



2024-2025 Child on Child Abuse Policy

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Introduction

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023 states that 'Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of child on child abuse'.

Stonyhurst International School is committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse. We continue to ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to reduce the extent of harm to the young person, with full consideration to the impact on that individual child's emotional and mental health and wellbeing.

All staff should have an awareness of safeguarding issues that can put children at risk of harm. Behaviours linked to issues such as drug taking, alcohol abuse, deliberately missing education and sexting (also known as youth produced sexual imagery) put children in danger.

All staff should be aware that safeguarding issues can manifest themselves via child-on-child abuse. This is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying);
 - physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm;
 - sexual violence and sexual harassment;
 - sexting (also known as youth-produced sexual imagery); and
 - initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.
- (KCSIE 2023)

Therefore, this policy will include a clear and comprehensive strategy taking a whole-school approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse, which includes a clear understanding by staff, children and young people and their parents about everyone's responsibility in managing any child-on-child abuse incidents. This will include both our prevention measures as well as our response to any incidents of harm.

Purpose

Children and young people may be harmful to one another in a number of ways which would be classified as child-on-child abuse. The purpose of this policy is to explore the many forms of child-on-child abuse and include a planned and supportive response to the issues.

At Stonyhurst International School Penang, we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- School Behaviour Management Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy
- Restorative Practices Policy
- Pupil Code of Conduct

What is child-on-child Abuse?

For these purposes, child-on-child abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate).

Child-on-child abuse can take various forms, including: serious bullying (including cyber-bullying), relationship abuse, domestic violence, child sexual exploitation, youth and serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, and/or gender-based violence. Children's experiences of abuse and violence are rarely isolated events, and they can often be linked to other things that are happening in their lives and the spaces in which they spend their time.

Any response to child-on-child abuse therefore needs to consider the range of possible types of child-on-child abuse set out above and capture the full context of children's experiences. Abusive behaviour can happen to pupils in school settings and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed, what appropriate support and intervention can be put in place to meet the needs of the individual and what preventative strategies may be put in place to reduce further risk of harm.

Abuse is abuse, and should never be tolerated or passed off as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'. Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender specific e.g. girls being sexually touched/assaulted and boys being subject to initiation/hazing-type violence. 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 how femininity and masculinity are constructed) rather than biological makeup.

It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability

Children with special educational needs and Disability (SEND) can face additional safeguarding challenges. These can include:

- assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's disability without further exploration;
- being more prone to peer group isolation than other children;
- the potential for children with SEND being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs; and
- communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these barriers.

To address these additional challenges, we will consider extra pastoral support for children with SEND particularly when investigating any form of child on child abuse (KCSIE, 2023).

Language

For the purposes of this policy the language used will refer to alleged victims and alleged perpetrators as research has shown that many children who present with harmful behaviour towards others, in the context of child-on-child abuse, are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents or adults in the community prior to their abuse of peers. (Farrer and Co. 2017).

The language used by children and parents in the reporting of any incidents that may have occurred could impact on any future rehabilitation of children and young people following any investigations that may occur.

Types of abuse

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between peers and the following list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse or prejudiced behaviour is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

1.1. Physical abuse (biting, hitting, kicking, hair pulling etc.)

Physical abuse may include, hitting, kicking, nipping, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm to another person. There may be many reasons why a child harms another and it is important to understand why a young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally, before considering the action or punishment to be undertaken.

1.2. Sexually harmful behaviour/sexual abuse (inappropriate sexual language, touching, sexual assault)

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it as well as the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate role play, to sexually touching another, sexual assault, rape or abuse.

1.3. Sexual violence and sexual harassment

Sexual violence refers to the sexual offences of rape and sexual assault. Sexual harassment means 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline. In referencing sexual harassment, it is in the context of child-on-child sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is likely to violate a child's dignity, and/or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualised environment (KCSIE 2021).

1.4. Bullying (inclusive of all types)

The definition of bullying is, 'a person who habitually seeks to harm or intimidate those who they perceive as vulnerable'.

Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages, social media or gaming, which can include the use of images and video) and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs or disabilities, or because a child is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences.

