Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

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Related documents:	Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE): September 2025 'Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges' (incorporated into KCSiE 2025, Part 5)

Contents

1.　Purpose

This policy identifies our strategy for preventing, identifying and appropriately managing child-on-child abuse. It should be applied to any situation or incident that could be construed as child-on-child abuse. Examples of behaviours that are likely to constitute child-on-child abuse are included under the 'definitions' part of this document.

2.　Scope

This policy applies to all Red Balloon of the Air (RBAir) staff, trustees and volunteers.

This policy is reviewed annually, and updated in the interim, as may be required, to ensure that it continually addresses the risks to which learners are or may be exposed. The review and development of this policy will be informed by assessing the impact and effectiveness of the policy over the previous 12 months.

3.　Policy statement

All forms of child-on-child abuse are unacceptable and will be taken seriously. Child-on-child abuse is abuse by one or more learners against another learner. Abusive comments and interactions should never be passed off or dismissed as 'banter', 'just having a laugh' or 'part of growing up'. Nor will harmful sexual behaviours be dismissed as the same. We maintain a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child-on-child abuse.

Staff should never tolerate or dismiss sexual violence or sexual harassment as 'banter', 'just having a laugh' or 'boys being boys'. Dismissing inappropriate behaviour as 'part of growing up' 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.

A learner is likely to disclose an allegation to someone they trust: this could be any member of staff. By making such a disclosure the pupil is likely to feel that the member of staff is in a position of trust. These types of abuse rarely take place in isolation and often indicate wider safeguarding issues.

It is vital that if child-on-child abuse is alleged it is investigated (in line with our Behaviour for Learning Policy) and, if substantiated, affirmative and supportive action is implemented.

We recognise that it is more likely that girls will be victims and boys perpetrators of child-on-child abuse, particularly sexual violence and sexual harassment. However, all child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously regardless of the gender of those involved.

We also recognise 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. We maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' and remain vigilant.

We will mitigate against incidents of child-to-child abuse by ensuring our PSHE programme is proactive in supporting learners in keeping themselves safe, providing contextual information regarding forms of abuse and exploring in a safe environment, the impact abuse can have on both the perpetrator and victim.

Further, we will:

- create a protective ethos in which child-on-child abuse, including sexual violence and sexual harassment will not be tolerated;
- ensure all learners involved will be supported so that positive changes to unwanted behaviours are achieved and further incidents prevented. All action will be consistent with our Anti-Bullying Policy, Behaviour for Learning Policy and Exclusion Policy. In particular, staff will seek to reach mutually beneficial outcomes through conflict resolution procedures which are an integral approach within the RBAir ethos;
- work with partner agencies, such as Local Authority Safeguarding teams, social services and/or the police to ensure any action taken within RBAir is coherent with any ongoing external investigation or intervention.

At RBAir, we recognise that child-on-child abuse can manifest itself in many ways and have a very damaging impact upon learners. We also understand that some of these abusive behaviours may be part of a wider experience of abusive behaviours towards the learner, which may result in coercion or being 'groomed' into criminal or sexual activities which may be organised by a gang. These risks may be present in the other contexts that learners experience beyond education e.g. communities, social activities or within their families.

The emotional harm from the threat of humiliation or intimidation can result in long-term trauma and challenges to the learner's wellbeing.

4. Responsibilities (compliance, monitoring and review)

Responsibility for the implementation and oversight of this policy rests with Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Like wider safeguarding issues, all members of the RBAir community have a responsibility in implementing this policy and taking proactive action to challenge and eliminate child-on-child abuse.

All staff should be clear about RBAir's policy and procedures with regard to child-on-child abuse, understand their role in preventing it and responding where they believe a child may be at risk.

All staff need to understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between children that are abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for children.

Our response to concerns/allegations of child-on-child abuse should be part of on-going proactive work to embed best practice and take a contextual whole-provision approach to tackling such abuse.

