Lawley Primary School
Child on Child Abuse Policy

Introduction

The governors, senior leadership team, and all staff at Lawley Primary School are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse (as defined below) both within and beyond the school.

We believe that in order to protect children, all schools should be aware of the nature and level of risk to which their pupils are or may be exposed, and put in place a strategy that is tailored to their specific safeguarding context; and take a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach to preventing and responding to child-on-child abuse,

We regard the introduction of this policy as a preventative measure. We believe that in order to tackle child on child abuse proactively, it is necessary to focus on all four of the following areas:

(i) systems and structures;
(ii) prevention;
(iii) identification; and
(iv) response/intervention

We recognise the increasing national concern about this issue and wish to implement this policy in order to mitigate harmful attitudes and child on child abuse in the school setting so that if a child is feeling unsafe as a result of the behaviour of any of their peers, they should inform the school so that it can ensure that appropriate and prompt action is taken in response.

This policy is the school's overarching policy for any issue that could constitute child on child abuse. It relates to, and should be read alongside, the school's child protection policy and any other relevant policies including, but not limited to, bullying (including cyber-bullying), online safety, IT use, data protection and retention of records, children missing in education and behaviour and discipline.

This policy sets out our strategy for improving prevention and identifying and appropriately managing child on child abuse.

Lawley Primary School:

- recognises that abuse is abuse, and should never be passed off as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', or 'part of growing up',
- is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child abuse as set out in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (September 2026)
- does not use the term 'victim' and/or 'perpetrator'. This is because our School takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about child-on-child abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused, and those who are alleged to have abused their peers, in addition to any sanctioning work that may also be required for the latter. 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
- uses the terms 'child' and 'children', which is defined for the purposes of this policy as a person aged under 18. We have nonetheless chosen not to restrict our approach to child-on-child abuse under this policy

to children but instead to adopt a wider interpretation of our safeguarding responsibilities so that they apply to all pupils, regardless of age.

Although the starting point is that the School's response to child on child abuse should be the same for all pupils, regardless of age, there may be some different considerations in relation to, for example, a child aged under 10 in terms of how local agencies and/or partners respond. Similarly, the School's response to incidents involving the exchange of youth involved sexual imagery will need to differ depending on the age of the pupils involved. There is also likely to be a more significant criminal justice response in relation to any pupil responsible for abuse who is aged 18 or over,

This policy should, if relevant, according to the concern(s) or allegation(s) raised, be read in conjunction with the Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026) and any other advice and guidance referred to within it, as appropriate; and should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

What is child-on-child abuse?

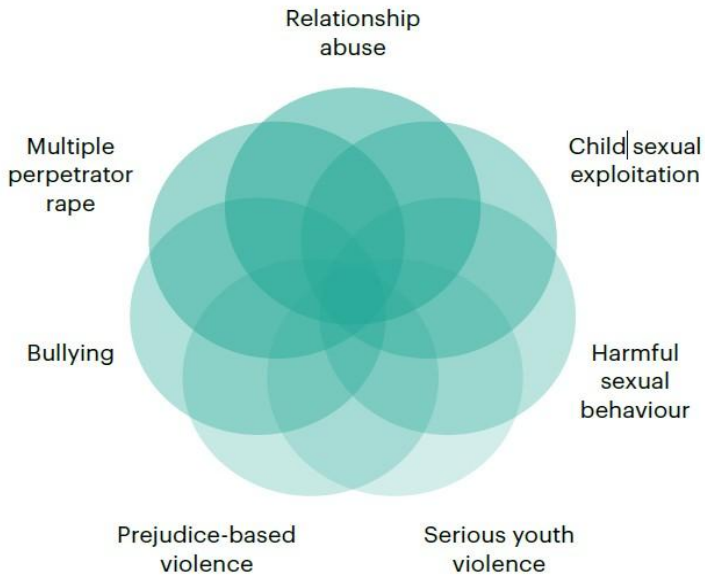
For these purposes, child on child abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control exercised between children, and within children's relationships (both intimate and nonintimate), friendships and wider peer associations.

