



All Saints Schools Trust

Child on Child Abuse Policy

Approved: September 2025
To be reviewed: September 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

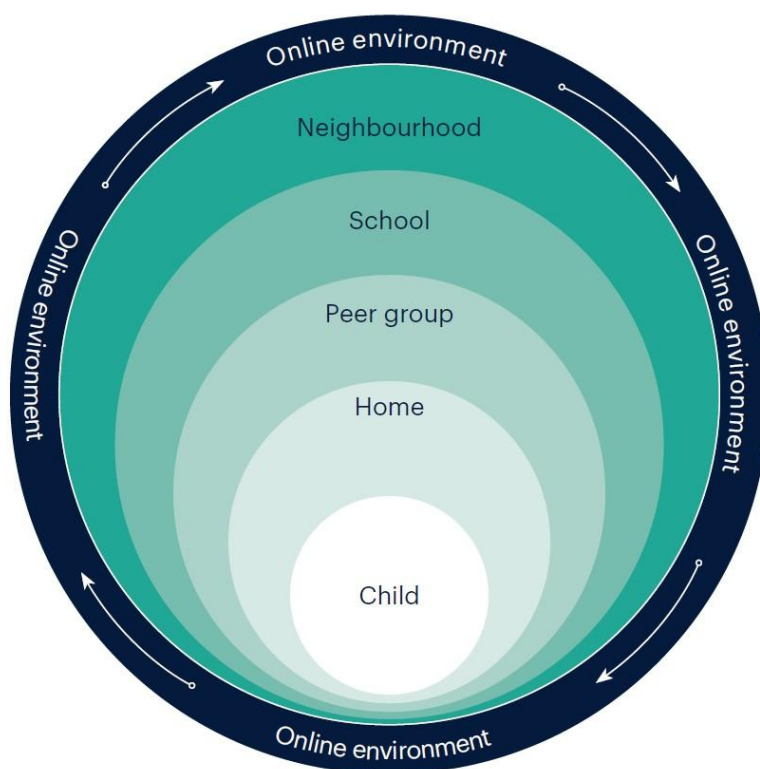
- 1.1 The Trust, Governors, all staff, volunteers and the whole community are committed to the early identification, intervention against, and prevention of, all forms of child-on-child abuse, both in and out of school. We commit to the following values and strategies:
- a. In order to protect and safeguard children, the school should be aware of the complexities of the risks which pupils may face and create and enforce a clear and comprehensive strategy which is suited to all their safeguarding needs.
 - b. That it is the responsibility of the school to enforce its whole-school approach in response to child-on-child abuse.
 - c. That this policy is created to PREVENT child-on-child abuse and that it is not acceptable merely to adopt a reactive approach to child-on-child abuse as a response to an alleged serious incident.
 - d. We recognise national and heightened concerns about these issues – particularly in light of the Everyone’s Invited platform (2021) – and the even greater need to ensure that the school’s students are safe at all times and that this policy is central to this approach.
 - e. We encourage parents to participate in our procedures so that if a student is made to feel unsafe by the behaviour of one of their peers, they should inform the school immediately so that immediate and proportionate action can be taken.
- 1.2 This policy is the over-arching policy for any issue that could constitute child-on-child abuse. It should be read alongside the following policies:
- Safeguarding and Child Protection,
 - School Acceptable Use policies
 - Behaviour,
 - Anti-Bullying Policy,
- 1.3 The policy does not use the terms “perpetrator” and “abuser”. This is because the school actively adopts a safeguarding approach to all those involved in allegations of, or concerns about, child-on-child abuse. Research shows that some young people who engage in such abuse have sometimes been victims of it themselves, and that they are therefore vulnerable, and that context is vital in assessing such harmful behaviour, and in deciding any sanctions which may apply.
- 1.4 This policy will be reviewed annually (and at any other time during the course of the year as necessary) to ensure that it consistently addresses the risks to which students are being, or may be, exposed. Staff and students will be involved in the review of the policy in order to inform the assessment of the impact and effectiveness of the policy during the previous year.

