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Harmful Sexual Behaviour Protocol

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive.

Peer-on-peer sexual abuse is a form of HSB where sexual abuse takes place between children of a similar age or stage of development.

Problematic sexual behaviour (PSB) is developmentally inappropriate or socially unexpected sexualised behaviour which doesn't have an overt element of victimisation or abuse.

In **England**, the Department for Education (DfE) has also provided advice for schools and colleges on how to prevent and respond to reports of [Sexual violence and harassment between children \(DfE, 2021\)](#).

What you need to do

Statutory guidance for schools in England says leaders should act on the assumption that all children and young people are affected by peer-on-peer sexual abuse and harassment (Department for Education (DfE)). To help keep children safe, this is best practice for everyone working or volunteering with children but it can be difficult to know how best to protect children from HSB, PSB and peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

This HSB protocol has been developed to clarify the measures and Mitigation used by Pensford Primary School to proactively, actively and reactively manage Harmful Sexual Behaviour (the umbrella terminology for all sexual behaviours).

To support identification of Sexual Behaviours, Pensford Primary School (school) use the Traffic Light Tool¹ (produced by Brook).

Schools need to:

- understand legislation and guidance relating to HSB, PSB and peer-on-peer sexual abuse
- create a safe culture for all children and young people
- put policies and procedures in place

¹ [brook traffic light tool.pdf \(eastsussex.gov.uk\)](#)

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Proactive Considerations

Codes of conduct

Our school has a code of conduct which clearly sets out what behaviour is and is not appropriate for adults and children. This helps make sure everyone knows what behaviour is appropriate.

Our code of conduct sets out how we will support children and young people to behave appropriately and what the consequences will be if they are unable to follow the code.

Training

All staff and volunteers receive regular training to help them understand whether sexual behaviour is developmentally typical, problematic, harmful or abusive and know what action to take. Trustees and school governors have a good understanding of what sexualised behaviour is, when it can pose a risk to children and how to keep children safe.

Reviewing and updating

Training, policies and procedures are updated regularly to make sure they are up-to-date with national guidance and reflect the needs of the children and young people we work with.

Clear records of any incidents of PSB, HSB or peer-on-peer abuse are kept, and we analyse these regularly. This helps identify patterns and improve the measures we are taking to keep children safe.

Creating a safe culture

Our school works hard to create a healthy and safe environment for all children and young people. This includes developing a culture where all kinds of problematic, harmful and abusive sexual behaviour are recognised and addressed. We have implemented a whole school approach towards responding to HSB which includes our policies, procedures and training.

Sharing policies and procedures

Safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures are shared with staff, volunteers, parents and carers. This ensures everyone understands what they need to do to help prevent and tackle problematic, harmful and abusive sexual behaviour.

We also have a pupil friendly approach to sharing this information using the So-Safe framework (see our RSE policy for more information).

Sharing this information can:

- help children and young people understand that any incidents of problematic, harmful or abusive sexual behaviour will be taken seriously and responded to effectively
- help them know who to talk to if anything upsetting has happened
- encourage them to speak out if they are worried about their own or someone else's behaviour.

This information is accessible, clear and visually supported.

Modelling appropriate behaviour

Staff and volunteers model respectful and appropriate behaviour. All understand and agree to follow our codes of conduct. Staff and volunteers are supported to respond consistently and appropriately to any incidents of sexualised behaviour. Children and young people understand that our school wants to keep them safe.

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All inappropriate behaviour (even if it is relatively innocuous) will be addressed and school behaviour policies will be applied. Restorative approaches support all involved to understand the impact on others, resolve differences and support stronger, healthier relationships.