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

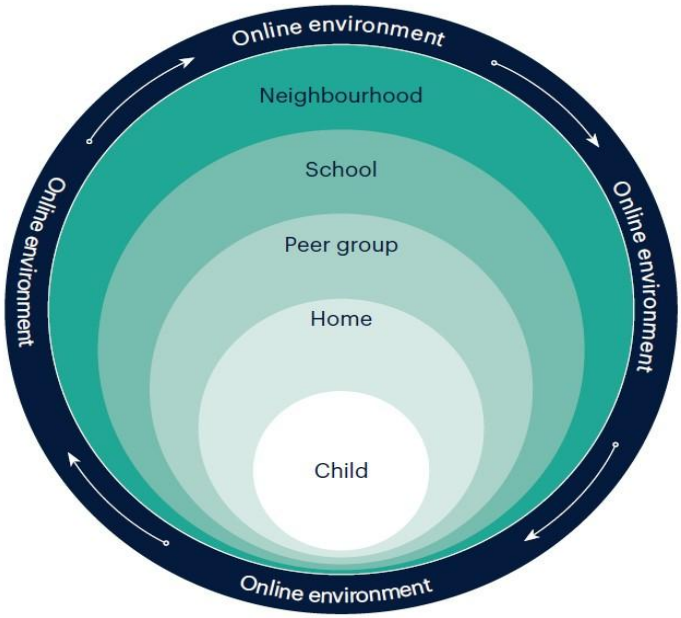
- serious bullying (including cyberbullying),
- relationship abuse, domestic violence and abuse,
- child sexual exploitation,
- youth and serious youth violence,
- harmful sexual behaviour, and/or
- prejudice-based violence including, but not limited to, gender-based violence.

Examples of online child on child abuse would include sexting, online abuse, child-on-child grooming, the distribution of youth involved sexualised content, and harassment.

Holistic account of child-on-child abuse



Contextual circles of adolescent vulnerability



What is Contextual Safeguarding?

This policy adopts a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach, which means:

- being aware of and seeking to understand the impact that these wider social contexts may be having on the School's pupils,
- creating a safe culture in the School by, for example, implementing policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse and harmful attitudes; promoting healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/ sexuality; hotspot mapping to identify risky areas in the School; training on potential bias and stereotyped assumptions,
- being alert to and monitoring changes in pupils' behaviour and/or attendance, and
- contributing to local child protection agendas by, for example, challenging poor threshold decisions and referring concerns about contexts to relevant local agencies (see section entitled 'multi-agency working').

How prevalent is child-on-child abuse?

Research suggests that child-on-child abuse is one of the most common forms of abuse affecting children in the UK. 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 behaviours continuum model

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

This continuum, developed by Simon Hackett, Associate Provost and **Professor** of Child Abuse and Neglect at Durham University, relates exclusively to sexual behaviours and is not exhaustive. The school uses the Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool to help professionals working with children to distinguish between three levels of sexual behaviour – green, amber and red, and to respond according to the level of concern.

Other behaviour

When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff can draw on aspects of the above continuum to assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and 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.

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

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 will disclose or present with behaviour(s) as a result of their experiences will differ.

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

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

Any child can be vulnerable to child-on-child abuse 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 their peers. 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 may also be particularly vulnerable to abuse by their peers.
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 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,

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

- 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.

School environment
The school actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by educating all governors, its senior leadership team, staff, pupils, and parents about this issue.