In addition, this policy builds on *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (September 2023), *Sexting in schools and colleges: responding to incidents and safeguarding*

children (UKCCIS), the NSPCC's and Research in Practice's *Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework* and Farrer and Co. Peer-on-Peer Abuse Toolkit, 2021. Suffolk Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

2. WHAT IS CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE?

Contextual circles of adolescent vulnerability



- 2.1** Child-on-child abuse is defined as “any form of physical, sexual and emotional and financial abuse, and coercive control, exercised between children and within children’s relationships, **both intimate and non-intimate**” (*Abuse between young people: a contextual account* (Routledge 2017)).
- 2.2** All staff should be aware that child-on-child abuse takes many forms. This is most likely to include, but is not limited to:
- Bullying (including cyberbullying).
 - Physical abuse.
 - Sexual abuse: see Appendix 1.
 - Sexual violence and sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment.
 - Upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person’s clothing without them knowing to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm.
 - Sexting.
 - Initiation / hazing type violence and rituals.

- h. Gender-based violence.
 - i. Relationship abuse (including domestic violence) where abuse takes place within existing intimate relationship(s).
 - j. Non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and videos.
- 2.3 All child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously. Staff must be aware that young people may be abused out of school but should not minimise the potential risks of child-on-child abuse within school too.
- 2.4 We recognise that child-on-child abuse must be addressed in the terms of the context in which it occurs. **Contextual safeguarding** recognises an approach which understands the harm and abuse to which young people can be exposed **beyond their families**.
- 2.5 As the school operates a contextual approach to safeguarding, it recognises the need to work alongside a Local Safeguarding Partnership, rather than just referring young people to it.
- a. This means that will be aware of, and will seek to understand, the effect that wider social contexts will be having on young people.
 - b. That we are also committed to creating a safe culture within school by implementing all the policies and procedures that address child-on-child abuse.
 - c. That we are committed to creating healthy relationships and attitudes to gender/sexuality and all forms of difference.
 - d. That we will provide training for staff and pupils on potential bias and stereotyping and commit to an inclusive approach for all members of our community.
 - e. That we will commit to identifying potential geographical “hotspots” on the school site which could be risky for students, thus improving the pre-existing school environment for pupils.
 - f. These “hot spots” can also include certain year groups, friendship clusters etc.
 - g. We will be alert to, and monitor, changes in students’ behaviour, emotional well-being and attendance.
 - h. In working with local agencies, we will contribute to the debate and implementation of child protection decisions by challenging threshold decisions which do not seem to be in the interest of the pupils and will consistently refer cases using a contextual approach.

3. HOW WIDESPREAD IS CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE?

3.1 Research suggests child-on-child abuse is one of the most prevalent forms of abuse affecting young people in the UK. Firmin and Curtis (2015) suggest that more than 40% of teenage girls aged between 13 and 17 have experienced sexual coercion.

When does behaviour become problematic or abusive?

3.2 All behaviour takes place on a spectrum as suggested by Professor Simon Hackett. In order to respond appropriately, we need to understand where a young person’s behaviour falls on this spectrum. Below is Professor Hackett’s model which demonstrates the range of sexual behaviour which can be presented by pupils. It is not exhaustive but

offers a means by which we can understand this behaviour and react to it sensitively and proportionately.

Sexual behaviours continuum model

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmentally expected • Socially acceptable • Consensual, mutual, reciprocal • Shared decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour • Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group • Context for behaviour may be inappropriate • Generally consensual and reciprocal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problematic and concerning behaviour • Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected • No overt elements of victimisation • Consent issues may be unclear • May lack reciprocity or equal power • May include levels of compulsivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victimising intent or outcome • Includes misuse of power • Coercion and force to ensure compliance • Intrusive • Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given • May include elements of expressive violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically violent sexual abuse • Highly intrusive • Instrumental violence which is psychologically and/or sexually arousing to the child responsible for the behaviour • Sadism

4. ARE SOME STUDENTS MORE VULNERABLE THAN OTHERS TO CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE?

4.1 The influence of peers is possibly the most significant factor in a young person’s social development and, as such, anyone can be subject to child-on-child abuse. However, there are certain groups who may be more at risk than others. For example, those with protected characteristics such as:

- Those who are socially isolated from their peer-group
- Those who are questioning their sexuality and identity
- Those with SEND needs: and a school must be careful not merely to assume that indicators of possible abuse relate only to their specific learning needs and are not investigated beyond this assumption
- Those with different ethnicity, race or religious beliefs.