Many experts say that bullying involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This could involve perpetrators of bullying having control over the relationship which makes it difficult for those they bully to defend themselves. The imbalance of power can manifest itself in several ways, it may be physical, or psychological (knowing what upsets someone), derive from an intellectual imbalance, or by having access to the support of a group, or the capacity to socially isolate.

It can result in the intimidation of a person or persons through the threat of violence or by isolating them either physically or online.

Low-level disruption and the use of offensive language can in itself have a significant impact on its target. If left unchallenged or dismissed as banter or horseplay it can also lead to reluctance to report other behaviour.

(Preventing and Tackling Bullying, July 2017)

1.5. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above. It is important to state that cyberbullying can very easily fall into

criminal behaviour. Electronic communications which are indecent or grossly offensive, convey a threat or false information or demonstrate that there is an intention to cause distress or anxiety to the victim would be deemed to be criminal. Electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another could also be deemed to be criminal behaviour.

If the behaviour involves the use of taking or distributing indecent images of young people under the age of 18 then this is also a criminal offence. Outside of the immediate support, young people may require in these instances, the School will have no choice but to follow Malaysian National Law to investigate these situations.

1.6. Sexting (Youth Produced Sexual Imagery)

Sexting is when someone sends or receives a sexually explicit text, image or video. This includes sending 'nude pics', 'rude pics' or 'nude selfies'. Pressuring someone into sending a nude picture can occur in any relationship, to anyone, whatever their age, gender or sexual preference.

However, once the image is taken and sent, the sender has lost control of the image and these images could end up anywhere. By having in their possession, or distributing, indecent images of a person under 18 on to someone else, young people are not even aware that they could be breaking the law.

1.7. Initiation/Hazing

Hazing is a form of initiation ceremony which is used to induct newcomers into an organisation such as a private school, sports team etc. There are a number of different forms, from relatively mild rituals to severe and sometimes violent ceremonies. The idea behind this practice is that it welcomes newcomers by subjecting them to a series of trials which promote a bond between them. After the hazing is over, the newcomers also have something in common with older members of the organisation, because they all experienced it as part of a rite of passage. Many rituals involve humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, and harassment.

1.8. Prejudiced Behaviour

The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised, and which is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – in particular, prejudices to do with disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class) and sexual identity.

1.9. Teenage relationship abuse

Teenage relationship abuse is defined as a pattern of actual or threatened acts of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, perpetrated by an adolescent (between the ages of 13 and 18) against a current or former partner. Abuse may include insults, coercion, social sabotage, sexual harassment, threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse. The abusive teen uses this pattern of violent and coercive behaviour in order to gain power and maintain control over the partner.

Measuring the behaviour

Simon Hackett's continuum of behaviour (taken from Farrer and Co. 2017) can be a useful guide to measure the behaviour that has occurred and consider the circumstances around the incident(s). The continuum looks at 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
- involves a misuse of power

Behaviour which is not abusive at first may potentially become abusive quickly or over time. Intervening early and addressing any inappropriate behaviour which may be displayed by a child is vital and could potentially prevent their behaviour from progressing on a continuum to become problematic, abusive and/or violent - and ultimately requiring (greater/more formal) engagement with specialist external and/or statutory agencies.

Expected action taken from all staff

All staff should be alert to the wellbeing of children and young people 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 will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ (Farrer and Co. 2017).

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator of the harm, these simple steps can help clarify the situation and establish the facts before deciding the consequences for those involved in perpetrating harm.

It is important to deal with a situation of peer abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible to get a true, accurate account of the facts around what has happened so that nothing is forgotten. It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the children and the parents when they become involved. For example; do not use the word perpetrator, this can quickly create a 'blame' culture and leave a child labelled.

Staff should be mindful of contextual safeguarding and that wider safeguarding concerns may influence the child's account of the event(s). Alongside this peer pressure and the impact of sharing information about the incident(s) may also influence a child's account.

All concerns or disclosures of child-on-child abuse must be immediately reported to the Head of Pastoral/Designated Safeguarding Lead.

