



GATEHOUSE  
SCHOOL

# Child on Child Abuse Policy

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<b>Approved by:</b>	Governors
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## 0. Document Control

The table below contains the changes made between the different final editions of this document set for approval. This is to help provide information to those reviewing and approving the document of the changes being made.

<b>Document Edition</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Details of change</b>
April 2026	All Sections	Formatting

# 1. Introduction

Gatehouse School recognises that abuse can occur between children and defines child-on-child abuse as any form of physical, sexual, emotional, or coercive behaviour between children, including intimate and non-intimate relationships, friendships, and peer interactions. This policy should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding, Online Safety, and related policies.

This policy is informed by and complies with the following statutory guidance and frameworks:

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE 2025)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Children Act 1989 and 2004

This policy forms part of the school's overarching Safeguarding Policy and is implemented in accordance with statutory guidance.

## 2. Purpose and Scope

This policy applies to all pupils at Gatehouse School and to all members of staff, volunteers, and visitors. It covers behaviour that takes place both on and off the school premises, including online behaviour, where there is a safeguarding concern linked to the school community.

The school is committed to **prevention, early identification, and appropriate management** of child-on-child abuse. A proactive approach focuses on the following:

1. Systems and structures
2. Prevention
3. Identification
4. Response/intervention

Gatehouse School does not dismiss abuse as 'banter' or 'part of growing up'.

## 3. Understanding Child-on-Child Abuse

- Gatehouse School recognises that abuse can occur between children and that all children are entitled to a safe and supportive learning environment. **Child-on-child abuse** is any form of physical, sexual, emotional, or coercive behaviour between children, including both intimate and non-intimate relationships, friendships, and peer interactions. Abuse can take place **inside or outside school, including online**, and staff must treat all reports seriously.
- The school adopts a zero-tolerance approach to child-on-child abuse.
- The school is committed to a proactive and preventative approach to child-on-child abuse. It does not adopt a solely reactive approach to incidents; instead, it focuses on systems, structures, prevention, identification, and effective response to reduce risk and promote a safe school environment.
- The School recognises that the absence of reported incidents does not mean that child-on-child abuse is not occurring. Such behaviour may be taking place but not disclosed or identified.
- The School does not routinely use the terms "victim" and "perpetrator" when responding to child-on-child abuse. Instead, it adopts a safeguarding approach that recognises all children

involved may have safeguarding needs, including those who have experienced harm and those who have displayed harmful behaviour.

### 3.1 Forms of Abuse

Abuse between children may take many forms, including but not limited to:

- **Bullying**, including cyberbullying, discriminatory and prejudice-based
- **Physical abuse**, such as hitting, biting, kicking, or hair pulling
- **Sexual abuse or harmful sexual behaviour**, including inappropriate touching, sexual assault, coercion, non-consensual sexual activity, upskirting, and sharing sexual imagery
- **Relationship abuse**, including teenage relationship abuse and initiation/hazing
- **Prejudice or discrimination-based abuse**
- **Online abuse**, including grooming and sharing sexual content

### 3.2 Gender and Vulnerability

Child-on-child abuse can affect **any child**, regardless of gender, age, background, sexual orientation, or ability. Any child may experience harm or may display harmful behaviour, and all concerns will be taken seriously. **Staff must not make assumptions about the nature of abuse or the roles of children involved based on stereotypes or protected characteristics.**

Some children may be at **increased risk**, including **LGBTQ+ children, children with SEND, and those who are socially isolated or otherwise vulnerable**. Staff should remain vigilant and ensure that safeguarding responses are **inclusive, proportionate, and non-discriminatory**.

### 3.3 Assessing Behaviour

The School uses **Hackett's sexual behaviour continuum** (Normal → Inappropriate → Problematic → Abusive) to assess sexual behaviours. A similar spectrum applies to other abusive behaviours, considering **social acceptability, frequency, consent, coercion, and power imbalance**.

#### Guidance and Best Practice

This policy is informed by external safeguarding guidance to ensure consistent, evidence-based practice:

- **NSPCC guidance on child-on-child abuse**
- **Brook Traffic Light Tool for harmful sexual behaviour**

Staff are expected to follow these frameworks when identifying, assessing, and responding to concerns.

### 3.4 Complexity of consent, choice, and power

The school recognises that in situations of child-on-child abuse, the concepts of consent and choice may be complex. Children may appear to make choices; however, where there is coercion, manipulation, pressure, or a power imbalance, those choices may be limited and may not represent true or informed consent.