4.2 Research also suggests that child-on-child abuse can affect boys and girls differently and so the school must explore gender dynamics within its individual context and recognise, and address, those factors, but also if factors outside school are involved.

5. HOW CAN WE CREATE A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO PREVENTING CHILD-ONCHILD ABUSE?

5.1 The school is actively committed to education for its entire community – staff, pupils, parents, governors and volunteers – in raising awareness of, identifying, and preventing, child-on-child abuse.

This strategy will include:

- an understanding of contextual safeguarding
- the identification of specific behaviour, including on-line activities, by encouraging young people to use social media responsibly and training them to identify and manage digitally abusive behaviour
- ensuring that even low-level concerns are followed up and never dismissing any form of concern as mere “banter” or “teasing”
- via the education of pupils about the widespread nature of child-on-child abuse. This should include PSHE lessons about consent etc but also in the wider school curriculum where equality and respect should be promoted at all times.

5.2 Pupils should be regularly informed in an age appropriate way about the harmful effects of abuse and the vulnerabilities of those who experience it, alongside possible reasons for such behaviour.

5.3 They should be clear about what actions to take if they witness such abuse and that the school operates a zero-tolerance approach to such incidents.

5.4 Parents should also be involved via public events and face-to-face meetings to promote this policy.

5.5 They should be regularly consulted as to their view of perceived risks to pupils and how the school can most effectively address them.

6. ENFORCING POSITIVE CULTURE

6.1 The entire school community – governors, staff, volunteers, pupils and parents – should work together to promote a positive culture of tolerance and respect amongst all its members.

6.2 The whole school culture should be built upon a foundation of fostering healthy and respectful relationships for all.

6.3 Every member of the community has a part to play in ensuring that abusive behaviour is never acceptable and that everyone contributes to creating this safe environment.

6.4 Pupils should feel able to share their concerns in an open and non-judgemental environment and that staff are trained to develop these trusting relationships.

6.5 Staff should encourage positive qualities in pupils and encourage them to attain their goals and ambitions.

6.6 Staff should respond to cases of child-on-child abuse promptly and appropriately. This involves informing the school's DSL so that they can spot concerning trends and patterns in behaviour and offer additional support to pupils.

7. MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

7.1 The school actively engages with its Local Safeguarding Partnership in relation to child-on-child abuse and works closely with Suffolk Children's Services, the police and other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures, as well as with other schools.

7.2 These are essential relationships in preventing, early identifying, and appropriately handling, child-on-child abuse. It is also important for pupils and staff to understand the referral pathways which are available in the area and for pupils to be able to access them quickly.

7.3 Working together with local agencies is, furthermore, crucial in supporting and helping to inform the local community about the school's response to child-on-child abuse, as well as allowing for an understanding of any underlying trends and patterns of behaviour which are emerging in this wider context.

7.4 Often, child-on-child abuse cases are complex and where the incident cannot be managed by the school itself, it is imperative that effective partnership working is involved, especially when wider safeguarding concerns exist.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

8.1 All concerns and allegations of child-on-child abuse must be handled promptly, sensitively, and appropriately. These responses can have a significant impact on the environment of a school.

8.1 ALL RESPONSES SHOULD:

- Include a thorough investigation of the concerns and allegations in the wider context in which they occur
- Assess whether it is appropriate for the police or Children's Services to carry out this process
- Treat all young people involved as at potential risk. This should also include the young person who is allegedly responsible for the abuse as they may have unmet needs and be at risk themselves
- Ensure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the child who has allegedly been abused, and anyone who is alleged to be responsible for it and understand that sanctions may need to be applied for the latter.

8.2 TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT:

- the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns for all those involved and address the impact of wider contexts, such as peer groups, family, school

environment, local community, previous experiences of crime and victimisation and the young person's online presence

- in order to mitigate risk, changes may need to be made to some of the above
- the complexity of the interplay between power, choice and consent and consider that a young person cannot consent if their choices are being limited
- the DSL should discuss any referral with the pupil and their parents/carers before it is made and obtain consent. This may not be possible if a referral has to be made immediately, however
- the school should manage the pupil's expectations of information sharing and keep them and their parents/carers informed of developments where appropriate and safe to do so
- significantly, the wishes of the pupil who has allegedly been abused must be taken into account and given as much control as is reasonably possible over decisions regarding an investigation and how they will be supported.

9. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IF A CHILD IS SUSPECTED OF BEING AT RISK OF BEING ABUSED BY THEIR PEERS, OR THAT A YOUNG PERSON MAY BE AT RISK OF ABUSING, OR IS ABUSING THEIR PEERS?

9.1 All the above factors should be discussed with the DSL immediately who will adhere to the School's Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy and then agree a course of action.

9.2 Where a young person is suffering, or is likely to suffer, a referral to Children's Services should be made (and to the police, if appropriate) immediately.

9.3 Anyone can make a referral. If it is not made by the DSL, they should be informed as soon as possible that a referral has been made - see Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy.

9.4 If a child speaks to a member of the staff about child-on-child abuse, the member should listen in a non-judgemental fashion and offer understanding and sensitive responses. See Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy.

10. HOW WILL THE SCHOOL RESPOND TO CONCERNS ABOUT, OR ALLEGATIONS OF, CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE?

10.1 The DSL will discuss with the reporting member of staff and, where necessary, take immediate steps to ensure the safety of all young people affected.

10.2 Where allegations concern the sharing of images of children on-line, the DSL should consider what urgent action can be taken. They should seek specialist help in preventing the images spreading further and remove the images from the here possible.

10.3 In such cases, the DSL should use their professional judgement to assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour and determine whether the alleged behaviour

should be dealt with internally or whether external support is required (from The Internet Watch Foundation, for example).

10.4 In borderline cases, the DSL may want to consult with Children's Services and the LADO and other relevant agencies in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Partnership's procedures on a no-names basis, to plan the appropriate response.

10.5 Where the DSL believes, or suspects, that a young person is being subjected to abusive or violent behaviour, they should contact Children's Services and/or the police immediately, and certainly within 24 hours of the DSL being made aware of the alleged behaviour.

10.6 The DSL will discuss the allegations with the external agency and then agree a plan which may include:

- management of the case internally but with help from external agencies, where appropriate
- the school contributing to an inter-agency early help assessment to enable the young person's and those of their families, needs to be targeted
- refer the young person(s) to Children's Services for a Section 17 (Child in Need) or a Section 47 (Child Protection) statutory assessment as appropriate
- report alleged criminal behaviour to the police. (There may be some circumstances where it is not appropriate to report such behaviour, however, and all cases will be treated on an individual basis, and in conjunction with their wider context.)

11. SAFETY PLANS

11.1 The school will always carry out a safety plan with regard to:

- any young person who is considered to have behaved abusively or violently
- any child who has allegedly been abused directly or affected by the alleged abusive or violent behaviour by a peer
- any young person who is deemed at risk from another young person in the judgement of the DSL.

11.2 If a child is considered to have behaved inappropriately, but not in a violent or abusive fashion, the DSL would apply their professional judgement in the context of the young person's individual needs and context, to ascertain whether it would be appropriate to contact Children's Services and carry out a Safety Plan.

11.3 If there is any concern that a young person may be being abused by another young person, a consultation with Children's Services should be carried out.

11.4 Where other young people have witnessed alleged abuse or violent behaviour, the DSL should assess the risk to them and consider whether a safety plan would be appropriate for their needs.

12. SHARING OF INFORMATION, DATA PROTECTION AND RECORD KEEPING

12.1 When responding to allegations of abuse, or concerns about abuse, the school will:

- always consult external agencies in order to best decide how to share information about the concerns or allegations affecting students, their parents, staff and other individuals involved
- record all necessary information for all the participating agencies and respond to the concerns or allegations within a safeguarding context
- a record of the legal purpose for sharing the information with any third party, including external agencies, is kept in the data protection audit.
- ensure that the third party has agreed to handle the information securely and only use it for the agreed legal purpose.
- consult, and act in accordance with, its safeguarding and data protection duties, including those set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018)* and *HM Government Advice on Information Sharing (July 2018)*.

12.2 We recognise that this will contain sensitive personal data and will be treated accordingly as per our Staff Data protection Policy.

13. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

13.1 The school may want to consider disciplinary action for any young person involved in child-on-child abuse; however, if there are police proceedings underway, or they are pending, it is crucial that the school works in partnership with the police and/or Children's Services.

13.2 Even if external agencies are not involved, the school may still need to consider sanctions in order to ensure positive behaviour in the future. This may include the young person taking responsibility for their actions and realising the gravity of them, thus demonstrating to other students that child-on-child abuse will never be tolerated.

13.3 Before deciding on any action, the school will always consider its duty to safeguard all young people in its care.

13.3 It should also take into account the underlying reasons for any abusive behaviour and the severity, and the causes of any abuse suffered by a young person.

13.6 Exclusion will only be considered as a last resort and in cases where the safety and wellbeing of other students is at risk.

13.7 In the case of an exclusion, due care must be given when sharing information with a student's new school in order to allow students in the receiving school to be protected, as well as the leaving student.

13.8 However, disciplinary interventions rarely solve child-on-child abuse and so the school's first resort should be to wider actions and to what can be learned from such cases in the school's future planning and behavioural strategies to combat abuse.

14. HOW CAN A SCHOOL CONTINUE TO SEEK TO IMPROVE ITS APPROACH TO CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING?

14.1 The school should continue to work to embed its approach to contextual safeguarding by involving the whole school community in its strategies and approach.

14.2 It should regularly review its practices by asking such questions as:

- what protective factors and influences exist in school to prevent child-on-child abuse and how can we strengthen and highlight them?
- does the school's physical environment and the students' journeys to and from school contribute to this abuse and how can we mitigate this risk?
- how can the school mitigate the risk posed by the online environment and encourage a positive and safe use of digital technology?
- do wider gender norms, equality issues and/or societal issues contribute to the abuse?
- what was the relationship between the abuse and the cultural norms between staff and students and how can these be evaluated and addressed in the future?
- does the abuse indicate a lack of staff training in particular areas and how can these needs be met?
- how have similar cases been handled in the past? What effect have they had, and what has been learned from them?
- are distinct patterns and trends emerging from the way in which the school handles these cases which can then be fed into future staff training?
- are these issues occurring in other local schools and is there the need for a multi-agency response to them?
- what has the school learned from past cases which can be addressed via the PSHE/RSE curriculum, and should it be improving its provision in terms of education in matters of consent, respect, equality, avoiding victim-blaming narratives, etc?
- are there lessons to be learned from the way in which the school engages with parents concerning child-on-child abuse cases?
- have certain types of young people been highlighted by cases of abuse and should the school be working with them to build confidence and teaching them how to identify and manage child-on-child abuse?

- should the school have intervened earlier and in a different manner?
- has the pupil voice been heard with regard to developing an on-going strategy to **avert** child-on-child abuse?

14.3 Answering these questions feeds into the school's child-on-child abuse action plan which will be reviewed regularly.

14.4 The school will work with the local agencies (where necessary) to deliver on this plan as part of its wider approach to contextual safeguarding.

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

From Consultation document *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges: Proposed advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads (September 2021)*

It is important that schools are aware of sexual violence and the fact children can, and sometimes do, abuse their peers in this way. When referring to sexual violence in this advice, we do so in the context of child-on-child sexual violence.

For the purpose of this advice, when referring to sexual violence we are referring to sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 ([here](#)) as described below:

Rape: A person (A) commits an offence of rape if: he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person (B) with his penis, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

Assault by Penetration: A person (A) commits an offence if: s/he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person (B) with a part of her/his body or anything else, the penetration is sexual, B does not consent to the penetration and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

Sexual Assault: A person (A) commits an offence of sexual assault if: s/he intentionally touches another person (B), the touching is sexual, B does not consent to the touching and A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

What is consent? Consent is about having the freedom and capacity to choose. Consent to sexual activity may be given to one sort of sexual activity but not another, e.g. to vaginal but not anal sex or penetration with conditions, such as wearing a condom. Consent can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity and each time activity occurs. Someone

consents to vaginal, anal or oral penetration only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice.

- a child under the age of 13 can never consent to any sexual activity;
- the age of consent is 16;
- sexual intercourse without consent is rape.

