



# WYMONDHAM HIGH ACADEMY

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## **POLICY STATEMENT PEER ON PEER ABUSE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

At Wymondham High Academy, we work in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education, 2020, which states that “governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer-on-peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer-on-peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with”. The document also states it is most important to ensure opportunities of seeking the voice of the child are heard and our students are given the opportunity to express their views. Our setting will ensure the safety of all concerned is paramount when deciding what action to take and what services to provide.

At Wymondham High Academy, we continue to ensure that any form of abuse or harmful behaviour is dealt with immediately and consistently to reduce the extent of harm to the young person, with full consideration to impact on that individual student’s emotional and mental wellbeing.

### **PURPOSE AND AIM**

Children and young people may be harmful to one another in several ways which would be classified as peer-on-peer abuse. The purpose of this policy is to explore the many forms of peer-on-peer abuse and include a planned and supportive response to the issues.

At Wymondham High Academy we have the following policies in place that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

### **INTRODUCTION TO ABUSE AND HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR**

Abusive behaviour can happen to children in schools and settings and it is necessary to consider what abuse is and looks like, how it can be managed and what appropriate support and intervention can be put into place to meet the needs of the individual and what preventative strategies may be put in place to reduce further risk of harm.

Abuse is abuse and should never be tolerated or passed over as “banter” or “part of growing up”. Equally, abuse issues can sometimes be gender specific, girls/boys being sexually touched/assaulted. This could also be same sex touching/assault. Students being subjected to initiation/hazing type violence. (KCSIE, 2020) It is important to consider the forms abuse may take and the subsequent actions required.

### **TYPES OF ABUSE**

There are many forms of abuse that may occur between peers and the list is not exhaustive. Each form of abuse, or prejudiced behaviour, is described in detail followed by advice and support on actions to be taken.

### **Physical abuse e.g. (biting, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, etc.)**

Physical abuse may include hitting, kicking, pinching, shaking, biting, hair pulling or otherwise causing physical harm to another person. There may be many reasons why a child harms another and it is important to understand why a young person has engaged in such behaviour, including accidentally before considering the action or sanction to be undertaken.

### **Sexually harmful behaviour/sexual abuse e.g. (inappropriate sexual language, touching, sexual assault, etc.)**

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and it may be just as distressing to the young person who instigates it, as it is to the young person it is intended towards. Sexually harmful behaviour may range from inappropriate sexual language, inappropriate roleplay to sexually touching another or sexual assault/abuse.

### **Bullying (physical, name calling, homophobic etc.)**

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both young people who are bullied and who bully others may have serious lasting problems.

#### **In order to be considered bullying, the behaviour must be aggressive and include:**

- An imbalance of power: Young people who bully use their power – such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information or popularity – to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviours happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally or for a particular reason, e.g. size, hair colour, gender, sexual orientation and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

### **Cyber bullying**

Cyberbullying is the use of phones, instant messaging, e-mail, chat rooms or social networking sites to harass, threaten or intimidate someone for the same reasons as stated above.

### **Prejudiced behaviour**

The term prejudice-related bullying refers to a range of hurtful behaviour, physical or emotional or both, which causes someone to feel powerless, worthless, excluded or marginalised, and which is connected with prejudices around belonging, identity and equality in wider society – in particular, prejudices to do with disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender, home life, (for example in relation to issues of care, parental occupation, poverty and social class) and sexual identity (homosexual, bisexual, transsexual).

### **Expected action taken from all staff**

Although the type of abuse may have a varying effect on the victim and initiator of the harm, these simple steps can help clarify the situation and establish the facts before deciding the consequences for those involved in perpetrating harm.

It is important to deal with the situation of peer abuse immediately and sensitively. It is necessary to gather the information as soon as possible and to get the facts around what has occurred, as soon

after, the student(s) may have forgotten. It is equally important to deal with it sensitively and think about the language used and the impact of that language on both the young person and the parents when they become involved. For example, do not use the word perpetrator, this can quickly create a “blame” culture and leave a young person labelled.

In all cases of peer-on-peer abuse it is necessary that all staff are trained in dealing with such incidents, talking to young people, and instigating immediate support in a calm and consistent manner. Staff should not be prejudiced, judgemental, dismissive, or irresponsible in dealing with such sensitive matters.

If, from the information gathered, it is believed any young person to be at risk of significant harm, a safeguarding referral will be made to the appropriate external agency e.g. Children’s Services/Police. The Academy will work closely with these agencies and follow their guidance.

### **Informing parents**

If, once appropriate advice has been sought from Police/Children’s Services we have agreement to inform parents or have been allocated that role from the other services involved, then we will inform parents as soon as possible. If Children’s Services/Police are not going to be involved then equally, this information may need to be shared with the parents.

The best way to inform parents is face to face. Although this may be time consuming and not always possible, the nature of the incident and the type of harm/abuse a young person may be suffering can cause fear and anxiety to parents whether their child is the child who was harmed or who harmed another.