This includes:

- training 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 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, and how to enable them to identify and manage abusive behaviour online.
- educating children about the nature and prevalence of child-on-child abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media, and the unequivocal facts about consent, via RHE and the wider curriculum. For example, by addressing gender inequality in a statistics class, or by reviewing literature in an English class which addresses bullying and its effect on mental health. 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 about the school's approach to such issues, including its zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of child-on-child abuse. Educating pupils about consent includes teaching them basic facts such as (i) a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity; (ii) the age of consent is 16; and (iii) sexual intercourse without consent is rape,

- supporting the on-going welfare of the pupils by drawing on multiple resources that prioritise pupil mental health,
- working with governors, senior leadership team, and all staff, pupils 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 community,
- creating conditions in which our pupils can aspire to, and realise, safe and healthy relationships,
- responding to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately and ensuring that all child-on-child abuse issues are fed back to the school's safeguarding team so that they can spot and address any concerning trends and identify pupils who may be in need of additional support.
- fostering a whole-school culture which is founded on the idea that every member of our school community is responsible for building and maintaining safe and positive relationships, and helping to create a safe School environment in which violence and abuse are never acceptable,
    - in which pupils develop trusting relationships with staff, and in which staff understand, through regular discussion and training, the importance of these relationships in providing pupils with a sense of belonging, which could otherwise be sought in problematic contexts,
    - in which pupils feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to,
    - which (i) proactively identifies positive qualities in pupils; (ii) nurtures these qualities; (iii) teaches and encourages pupils to think about positive hopes for the future; and (vi) supports pupils in developing small-scale goals that enable realistic ambitions, and
- engaging parents on these issues by:
    - talking about them with parents, both in groups and one to one,
    - asking parents what they perceive to be the risks facing their child and how they would like to see the school address those risks, and
    - encouraging parents to hold the school to account on this issue, in part as a result of visibility of this policy.

Multi-agency working

The school actively engages with its Local Safeguarding Partnership in relation to child-on-child Abuse. The school actively refers concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse where necessary to Family Connect, the police or other relevant agencies in accordance with advice provided. This is particularly important because child-on-child abuse can be a complex issue, and even more so where wider safeguarding concerns exist.

Responding to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse

General principles

It is essential that all concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The way in which they are responded to can have a significant impact on our school environment. 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 (as appropriate) – 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 child allegedly responsible for the abuse 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 school should ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly experienced the abuse, and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it, and additional sanctioning work may be required for the latter,

- take into account 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 within and outside the School); family; the School environment; their experience(s) 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 child/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 school 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 take into account 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.

What should you do if you suspect either that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s)?
If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that a child may be at risk of or experiencing abuse by their peer(s), or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should discuss their concern with the DSL without delay so that a course of action can be agreed.

Where a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer from harm, it is important that a referral to Family Connect (and, if appropriate, the police) is made immediately. Anyone can make a referral. Where referrals are not made by the DSL, the DSL should be informed as soon as possible that a referral has been made.

If a child speaks to a member of staff about child-on-child abuse that they have witnessed or are a part of, the member of staff should listen to the child and use open language that demonstrates understanding rather than judgement.

How will the school respond to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse?
The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the member of staff who has reported it/them and will, where necessary, take any immediate steps to ensure the safety of the child/all children affected.

Where any concern(s) or allegation(s) indicate(s) that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL should consider what urgent action can be taken in addition to the actions and referral duties set out in this policy, to seek specialist help in preventing the images spreading further and removing the images from the internet.

DSLs should always use their professional judgement to: (a) assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour, and (b) determine whether it is appropriate for the alleged behaviour to be to be dealt with internally and, if so, whether any external specialist support is required.

In borderline cases the DSL may wish to consult with Family Connect and/or other relevant agencies to determine the most appropriate response.

Where the DSL considers or suspects that the alleged behaviour in question might be abusive or violent on a spectrum or where the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question might otherwise require it, the DSL should contact Family Connect and/or the police immediately and, in any event, within 24 hours of the DSL becoming aware of the alleged behaviour.

The DSL will discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the agency and agree on a course of action, which may include:

- Manage internally with help from external specialists where appropriate and possible.
- Undertake/contribute to an inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted early help services provided to address the assessed needs of the child/children and their family.
- Refer the child/children to Family Connect for a section 17/47 statutory assessment.

