

There are four key definitions of peer-on-peer abuse:

Abuse in intimate personal relationships between peers – young people who experience physical, emotional, sexual and/or financial abuse, and coercive control, in their intimate relationships, as well as family relationships.

Child sexual exploitation – those under the age of 18 who are sexually abused in the context of exploitative relationships, contexts and situations, by a person of any age, including another young person.

Serious youth violence – any offence of most serious violence or weapon-enabled crime, where the victim is aged 19 or younger, e.g. wounding with intent, rape, murder and grievous bodily harm.

Harmful sexual behaviour – young people displaying sexual behaviours that are outside of developmentally 'normative' parameters. For the purpose of this guidance, the term 'child' refers to any young person under 18 years old.

Peer on Peer abuse – the facts:

- Rates of violence are higher in girls in England than in any other country;
- 1 in 3 girls have experienced sexual violence from a partner before they are 18 years old;
- 4 in 10 teenage girls have experienced sexual coercion when they have been aged between 13 and 17 years old;
- 1 in 5 girls in England have suffered physical violence from their boyfriend;
- 48 percent of girls have experienced instances of emotional and online abuse from their partners;
- Young people have reported that physical, sexual and emotional abusing as well as being abused by their peers, is a means of survival in gang affected neighbourhoods;
- Two thirds of contact sexual abuse experienced by children under the age of 18 was perpetrated by someone under the age of 18 years old;
- Almost a third of girls between 16 and 18 years old have been subject to unwanted sexual touching in UK schools.

Who does it affect?

- Girls and young woman are more frequently identified as those who are abused by their peers, reporting it as having a negative impact on their life;
- Boys and young men are more likely to be identified as abusers, and less likely to say that their partner abuse impacts on them negatively;
- Peer-on-peer abuse tends to be experienced by children 10 and upwards with those abusing them being slightly older. However, cases of 8 year olds being abused, and inflicting abuse, have been reported;
- Children with intra-familial abuse in their histories, or those living who have been abused are more vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse;
- Children in care or those that have experienced bereavement are more likely to abuse or be abused by their peers;
- Black and minority ethnic children are often under-identified as victims, and over identified as perpetrators instead.

What are the impacts of abuse on a child?

Peer-on-peer abuse can manifest itself and impact a child in many ways including, but not limited to, the following:

- Causing physical injuries;
- Encouraging drug and alcohol abuse;
- Going missing/running away;
- Compromising their sexual health;
- Committing criminal offences;
- Actively disengaged from school;
- Affecting their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

How do you identify abuse?

Staff should be mindful that early information sharing is vital for the effective identification, assessment and allocation of appropriate service provision, whether this is when problems first emerge, or where a child/young person is already known to children's social care

There is no clear boundary between incidents that should be reported as peer-on-peer abuse and incidents that are properly dealt with as bullying, sexual experimentation, etc. For this reason, a staff member's professional judgement plays a vital role in the identification process.

It may be appropriate to regard a child/young person's behaviour as abusive if:

- There is a difference in power between the people involved;
- The perpetrator has repeatedly tried to harm one or more people;
- There are concerns about the intention of the alleged perpetrator;
- If it is believed that the perpetrator intended to cause harm to the victim, this must be regarded as abuse even if severe harm was not actually caused.

What should you do after identifying abuse?

- Any staff member, who feels that a child/young person has abused another child, should notify the Designated Safeguarding Lead **immediately**, including if the incident of abuse took place off the premises
- If the concern indicates that a potential crime has taken place, or that safeguarding implications, it may be necessary to call children's social care or the police;
- The concern should be recorded.

After the referral is progressed, a strategy discussion will be held with all relevant agencies. Their discussion will cover:

- Whether the perpetrator poses a continuing risk to any child/young person;
- How to protect any child/young person at immediate risk of significant harm;
- Whether a section 47 enquiry should be made and how it should be handled;
- What action should be taken in respect of the alleged perpetrator, such as arranging a risk management meeting.

A section 47 enquiry is initiated if a child/young person is taken into police protection, if an emergency protection order is put in place, or there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child/young person is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. A section 47 enquiry should only be pursued if the perpetrator is continuously at risk of causing harm.

Any action taken in respect of the perpetrator will be based on the risk they are likely to cause other children /young people and what actions can be taken to minimise the risk.

If the perpetrator is over 10 years old, consideration will be taken whether to progress under the criminal justice system is appropriate. An assessment of the perpetrator's needs will be carried out, taking into consideration:

- The nature, extent and context of the abusive behaviour;
- The child's development, family and social circumstances;
- Whether the child appears to pose a continuing risk, and who is likely to suffer from him/her;
- The parents/carers of all the children involved will be informed of the incident and included in a strategy discussion about what will happen next. A risk assessment will be considered at this time in order to protect all parties involved whilst arrangements are made for a supervision plan to be put in place;
- An investigation will be led by the police or social care team, unless thresholds for these services are not met, in which case GP Strategies Training Ltd will undertake a thorough investigation.

What action do you take to support the victim?

- During the strategy discussion, it is important to consider what action is necessary to make sure of the immediate safety of the victim, and what further enquiries are required to reduce the risk;
- If the victim is still at risk of harm, a child protection conference will be arranged during the strategy discussion;
- A child protection conference may conclude that the victim is not in need of protection, but might need support to address any issues arising from the abuse. For example, GP Strategies Training Ltd might need to signpost to a counselling service to help with the victim's anxiety following an incident of abuse;
- If the victim and perpetrator are members of the same family/household before making arrangements to return the perpetrator to the family/household, it is critical to ensure that the victim's views have been heard and that they feel safe;
- A supervision plan may be implemented, in order to make sure that the victim is protected from the incident reoccurring; this is often achieved by ensuring that the children/young people involved in the incident are separated.

How can abuse be prevented?

All staff, volunteers, children and young people involved with GP Strategies Training Ltd have a responsibility to work together to make sure that abuse does not occur and if it does occur, that action is taken. In order for this to happen, 'ground rules' should be set out during the induction process, to make sure the following:

- How staff, volunteers, children and young people are expected to behave (Safeguarding Code of Practice);
- What constitutes abuse;
- How any incidents of abuse will be addressed by GP Strategies Training Ltd;
- The importance of adherence to fundamental British values.

GP Strategies Training Ltd will minimise the risk of allegations against other children and young people by providing the following:

- Induction;
- An effective system for young people to raise concerns with staff;
- Robust risk assessments for children/young people that are identified as posing a potential risk;
- Appropriate targeted work for children/young people identified as a potential risk.

What's next?

Once an incident of peer-on-peer abuse has been reported, the child/young person should be continuously monitored and their case reviewed on a regular basis. It is important to keep in mind that a single incident of abuse does not indicate that a child/young person is likely to abuse again, and that some children/young people who abuse others have been abused themselves. However, this cannot be assumed in any particular case.

In the event of a case of abuse, the needs of the victim and the needs of the perpetrator must be considered separately.

More information regarding peer-on-peer abuse can be found in the 'Keeping children safe in education' (updated 2021) statutory guidance.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>