## 4. Whole-School Approach

### 4.1 Environment and Culture

The School promotes **safe, respectful relationships** and provides systems for pupils to raise concerns. Staff are trained to:

- Recognise and respond to child-on-child abuse
- Challenge harmful attitudes and prevent low-level behaviours from escalating
- Educate pupils about consent, healthy relationships, and safe use of social media

### 4.2 Education and Engagement

- Pupils learn about child-on-child abuse in **PSHE lessons and the wider curriculum**, including consent and online safety.
- Parents are engaged through discussions, awareness sessions, and support for pupil wellbeing.
- The school delivers a structured programme of education to support pupils in understanding healthy relationships, consent, respect, and appropriate behaviour. This is primarily delivered through PSHE and the wider curriculum and is reinforced through pastoral care, assemblies, and safeguarding education. Pupils are taught how to recognise unsafe or abusive behaviour, including online, and are regularly reminded of how to seek help and report concerns. Parents are engaged in supporting this learning where appropriate.

### 4.3 Positive School Culture

The school fosters:

- A safe environment where children can trust staff
- Recognition of positive qualities in pupils and encouragement of aspirations
- Supervised activities to fulfil needs that might otherwise be met in unsafe ways

## 5. Responding to Child-on-Child Abuse Concerns and Allegations

### 5.1 Key Principles for Safeguarding Responses

All concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse will be handled sensitively, appropriately, and promptly. The school recognises that the way concerns are managed can have a significant impact on the children involved and the wider school environment.

Responses will:

- Be proportionate, thorough, and evidence-informed, taking into account the nature and seriousness of the concern. Where appropriate, the school will work with external agencies, including Children's Social Care and the police, who may take the lead on investigation.

- Treat all children involved as potentially at risk of harm. While a child may have experienced abuse, a child who has displayed harmful behaviour may also have unmet needs and require safeguarding support. The school will ensure that appropriate support and safeguarding responses are in place for all children involved, alongside any necessary disciplinary action.
- Take full account of the wider context in which the behaviour may have occurred. This includes peer relationships (both within and outside school), family circumstances, the social and community environment, experiences of victimisation, and online activity. The school will consider whether changes to these contexts are required to reduce risk and support the children involved.
- Recognise the complexity of child-on-child abuse, including the interplay between power, choice, and consent. Staff will understand that children may appear to make choices; however, where there is coercion, manipulation, pressure, or power imbalance, those choices may be limited and may not represent true or informed consent.
- Take into account the views, wishes, and experiences of the children involved. Where it is safe and appropriate to do so, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will discuss proposed actions with the child/children and their parents. The school will seek consent for referrals unless doing so would increase risk to a child.
- Ensure that children and their parents are kept informed, where appropriate, and supported to understand what is happening and why. The school will manage expectations carefully regarding confidentiality and information sharing.
- Place particular emphasis on the needs of any child who has been harmed, ensuring they are given an appropriate level of choice, voice, and control over decisions about how they are supported and how the situation is managed, in line with safeguarding requirements.
- The School adopts a zero-tolerance approach to child-on-child abuse.
- The School is committed to a proactive and preventative approach to child-on-child abuse. It does not rely solely on reactive responses but focuses on systems, structures, prevention, identification, and effective safeguarding intervention.
- The School recognises that the absence of reported incidents does not mean that child-on-child abuse is not occurring. Such behaviour may be taking place but not disclosed or identified.
- The School does not routinely use the terms “victim” and “perpetrator” when responding to child-on-child abuse. Instead, it adopts a safeguarding approach which recognises that all children involved may have safeguarding needs.
- The School actively engages in multi-agency safeguarding processes and, where appropriate, contributes to strategy discussions and child protection meetings. The School will use professional curiosity and, where necessary, appropriate professional challenge to ensure that safeguarding decisions are robust and in the best interests of the child.

## 5.2 Staff Actions

Staff who become aware of possible child-on-child abuse must:

- Report concerns immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).
- Listen carefully to the child using non-judgmental and supportive language.
- Staff must not investigate or seek evidence independently under any circumstances.
- Consider whether the child is at immediate risk of harm.

If the child is not in immediate danger, staff must report the concern to the DSL, who will determine whether a referral to Children’s Social Care or the police is required.