The same procedures should be followed when dealing with sibling-on-sibling abuse.

### **Points to consider**

Where did the incident or incidents take place?

Was the incident in an open visible place to others? If so, was it observed? If not, is more supervision required within this particular area?

What was the explanation by all the children involved of what occurred?

Can each of the young people give the same explanation of the incident and what is the effect on the young people involved? Is the incident seen to be bullying for example, in which case regular and repetitive? Is the version of one young person different from another and why? If the incident requires police involvement, it may not be appropriate for the Academy to speak with all students concerned, until the police advise to do so.

What is each of the children’s own understanding of what occurred?

Do the young people know/understand what they are doing? E.g. do they have knowledge of body parts, of privacy and that it is inappropriate to touch? Is the young person’s explanation in relation to something they may have heard or been learning about that has prompted the behaviour? Is the behaviour deliberate and contrived? Does the young person understand the impact of their behaviour on the other person?

In dealing with an incident of this nature the answers are not always clear cut. If the Academy are concerned or unsure as to whether there is any risk involved, advice would be sought from Children’s Services.

## **Repetition**

Has the behaviour been repeated to an individual on more than one occasion? In the same way it must be considered, has the behaviour persisted to an individual after the issue has already been discussed or dealt with and appropriately resolved?

## **Next Steps**

Once the outcome of the incident(s) has been established, it is necessary to ensure future incidents of abuse do not occur again and consider the support and intervention required for those involved.

## **For the young person who has been harmed**

What support they require depends on the individual young person. It may be that they wish to seek counselling externally or access the school's wellbeing service. It may also be that they feel able to deal with the incident(s) on their own or with support of family and friends. In which case it is necessary that this young person continues to be monitored and offered support should they require it in the future. If the incidents are of a bullying nature, the young person may need support in improving peer groups/relationships with other young people or some restorative justice work with all those involved may be required.

Other interventions that could be considered may target a whole class or year group, for example a speaker on cyberbullying, relationship abuse, etc. It may be that through the continued curriculum of PHSE that certain issues can be discussed and debated more frequently.

If the young person feels particularly vulnerable it may be that a risk assessment can be put in place for them, whilst in the setting, so that they have someone named that they can talk to, support strategies for managing future issues and identify services to offer additional support.

## **For the young person who has displayed harmful behaviour**

In this circumstance it is important to find out why the young person has behaved in such a way. It may be that the young person is experiencing their own difficulties and may even have been harmed themselves in a similar way. In such cases support, such as one to one mentoring or counselling, may also be necessary. Support from identified services may be necessary through a referral to the relevant external agencies and the young person may require additional support from family members.

Once the support required to meet the individual needs of the young person has been met, it is important that the young person receives a consequence for their behaviour. This may be in the form of restorative justice, e.g. making amends with the young person they have targeted if this has been some form of bullying. In cases of sexually harmful behaviour, it may be a requirement for the young person to engage in one-to-one work with a particular service or agency.

Even following the conclusion of any investigation, the behaviour that the young person has displayed may continue to pose a risk to others, in which case an individual risk assessment may be required. This should be completed via a multi-agency response to ensure that the needs of the young person and the risks towards others are measured by all those agencies involved, including the young person and their parents. This may mean additional supervision of the young person or protective strategies if the young person feels at risk of engaging in further inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

## After care

It is important that following the incident, the young people involved continue to feel supported and receive help even if they have stated that they are managing the incident. Sometimes the feelings of remorse, regret or unhappiness may occur at a much later stage than the incident. It is important to ensure that the young people do not engage in any further harmful behaviour either towards someone else or to themselves as a way of coping (e.g. self-harm). Therefore, students should be made aware of the ongoing support available to them.

## Preventative Strategies for Wymondham High Academy

Wymondham High Academy recognises that it is important to develop appropriate strategies to prevent the issue of peer-on-peer abuse rather than manage the issues in a reactive way.

The setting recognises that peer-on-peer abuse can and will occur even with the most stringent of policies and support mechanisms. In which case it is important that staff continue to recognise and manage such risks and learn how to improve and move forward with strategies in supporting children/young people to talk about any issues and through sharing information with all staff.

At Wymondham High Academy the following strategies are in place to prevent peer-on-peer abuse.

- We ensure that our setting has an open environment where the children feel safe to share information about anything that is upsetting them or worrying them.
- We ensure that the children are adequately supervised (in line with ratio guidance) during social times.
- Our setting has a strong and positive PSHE curriculum.
- Wymondham High Academy promotes British Values throughout the curriculum.

It is important that staff do not dismiss issues as “banter” or “growing up” or compare them to their own experiences of childhood.

It is necessary that staff consider each issue and each individual, in their own right, before taking action.

If staff minimise the concerns raised, it may result in a child/young person seeking no further help or advice.

Confirmed by the **Governing Body of Wymondham High Academy**

Signature of Chair: .....  ..... Date: 12 May 2021  
**Chair of Governors**

Review Date: May 2022