Active Considerations

Safe environments

Environments are monitored and behaviour data is analysed to identify any locations where there are concerns about peer-on-peer sexual abuse taking place. Any identified areas are risk assessed and mitigations may include:

- Increased supervision
- Open door policies
- Low level concerns collated and actioned
- Robust procedures for any misconduct in line with Trust policies
- Empowering pupil voice and parental feedback/coproduction
- Online safety training and support
- Supporting learning through interventions using So-Safe and [Scarf](#)
- Working with other agencies

Children's understanding of sexualised behaviour

Children may not always understand that they have experienced or displayed problematic or harmful sexual behaviour. This might be because:

- they don't understand what constitutes appropriate, problematic or abusive sexualised behaviour
- they have experienced sexual abuse
- they don't know whether consent was given
- the abuse happened between friends or partners
- the abuse took place online
- they blame themselves for being abused
- they haven't received appropriate relationships and sex education

At our school, adults are able to have age-appropriate discussions with children and young people about sex and relationships. HSB can, in some cases, progress on a continuum. Addressing inappropriate behaviour is an important intervention that helps prevent problematic, abusive and/or violent behaviour in the future. Children displaying HSB have often experienced their own abuse and trauma and it is important that they are offered appropriate support.

Helping children speak out

Children might not always feel able to talk to adults about sexualised behaviour. School attempt to make this easier by:

- Building a positive, trusting relationships with children.
- Pupils have frequent opportunities to share their thoughts and opinions, and we encourage them to speak out.
- We listen to pupils respectfully and respond appropriately to what they say.
- Within the school we build a culture that challenges inappropriate behaviour. This can help children feel more confident that they will be supported if they raise concerns.
- Specialist staff make it easier for children to share anything they're worried about – all adults in the school are trained in Trauma Informed approaches and are aware of the importance of being emotionally available to young people.

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- Having an anonymous online system for reporting concerns or incidents - <https://forms.office.com/r/WS45F7n6T4>

Talking with children about sexual behaviour

We endeavour to talk to children in an age-appropriate way about sexual behaviour, trust, consent, boundaries and responsibility. This helps them have a clearer understanding of what behaviour is, and is not, appropriate and why.

Pupils are used to having open discussions with adults, which can help them feel more comfortable about speaking out if they are worried or upset about anything.

We involve parents by sharing the topics we're discussing and making time to answer their questions.

Relationships and sex education

Lessons on relationships, sex and sexuality are part of the curriculum.

We use Coram Scarf to support with our teaching of RSE.

Coram Scarf teaches pupils about friendships and boundaries. Each lesson links to the RSE standards and we select the lessons based on the individual pupil development.

Relationship Education is interwoven in all of PSHE, as being able to form healthy relationships is key.

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Reactive Considerations

Responding to Concerns about PSB or HSB

In the event of problematic or harmful sexual behaviour (PSB or HSB) school recognise that it is important to respond quickly, proportionately and appropriately. If staff have any concerns about a child's welfare, **they will act on them immediately**, rather than wait to be told. Where the report includes an online element, staff are aware of searching screening and confiscation advice (for schools) and [UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#). Staff are trained not to view or forward illegal images of a child and when it is appropriate to confiscate any devices to preserve any evidence and hand them to the police for inspection.

When a pupil has displayed or experienced PSB, HSB or peer-on-peer abuse but they are not in immediate danger, concerns are shared in the following ways.

- **School safeguarding and child protection procedures**, including sharing concerns with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). If possible, reports are managed with two members of staff present, (preferably one of them being the designated safeguarding lead or a deputy). However, this might not always be possible. There are four likely strategies to consider when managing any reports of sexual violence and/or sexual harassment. The DSL or DDSL will:
 - **Manage Internally**
 - **Early Help**
 - **Referrals to Children's Social Care**
 - **Report to the police as appropriate** (for example, if an allegation of rape, sexual assault or sexual offence is made). This should happen alongside making a referral to children's social care, following local authority guidelines.
- **Contact the NSPCC helpline** on [0808 800 5000](tel:0808 800 5000) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.
- **Contact the Report Abuse in Education helpline** on [0800 136 663](tel:0800 136 663) or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.
- **Contact your local child protection services - [0300 123 2224](tel:0300 123 2224)**
An Early Help Assessment will also need to be submitted

