them to come forward, delivered through assemblies, tutor time, posters and leaflets. They were also actively engaging parents and alumni to discuss concerns and address them where possible.
 - While it is too early for leaders to talk about the impact of such initiatives, children and young people in these schools told us that they can see that leaders are trying to respond in positive ways to the Everyone's Invited testimonies. They told us that they feel confident in talking about sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online, when there is a positive and open school culture.