In monitoring and reviewing incidents of child-on-child abuse we will consider:
- the context in which an incident of child-on-child abuse occurred i.e. in an RBAir Centre, the local community, or the wider physical and online environment;
- the influence of protective factors, i.e. whether there is evidence of learner 'witnesses' intervening, whether there is evidence that such intervention was an impact of our PSHE programme and/or the RBAir ethos;
- how and when child-on-child abuse was detected by staff, how was it challenged and the impact of such a challenge;
- how (if at all) did RBAir's physical environment contribute to the abuse, and whether there are recommendations for learner safety, security and supervision;
- whether wider gender norms, equality issues and/or societal attitudes contributed to the abuse;
- whether there is a relationship between the abuse and the cultural norms between staff and learners;
- whether the abuse indicates a need for staff training on, for example, underlying attitudes, a particular issue or the handling of particular types of abuse;
- whether similar cases have been managed in the past and what effect has this had;

- whether the case, or any identified trends, highlight areas for development in the way in which RBAir works with learners to raise their awareness of and/or prevent child-on-child abuse, including considering the further development of the PSHE curriculum and lessons that address underlying attitudes or behaviour such as gender and equalities work;
- whether there any lessons to be learnt about the way in which RBAir engages with parents to address child-on-child abuse issues;
- whether there are underlying issues that affect other educational providers in the area and whether there is a need for a multi-agency response;
- whether the case highlights a need to work with certain learners to build their confidence and teach them how to identify and manage abusive behaviour;
- whether there were opportunities to intervene earlier or differently and/or to address common themes amongst the behaviour of other learners in RBAir.

5. Records management

Responsibility for the safekeeping of this policy lies with the Head of Centre who will store it accordingly on the shared staff drive.

All allegations of child-on-child abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with in accordance with our safeguarding procedures. Records will include:
- a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern;
- details of how the concern was followed up and resolved;
- a note of any action taken, decisions reached and the outcome.

6. Definitions

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 defines child-on-child abuse as '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 (also 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 stand-alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse;
- consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery);
- 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;
- upskirting, which is a criminal offence and 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;
- 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).

7.   Reporting systems

RBAir has systems in place for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously. These systems are:
- well promoted throughout RBAir;
- easily understood by all learners;
- easily accessible to all learners.

Learners can report concerns about child-on-child abuse by:
- speaking to any member of staff;
- speaking directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a Deputy DSL.

All staff are trained to manage reports of child-on-child abuse and know to refer concerns immediately to the DSL or a Deputy DSL.

Learners are reassured that:
- they will be taken seriously;
- they will be supported and kept safe;
- they are not creating a problem by reporting;
- they should never be made to feel ashamed for making a report.

8.   Procedures to minimise risk

RBAir has the following procedures in place to minimise the risk of child-on-child abuse:

Prevention through education
- Our PSHE curriculum addresses child-on-child abuse, healthy relationships, consent, and online safety in an age-appropriate way.
- We create a whole-provision culture of zero tolerance for sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and all forms of abuse.
- We teach learners how to recognise abusive behaviour and how to seek help.

Staff vigilance
- All staff maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here'.
- Staff are trained to identify indicators and signs of child-on-child abuse.
- Staff challenge inappropriate behaviours immediately and do not dismiss them as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'.

Environmental measures
- We regularly review our physical environment to identify and address any areas that may increase risk.
- We maintain appropriate supervision of learners.
- We consider online safety, and the role technology can play in facilitating abuse.

Monitoring and review
- We regularly review incidents and patterns of behaviour.
- We work with learners to understand their experiences and concerns.
- We adapt our approaches based on what we learn.

9.   Support for those involved

Support for victims

RBAir will ensure that victims of child-on-child abuse receive appropriate support, which may include:

- immediate safeguarding measures to ensure their safety;
- emotional and pastoral support from trained staff;
- referral to specialist services where appropriate;
- adjustments to their timetable or environment if needed to keep them safe;
- ongoing monitoring of their wellbeing.

We recognise that victims may find the experience distressing, which can adversely affect their educational attainment. We will work to minimise this impact while ensuring they feel supported and safe.

Support for alleged perpetrators

RBAir recognises that children who display harmful behaviour often have their own unmet needs and may have experienced abuse themselves. We will:

- consider the age and developmental stage of the alleged perpetrator;
- assess their needs and provide appropriate support;
- consider both safeguarding and disciplinary responses on a case-by-case basis;
- offer appropriate interventions to address harmful behaviour;
- work with external agencies where appropriate.

We balance the need to safeguard the victim with providing the alleged perpetrator with education and safeguarding support.

Support for other children affected

- We will consider support for children who have witnessed child-on-child abuse.
- We will ensure that witnesses are not bullied or harassed.
- We will be aware of the potential role of social media in the aftermath of incidents.

Working with parents/carers

In most cases, we will engage with both the victim's and alleged perpetrator's parents or carers, unless there is reason to believe this would put the child at additional risk. We will:
- discuss what is being put in place to safeguard their child;
- explain any impact on their child's education;
- work in partnership to support their child.