If the child is at immediate risk of harm, staff must act quickly to safeguard the child and inform the DSL immediately.

## 5.3 Exceptional Circumstances

If the DSL (or deputies) are unavailable and a child is at immediate risk of harm, staff may make a referral directly to Children's Social Care or the police. The DSL must be informed as soon as possible afterwards.

All actions must be recorded promptly and accurately on the school's safeguarding system (CPOMS), including the rationale for any decisions taken.

## 5.4 Safeguarding Assessment and Multi-Agency Response

Upon receiving a concern, the DSL will:

- Assess the seriousness of the concern.
- Early intervention will always be considered where appropriate to prevent escalation of risk.
- Determine the appropriate safeguarding response.
- Manage internally with specialist support where appropriate.
- Provide early help or targeted interventions to prevent escalation.
- Make referrals to Children's Social Care under Section 17/47 where required.
- Report alleged criminal behaviour to the police in line with statutory guidance.
- Develop and implement safeguarding safety plans for all affected children.
- Maintain accurate safeguarding records in line with data protection requirements.

## 5.5 Safeguarding Support for All Children Involved

The school recognises that all children involved in child-on-child abuse may require safeguarding support.

The child who has been harmed will be supported through:

- Pastoral care and ongoing safeguarding support
- Safety planning
- Referral to external support services where appropriate

The child who has displayed harmful behaviour will also be supported to:

- Understand the impact of their actions
- Address underlying needs or vulnerabilities
- Prevent further harm

Support will be provided within a clear safeguarding framework that ensures appropriate boundaries and proportionate responses, alongside ongoing oversight.

## 5.6 Disciplinary Action

Where disciplinary measures are required, they may be used to:

- Ensure children take responsibility for their behaviour
- Reinforce that child-on-child abuse is not acceptable
- Protect the safety and well-being of others

Disciplinary measures will be considered alongside safeguarding needs, the mental health of the children involved, and any ongoing police or social care involvement. **Safeguarding considerations will always take precedence over disciplinary processes.**

Managed moves or exclusions will only be considered as a last resort where necessary to safeguard children and where alternative interventions are insufficient.

## 5.7 Recording, Information Sharing and Confidentiality

All concerns, disclosures, and actions must be recorded accurately, promptly, and factually on the school's safeguarding system (CPOMS).

Records will:

- Be dated and include a clear rationale for decisions
- Use the child's own words where appropriate
- Be stored securely in line with safeguarding and data protection requirements

Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with statutory safeguarding and data protection guidance.

The school will ensure appropriate and lawful information sharing with relevant agencies, including Children's Social Care and the police, where required to safeguard children effectively.

## 6. Contextual Safeguarding

### 6.1 Contextual Safeguarding Overview

Gatehouse School adopts a **whole-school contextual safeguarding approach**, recognising that risks to children may arise **outside the home and school environment**, including online spaces and wider social contexts. This approach ensures that safeguarding considers **peer, community, and environmental factors**, not just family circumstances.

### 6.2 Implementation

The school implements contextual safeguarding by:

- **Identifying and addressing risky areas** in school, on school grounds, and online
- **Promoting healthy peer relationships and positive social norms** through education, PSHE, and pastoral care
- **Monitoring trends in pupil behaviour, attendance, and online activity**
- **Engaging with local safeguarding initiatives and external agencies** to manage risk and share best practice

### 6.3 Reflective Practice

Staff are encouraged to reflect on the following questions to continuously improve safeguarding practices:

- How do school environments, online spaces, and wider social norms affect the likelihood of abuse?
- What lessons can be learned from incidents to prevent future occurrences?
- How can the school improve awareness of child-on-child abuse among pupils, staff, and parents?

## 6.4 Reflective Approach to Contextual Safeguarding

The school adopts a reflective and evaluative approach to child-on-child abuse. Following any incident or concern, the school considers what can be learned from the case, including any contributing environmental, social, or contextual factors. This may include reflection on peer group dynamics, online influences, physical spaces within the school, and wider cultural or community factors. Where appropriate, outcomes inform improvements to safeguarding practice, staff training, and preventative education.

This approach ensures that safeguarding interventions are **proactive, preventative, and contextually informed**, helping to reduce risk and protect all children within the school community.

Gatehouse School is committed to preventing, identifying, and responding to child-on-child abuse. Staff, pupils, and parents all play a role in ensuring a safe environment.