

HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC SCHOOL



CHILD ON CHILD ABUSE POLICY

Date agreed	October 2025
Next review date	October 2026

Holy Family Catholic School Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

In line with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025

Section 1: Introduction and Policy Aims

1.1 Introduction

Holy Family Catholic School recognises that children can abuse other children (often referred to as child-on-child abuse), and that it can happen both inside and outside of school and online. All staff should be clear as to the school's policy and procedures with regard to child-on-child abuse and the important role they have to play in preventing it and responding where they believe a child may be at risk from it.

All staff should understand that even if there are no reports in their schools it does not mean it is not happening. It may be the case that abuse is not being reported. As such it is important that when staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they should speak to their designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy). Keeping Children Safe in Education

This policy should be read in conjunction with our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Behaviour Policy, Online Safety Policy, Acceptable Use Policy, and Searching, Screening and Confiscation Policy.

1.2 'It Could Happen Here'

It is essential that all staff understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between children that are abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as "just banter", "just having a laugh", "part of growing up" or "boys being boys" can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for children and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

1.3 Policy Aims

This policy aims to:

- Clarify the different forms child-on-child abuse can take
- Set out clear procedures to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse
- Establish systems that are well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously
- Explain how allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with
- Set out clear processes as to how victims, perpetrators and any other children affected by child-on-child abuse will be supported
- Establish a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, making clear it should never be passed off as "banter", "just having a laugh", "part of growing up" or "boys being boys"
- Recognise that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators, but that all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously
- Acknowledge that even if there are no reported cases of child-on-child abuse, such abuse may still be taking place and is simply not being reported

1.4 Responding to Reports Inside and Outside School

The school will respond appropriately to all reports and concerns about sexual violence and/or sexual harassment both online and offline, including those that have happened outside of the school. Keeping Children Safe in Education

Section 2: Definitions and Forms of Child-on-Child Abuse

2.1 Types of Child-on-Child Abuse

Child-on-child abuse is most likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children (sometimes known as 'teenage relationship abuse')
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse)
- sexual violence such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence)
- sexual harassment such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be standalone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery)
- upskirting which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress, or alarm, and
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

2.2 Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum, ranging from normal and developmentally expected to inappropriate, problematic, abusive and violent. Problematic, abusive and violent sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. A useful umbrella term is "harmful sexual behaviour" (HSB). The term has been widely adopted in child protection and is used in this policy. HSB can occur online and/or face-to-face and can also occur simultaneously between the two. HSB should be considered in a child protection context. When considering HSB, both ages and the stages of development of the children are critical factors. Sexual behaviour between children can be considered harmful if one of the children is much older, particularly if there is more than two years' difference or if one of the children is pre-pubescent and the other is not. However, a younger child can abuse an older child, particularly if they have power over them, for example, if the older child is disabled or smaller in stature. Keeping Children Safe in Education

2.3 Definitions of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

Sexual Violence

Sexual abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.

Sexual Harassment

When referring to sexual harassment we mean 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature' that can occur online and offline and both inside and outside of school. 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.

Whilst not intended to be an exhaustive list, sexual harassment can include:

- sexual comments, such as telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance and calling someone sexualised names
- sexual "jokes" or taunting
- physical behaviour, such as deliberately brushing against someone, interfering with someone's clothes
- displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature
- upskirting (this is a criminal offence)
- online sexual harassment. This may be standalone, or part of a wider pattern of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence. It may include:
 - consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos
 - sharing of unwanted explicit content
 - sexualised online bullying
 - unwanted sexual comments and messages, including, on social media
 - sexual exploitation; coercion and threats, and
 - coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they're not comfortable with online

2.4 Awareness of Indicators and Barriers to Reporting

Staff should not assume a colleague, or another professional will take action and share information that might be critical in keeping children safe.

If staff have any concerns about a child's welfare, they should act on them immediately. They should follow their school's child protection policy and speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy).

Staff should be aware that:

- Children may not find it easy to tell staff about abuse

- Children can show signs in ways they hope adults will notice and react
- Children may not recognise their experiences as harmful
- They may feel embarrassed, humiliated or threatened
- Vulnerability, disability, sexual orientation and/or language barriers may be factors

2.5 Recognition of Gendered Nature of Abuse

While recognising that girls are more likely to be victims and boys are more likely to be perpetrators, the school acknowledges that:

- All child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously
- Anyone can be a victim regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or any other protected characteristic
- Anyone can be a perpetrator

2.6 Recording and Analysis

All incidents of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, analysed and reported to governors and senior leaders. This includes looking for patterns and trends and links to safeguarding concerns.