2.1 Gather the Facts

In cases specifically relating to sexual violence and sexual harassment, part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023) states that two members of staff (one being the Designated Safeguarding Lead) should be present to manage the report, where possible.

In all circumstances, staff need to speak to all the young people involved separately, gain a statement of facts from them and use consistent language and open questions for each account. The easiest way to do this is not to have a line of questioning but to ask the young people to tell you what happened. Only interrupt the young person from this to gain clarity with open questions, 'where, when, why, who'. (What happened? Who observed the incident? What was seen? What was heard? Did anyone intervene?) A full and clear record of exactly what the young person has said in their own language should be made and stored following each school/setting's own recording protocols (iSAMS or paper when iSAMS is unavailable).

2.2. Consider the intent (begin to risk assess)

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

Decide on the next course of action

If from the information that you gather you believe any young person to be at risk of significant harm you must make a safeguarding report of concern immediately. This action would, in most circumstances be undertaken by the Designated Safeguarding Lead but in the event of their absence the referral can be made by to the Principal.

If a crime has been committed and the police are notified, they may pursue this further by asking to interview the young people in school, or they may ask for parents to come to school to be spoken to also. It is important to be prepared for every situation and the potential time it may take. The School will follow all Malaysian National Laws.

2.3 Informing parents

If, once appropriate advice has been sought then parents would be informed as soon as possible. If external services/agencies are not going to be involved then equally, this information may need to be shared with parents. Parents would not be informed if by doing so the child was put at further risk of significant harm.

In all circumstances where the risk of harm to the child is evident then the School will encourage the young person to share the information with their parent/s (they may be afraid to tell parents that they are being harmed in any way).

The best way to inform parents is face to face. Although this may be time-consuming, the nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a young person may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another. With this in mind, the DSL, Head of Pastoral, Deputy Principal or Principal will meet with all relevant parties to follow up on the incident personally.

2.4. Points to consider:

- What is the age of the children involved?
- How old are the young people involved in the incident and is there any age difference between those involved? (In relation to sexual exploration, children under the age of 5, in particular 1-4 year olds who are learning toileting skills may show a particular interest in exploration at around this stage. This, however, should not be overlooked if other issues arise (see following).
- Where did the incident or incidents take place?
- Was the incident in an open, visible place to others? If so, was it observed? If not, is more supervision required within this particular area?
- What was the explanation by all children involved of what occurred?
- Can each of the young people give the same explanation of the incident and also what is the effect on the young people involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying for example, in which case was it regular and repetitive? Is the version of one young person different from another and why?
- What is each of the children's own understanding of what occurred?
- Do the young people know/understand what they are doing? e.g. do they have knowledge of body parts, of privacy and that it is inappropriate to touch? Is the young person's explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the young person have an understanding of the impact of their behaviour on the other person? In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear

cut. Advice would be sought from an external specialist/expert to follow up with any concerns.

2.5. Repetition

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered whether the behaviour has persisted after the issue has already been discussed or dealt with and appropriately resolved.

2.6. Outcomes

The outcome of the investigation will follow local guidance, meaning a referral may be made to either the police/social care for a full investigation. It may be that on investigation, a decision has been made to handle the incident(s) internally in which case the School will implement the School's Behaviour Management Policy, Restorative Practice Approach and/or the School's Expulsion, Removal and Review Policy.

If the incidents reveal a Child Protection and Safeguarding concern, the guidelines of the School's Policy will also be enacted by the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

In any of the above outcomes the school has a duty of care to manage the education needs of both children/young people in which case an educational plan may be needed irrespective of the outcome.

2.7. Next Steps

Once the outcome of the incident(s) has been established it is necessary to ensure future incidents of abuse do not occur again and consider the support and intervention required for those involved.

For the young person who has been harmed (the alleged victim)

What support they require depends on the individual young person. It may be that they wish to seek counselling or one-to-one support via a mentor. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with the support of family and friends. In such cases, it is necessary that this young person continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the young person may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other young people or some restorative practice work with all those involved may be required.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group, for example a speaker on cyberbullying, relationship abuse etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PSHE that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

If the young person feels particularly vulnerable it may be that a support plan can be put in place for them whilst in school so that they have someone named that they can talk to, support strategies for managing future issues and identified services to offer additional support.