The School will carry out a safety plan in respect of:

- any child who is alleged to have behaved in a way that is considered to be abusive or violent,
- any child who has reportedly been abused or affected by the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another child, or
- any child who may be at risk due to the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by another child as deemed appropriate by the DSL.

Where it is alleged that a child has behaved in a way that is considered to be inappropriate or problematic (as opposed to abusive or violent), the DSL will use their professional judgment – based on the particular concern(s) and/or allegation(s) raised, and the needs and circumstances of the individual child/children in question – to determine whether it would be appropriate to contact children's social care, and to carry out a safety plan.

In deciding (a) whether a safety plan would be appropriate; and (b) which children require a safety plan, the DSL should consider:

- the extent to which a child may have experienced or otherwise been affected by the alleged behaviour, and the impact on them. This will depend not only on the child's involvement in or proximity to the alleged behaviour, but also on factors such as their possible wider circumstances and needs, their age and understanding, and the extent to which the alleged behaviour might trouble or distress other children, or expose them to inappropriate sexual behaviour,
- the importance of early intervention to address and to prevent escalation of inappropriate and/or problematic behaviours, and
- whether there are any wider safeguarding concerns about a child – for example, where a child's behaviour may be considered to be inappropriate or problematic, or at risk of escalating, the DSL and/or external agencies may determine that a safety plan is required to control emerging risks.

In all cases where a safety plan is not considered to be appropriate, the school should nonetheless take steps to safeguard and support the/each child who is allegedly responsible for the behaviour, and any children affected by it, and should continue to monitor the situation. If risks increase consideration should again be given to developing a safety plan. A safety plan should be developed in consultation with key statutory agencies to whom any referral and/or report is necessary.

Careful judgment and consideration are required as to whether alleged behaviour which might be judged to be inappropriate by an adult might actually be harmful to another child. Consultation is recommended with Family Connect if there is any doubt about this.

Careful consideration should also be given to a range of factors including the context, severity of the alleged behaviour, impact of the alleged behaviour on others, risk to others, and whether there are any patterns of behaviour occurring.

Where other children have been identified as witnesses to alleged abuse or violence, consideration should also be given by the DSL to whether there might be any risks to those children, and whether a safety plan would be appropriate in relation to any risks presenting to them.

When responding to concern(s) or allegation(s) of child-on-child abuse, the school will:

- always consider carefully, in consultation with Family Connect, the police and other relevant agencies (where they are involved), how to share information about the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the pupil(s) affected, their parents, staff, and other pupils and individuals,
- record the information that is necessary for the school and other relevant agencies (where they are involved) to respond to the concern(s) or allegation(s) and safeguard everyone involved,
- keep a record of the legal purpose for 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, and
- be mindful of and act in accordance with its safeguarding and data protection duties, including those set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2026)74 and the *HM Government advice on Information Sharing* (updated in 2026).

The school may wish to consider whether disciplinary action may be appropriate for any child/children involved. However, if there are police proceedings underway, or there could be, it is critical that the school 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 school may still need to consider what is the most appropriate action to take to ensure positive behaviour management. Before deciding on appropriate action the School will always consider its duty to safeguard all children in its care 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 peer-on-peer abuse and the causes of it.

The school will, where appropriate, consider the potential benefit, as well as challenge, of using managed moves or exclusion as a response, and not as an intervention, recognizing that even if this is ultimately deemed to be necessary, some of the measures referred to in this policy may still be required. Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and only where necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the other children in the school.

The school will always consider the wider actions that may need to be taken, and any lessons that may need to be learnt going forwards.

The school's response to concerns or allegations of child-on-child abuse should be part of on-going proactive work by the school to embed best practice and in taking a whole-school community Contextual Safeguarding approach (defined above) to such abuse. As such the School's response can become part of its wider prevention work.