Section 3: Responding to Non-Sexual Child-on-Child Abuse

3.1 Scope

This section covers the school's procedures for dealing with child-on-child abuse that is non-sexualised, including:

- Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers (non-sexual)
- Physical abuse which can include hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm

3.2 Immediate Response

When staff become aware of or suspect non-sexual child-on-child abuse:

1. **Do not wait for a disclosure** - act on concerns immediately if you observe:
 - Conversations suggesting a child may have been harmed
 - Changes in a child's behaviour
 - Physical indicators
2. **Report immediately** to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or a deputy DSL
3. **Record** all concerns, discussions and observations using the school's CPOMS system

3.3 Investigation and Response

The DSL (or deputy) will:

1. Assess the concern and determine appropriate action
2. Consider whether the incident meets the threshold for a safeguarding concern
3. Conduct or arrange for an appropriate investigation
4. Liaise with parents/carers as appropriate

5. Consider whether external agencies need to be involved
6. Implement support for all children involved
7. Consider appropriate sanctions in line with the school's Behaviour Policy

3.4 Support for Pupils

For the victim:

- Immediate safeguarding and pastoral support
- Regular check-ins with designated staff
- Access to counselling if appropriate
- Adjustments to timetable/arrangements if needed to ensure safety

For the alleged perpetrator:

- Assessment of any unmet needs
- Appropriate support and intervention
- Clear expectations about behaviour
- Monitoring and review

For witnesses and other affected pupils:

- Reassurance and support
- Clear messaging about reporting concerns
- Monitoring for signs of distress

3.5 Sanctions

Sanctions will be applied in line with the school's Behaviour Policy and will be:

- Proportionate to the incident
- Age-appropriate
- Focused on learning and behaviour change
- Never used as a punishment in isolation without support

Section 4: Responding to Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

4.1 Designated Harmful Sexual Behaviour Lead

Holy Family Catholic School has appointed **Miss Lauren Hall** as the Designated Harmful Sexual Behaviour Lead. Miss Hall works closely with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and has specialist knowledge and training in responding to harmful sexual behaviour.

4.2 Immediate Response to a Report

Staff shouldn't wait for a disclosure. If they have concerns about a child's welfare, they should act on these immediately. Indicators could include:

- A conversation suggesting a child may have been harmed (this may be a conversation the staff member overhears rather than is part of)
- A child's behaviour

Staff should be ready to complete a safeguarding report.

When managing a report, staff should:

1. Listen carefully to the child
2. Remain calm and non-judgmental
3. Not promise confidentiality
4. Not ask leading questions
5. Record the conversation accurately using the child's words
6. Inform the DSL (or deputy) immediately
7. Not view any images if the report includes an online element

4.3 Reassurance for Victims

Victims of this abuse will likely find the experience distressing, which can affect their progress in school. This can be made worse if the alleged perpetrator(s) attends the same school. Reassure them that you'll take them seriously, that they're not creating a problem, that they'll be supported and kept safe, and that the law is there to protect children rather than criminalise them.

4.4 Risk and Needs Assessment

Where there's been a report of sexual violence, the DSL (or a deputy) should make an immediate risk and needs assessment, considering:

- The victim, especially their protection and support
- Whether there may have been other victims
- The alleged perpetrator(s)
- All other children at the school, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them
- The time and location of the incident, and any action required to make the location safer

Where there's been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The DSL should engage with children's social care and specialist services as required, including Miss Lauren Hall, the Designated Harmful Sexual Behaviour Lead.

The risk assessment will consider:

- The wishes of the victim and how they want to proceed
- The nature of the alleged incident(s), including whether a crime may have been committed and/or whether harmful sexual behaviour has been displayed
- The ages and developmental stages of the children involved
- Any power imbalance between the children
- Whether the alleged incident is a one-off or part of a sustained pattern of abuse
- That sexual violence and sexual harassment can take place within intimate personal relationships between peers
- That intra familial harms are important and what necessary support siblings will need following the incident
- Whether there are ongoing risks to the victim (or anyone else)
- Any related issues and wider context, including links to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation The Key Leaders

4.5 Four Management Options

There are 4 likely scenarios for the next steps:

1. **Manage internally**, where this is considered appropriate in the circumstances, and early help or statutory interventions aren't required
2. **Early help**, where statutory interventions aren't required. The DSL should know what this process is and where to access support
3. **Referrals to children's social care**, where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger
4. **Report to the police** (usually in parallel with a referral to children's social care), where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made

4.6 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The school will:

- Do all it reasonably can to protect the anonymity of any children involved
- Carefully consider which staff should know about the report
- Consider the potential impact of social media in facilitating the spreading of rumours
- Not promise confidentiality to any child making a report

4.7 Recording

Record all concerns, discussions and decisions made, along with the reasons behind them, in writing. Reflect on the decisions and actions taken and update relevant policies with lessons learnt. Look out for potential patterns of concerning, problematic or inappropriate behaviour.

4.8 Ongoing Support for the Victim

The school will:

- Keep the victim a reasonable distance apart from the alleged perpetrator(s) on school premises
- Provide ongoing pastoral support
- Consider what support is needed to help the victim continue their education
- Work with the victim to understand their wishes regarding their