For the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour (alleged perpetrator)

In this circumstance, it is important to find out why the young person has behaved in such a way. It may be that the young person is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have been harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases support such as one to one mentoring or counselling may also be necessary. Particular support from identified services may be necessary through a referral and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person has been met, it is important that the young person receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the

form of restorative justice e.g. making amends with the young person they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying.

If there is any form of criminal investigation ongoing it may be that this young person cannot be educated on-site until the investigation has concluded, in which case the young person will need to be provided with appropriate support and education whilst off-site.

Even following the conclusion of any investigation, the behaviour that the young person has displayed may continue to pose a risk to others, in which case an individual risk assessment may be required. This may mean additional supervision of the young person or protective strategies if the young person feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

The school may also choose a punishment as a consequence such as exclusion or internal exclusion/inclusion/seclusion for a period of time to allow the young person to reflect on their behaviour.

2.8. Aftercare

It is important that following the incident the young people involved continue to feel supported and receive help even if they have stated that they are managing the incident. Sometimes the feelings of remorse, regret or unhappiness may occur at a much later stage than the incident. It is important to ensure that the young people do not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). In such cases, regular reviews with the young people following the incident(s) are imperative. This will be conducted by the Head of Pastoral regularly.

2.9. Disciplinary Action

The School will consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved. Any such action will address the abuse, the causes of it, and attitudes underlying it.

Disciplinary action may sometimes be appropriate, (a) to ensure that the child/children take(s) responsibility for and realise(s) the seriousness of their behaviour; (b) to demonstrate to the child/children and others that child on child abuse can never be tolerated; and (c) to ensure the safety and well-being of other children. However, these considerations must be balanced against the child's/children's own potential unmet needs and any safeguarding concerns.

Before deciding on appropriate action the School will always consider its duty to safeguard all children from harm; the underlying reasons for a child's behaviour; any unmet needs, or harm or abuse suffered by the child; the risk that the child may pose to other children; and the severity of the child on child abuse and the causes of it.

3.0. Review of Circumstances

Following any incident of harm, the School will reflect and evaluate its protocols and processes and consider if anything could have been done differently. A process of collaboration with staff will support in identifying what changes within the School need to occur. This demonstrates the School is continually reviewing its policies and systems in effectively keeping children safe.

3.1. Preventative Strategies

It is important for the School to develop appropriate strategies in order to prevent the issue of child-on-child abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way. Firstly, the School's recognition that child-on-child abuse can and will occur on any site even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. It is therefore important for the School to continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in

supporting young people in talking about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

This is supported by ensuring that the School has an open environment where young people feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting or worrying them.

To enable such an open and honest environment it is necessary to ensure the whole School staff feels confident and enabled to talk about issues and challenge perceptions of young people including use of inappropriate language and behaviour towards one another. In order to create such an environment, whole staff training including Child Protection and Safeguarding is completed. It is incredibly important that staff do not dismiss issues as 'banter' or 'growing up' or compare them to their own experiences of childhood. It is necessary that staff consider each issue and each individual in their own right before taking action. If staff minimise the concerns raised it may result in a young person seeking no further help or advice.

Parents need to be informed and included in understanding the policy about what child-on-child abuse is and how the School will be tackling it. This can help to alleviate any concerns and worries and create a joint approach.

Stonyhurst International School will have a Pupil Council to enable pupil voice, encouraging young people to support changes and develop 'rules of acceptable behaviour' which will help to create a positive ethos in School and one where all young people understand the boundaries of behaviour before it becomes abusive.

Schools which excel at tackling abuse have created an ethos of good behaviour where pupils treat one another and the School staff with respect because they know that this is the right way to behave. That culture extends beyond the classroom to the corridors, the refectory, the playground, and beyond the school gates including travel to and from school.

Stonyhurst International School will work to ensure that values of respect for staff and other pupils, an understanding of the value of education, and a clear understanding of how our actions affect others permeate the whole school environment and are reinforced by staff and older pupils who set a good example to the rest.