



fostering
therapeutically
SINCE 1987

Peer on Peer Abuse

RELATED POLICIES

Agency Policies

- Policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of children including child protection;
- Anti-bullying;
- Safeguarding risk assessment and risk management;
- Online Safety;
- Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation.

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1. Introduction

The term 'peer on peer abuse' relates to various forms of abuse, where all parties involved are under the age of 18 years. The abuse can include violence and criminal activity, harmful sexual behaviour, sexual exploitation, relationship abuse and bullying (including cyberbullying) and is harmful to both the victim and the perpetrator due to their status as children.

The victims of peer on peer abuse are both male and female and particularly vulnerable groups include those with disabilities and those who represent minority groups (e.g. on basis of sexuality, race or religion). Peer on peer abuse is often a feature of gang activity, and a victim might experience a combination of different abuses and have multiple support needs.

2. Where does Peer on Peer Abuse Occur?

Young people in foster care might experience abuse from their peers:

- Within the foster home;
- At school;
- At clubs/social activities;
- On public transport/walking to school.

3. Agency Response

Foster parents and agency staff need to be alert to the signs of peer on peer abuse and be familiar with agency policies to ensure a swift and appropriate response. Young people's risk assessments should identify key concerns and safeguarding measures both for use within the home and community.

- **Being aware of, and managing bullying:**
Bullying is defined as "behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, which intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally." Bullying behaviour can include name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading hurtful and untruthful rumours, taking belongings, inappropriate touching or excluding someone from a social group. Young people might be targeted as a result of their race, religion, sexuality or disability and bullying might take place online. This is known as 'cyberbullying'. The Anti-Bullying Alliance has excellent online resources for professionals, parents and foster parents to raise awareness of bullying issues.

Visit their website at <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information>

- **Gangs awareness**
Young people can be exploited physically and/or sexually by a gang or group of young people. Gangs (mainly comprising young men and boys aged 13-25 years) are typically involved in various forms of criminal activity including violence with knives and guns, robbery and intimidation, exposing both gang members and targets to harm. Gangs are characterised by their identifiable markers including territory, name and clothing, while other groups without specific gang characteristics exist within the community and online to exploit young people, often sexually.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/345337/AdviceParentsCarersGangs14.pdf)

- **CSE awareness**
The sexual exploitation of young people by adult perpetrators has been well publicised with recent prosecutions of adult males in Rotherham and Rochdale. Young people can also be sexually exploited by older young people and this is reflected in the most recent definition: CSE "occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity"
CSE always involves an imbalance of power and victims might not be aware of the exploitation, perceiving the relationship as loving. Local safeguarding partnerships publish information and advice about all forms of exploitation.

See, for example, <https://www.kscmp.org.uk/guidance/exploitation/child-sexual-exploitation>

- **Youth produced sexual imagery (“sexting”)**

The sharing of nude images online between young people is not always intentionally harmful but has the potential to harm if there are elements of coercion, bribery and/or blackmail involved. Young people can feel pressured to send nude images and once images have been shared they lose control over them; the image can be copied and shared indefinitely. The law prohibits the taking, possessing and sharing of ‘indecent images of children’ which includes nude images shared between young people, if the subject of the image is under 18 years of age. Young people who are involved in this behaviour can therefore need support with both the emotional impact of image sharing as well as possible police investigations.

There is a helpful online guide for parents and foster parents on the CEOP website.

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Nude-selfies-a-parents-guide/>

4. Resources for Foster Parents

The **‘I-SPACE’** website is a source of current information and advice for foster parents in ISP.

5. Resources for Young People

Barnardo’s Real Love Rocks website: <https://www.barnardosrealloverocks.org.uk/>

Childline: 0800 11 11 or find out about the “For Me”. <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/for-me/>