APPENDIX 2: SUPPORT SERVICES

From Consultation document *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges: Proposed advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads (September 2022)*

Specialist Organisations

- Barnardo's - UK charity caring for and supporting some of the most vulnerable children and young people through their range of services.
- Lucy Faithfull Foundation - UK-wide child protection charity dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse. They work with families affected by sexual abuse and also run the confidential Stop it Now! Helpline.
- Marie Collins Foundation – Charity that, amongst other things, works directly with children, young people, and families to enable their recovery following sexual abuse
- NSPCC - Children's charity specialising in child protection with statutory powers enabling them to take action and safeguard children at risk of abuse.
- Rape Crisis - National charity and the umbrella body for their network of independent member Rape Crisis Centres.
- UK Safer Internet Centre - Provides advice and support to children, young people, parents, carers and schools about staying safe online.

Support for Victims

- Anti-Bullying Alliance - Detailed information for anyone being bullied, along with advice for parents and schools. Signposts to various helplines and websites for further support.
- Rape Crisis - Provide and signpost to a range of services to support people who have experience rape, child abuse or any kind of sexual violence.
- The Survivors Trust- UK-wide national umbrella agency with resources and support dedicated to survivors of rape, sexual violence and child sex abuse.
- Victim Support - Supporting children and young people who have been affected by crime. Also provides support to parents and professionals who work with children and young people – regardless of whether a crime has been reported or how long ago it was.

Toolkits

- ask AVA - The Ask AVA prevention platform has been created to support education practitioners across the UK to develop and deliver a comprehensive programme to stop Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Brook's Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool - A tool which uses a traffic light system to categorise, identify and respond to young people's sexual behaviour
- Lucy Faithful Foundation HSB Behaviour Toolkit – provides support, advice and information on how to prevent it, links to organisations and helplines, resources about HSB by children, internet safety, sexual development and preventing child sexual abuse.
- NSPCC - Online Self-assessment tool to ensure organisations are doing everything they can to safeguard children.
- NSPCC - Resources which help adults respond to children disclosing abuse.
- Safeguarding Unit, Farrer and Co. and Carlene Firmin, MBE, University of Bedfordshire – Child-on-Child Abuse toolkit provides practical guidance for schools on how to prevent, identify early and respond appropriately to child-on-child abuse.

Confidential Support for parents/carers

- CEOP Thinkuknow advice for parents: Advice/resources on how to approach and deal with concerns about what children may be doing online
- Challenging harmful sexual attitudes and their impact - On the Thinkuknow site, this resource helps challenge harmful sexual attitudes
- Supporting positive sexual behaviour - On the Thinkuknow site, advice on how to start a conversation to support positive sexual behaviour
- Childnet: Advice for parents and carers to keep children safe online - Advice and resources to help parents and carers keep children safe online.
- How Can I Help My Child? - Marie Collins Foundation – Sexual Abuse Online
- Parentsafe - London Grid for Learning - Detailed advice/resources covering various issues such as online safety, apps, and how to report concerns.
- Parentzone - Provides expert information and resources to help make the internet work for families.

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE SAFETY PLAN

How can I try and ensure I will not be at risk of further abuse/unpleasant behaviour?

- Try to avoid situations/ groups/individuals who make me feel uncomfortable
- I will 'check in' regularly with my teacher and report any concerns
- I will report any digital activity which is concerning or unsolicited
- I will not join in digital inter-actions which could be under-mining

Do I have any mental health concerns or symptoms that make it harder to stay safe?

How can I help with these?

- I will share my concerns with my parents/guardians (where possible)
- I will tell a teacher or TA
- I will talk to Children's Services – as appropriate

What can I do right now that will help me feel safe? (coping strategies)

- Talk to friends
- Take myself away from social groups to a quiet place
- Avoid participation in online behaviour which could leave me vulnerable to unpleasant comments/behaviour
- Use wellbeing apps, access useful websites or telephone organisations who offer support (see below)

Who can I reach out to for help?

- My teachers
- My Headteacher
- My teaching assistants
- Childline 0800 1111
- MIND 0300 123 3393
- SAMARITANS 116 123

Long Term Support Plan

- To build resilience via supportive friends/influences
- Arrange extra support, via the school counselling service or external therapists if this becomes necessary
- To move away, physically, digitally and emotionally, from those who have been abusive