Children and young people can also contact:

- **Report Abuse in Education helpline** to talk about being involved or witnessing incidents or sharing experiences of sexual abuse and harassment by calling [0800 136 663](tel:0800 136 663) or email help@nspcc.org.uk.
- Childline has produced age-appropriate information and advice for children and young people about sexual abuse, which includes information about HSB and peer-on-peer sexual abuse. Signpost children to Childline for support, or use some of these examples to help start a conversation. [See Childline's information about sexual abuse for children and young people](#).
- Children can also contact Childline for free on [0800 1111](tel:0800 1111) if they need to talk to a counsellor confidentially.

Risk assessment

When there has been a report of HSB, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) will make an immediate risk and needs assessment. The risk and needs assessment should consider:

- the victim, especially their protection and support;
- whether there may have been other victims,
- the alleged perpetrator(s); and
- all the other children, (and, if appropriate, adult students and staff) at the school, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them from the alleged perpetrator(s), or from future harms.

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Whilst the school establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with children's social care and the police, the alleged perpetrator(s) will be removed from any classes they share with the victim. The school will also carefully consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator(s) a reasonable distance apart on school site (including during any before or after school-based activities) and on transport to and from school, where appropriate. **These actions are in the best interests of all children involved and should not be perceived to be a judgment on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator(s).**

Where there is a police investigation there are likely to be 3 possible outcomes.

Conviction - Any conviction (even with legal anonymity reporting restrictions) is potentially going to generate interest among other pupils in the school. School will do its best to ensure both the victim and perpetrator remain protected, especially from any bullying or harassment (including online).

Caution - If a child receives a caution for a sexual offence, the school will update its risk assessment, ensure relevant protections are in place for all the children at the school and, if it has not already, consider any suitable action in line with their behaviour policy. This process should include a review of the necessary actions to keep all parties safe and meet their needs. If the perpetrator(s) remains in the same school as the victim, the school will be very clear as to their expectations regarding the perpetrator(s). This could include expectations regarding their behaviour and any restrictions the school or college thinks are reasonable and proportionate with regard to the perpetrator(s)' timetable.

No Further Action - Where cases are classified as "no further action" (NFA'd) by the police or Crown Prosecution Service, or where there is a not guilty verdict, the school will continue to offer support to the victim and the alleged perpetrator(s) for as long as is necessary. A not guilty verdict or a decision not to progress with their case will likely be traumatic for the victim. The fact that an allegation cannot be substantiated or was withdrawn does not necessarily mean that it was unfounded. School will discuss any decisions with the victim in this light and continue to offer support. The alleged perpetrator(s) is also likely to require ongoing support for what will have likely been a difficult experience.

Useful Links

Confidential, specialist support and advice on HSB is available from the specialist sexual violence sector:

- Contact [Rape Crisis \(England & Wales\)](#) or [The Survivors Trust](#) for information, advice, and details of local specialist sexual violence organisations.
- [NICE guidance](#) contains information on developing interventions, working with families and carers and multi-agency working.
- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has developed a [HSB toolkit](#), which amongst other things, provides support, advice and information on how to prevent it, links to organisations and helplines, resources about HSB by children, internet safety, sexual development and preventing child sexual abuse.
- The NSPCC provides free and independent advice about HSB: [NSPCC Learning: Protecting children from harmful sexual behaviour](#) and [NSPCC - Harmful sexual behaviour framework](#)
- [Contextual Safeguarding Network – Beyond Referrals \(Schools\)](#) provides a school self-assessment toolkit and guidance for addressing HSB in schools.
- StopItNow - [Preventing harmful sexual behaviour in children](#) - Stop It Now provides a guide for parents, carers and professionals to help everyone do their part in keeping children safe, they also run a free confidential helpline.

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