

Safeguarding Newsletter

February 2022

Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment – working together to keep children safe

Definition

Sexual violence is rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault or causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent.

Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.

Harmful sexual behaviour is problematic, abusive and violent behaviour by a child/young person that is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage.

It should also be noted that children/young people who are, or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bi, or trans (LGBT) can be targeted by their peers, and children/young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are more likely to be abused than their peers.

All our children/young people have a right to grow up safe from abuse and harassment. Education settings are central to framing a safe ethos and creating safe spaces for children/young people to explore healthy relationships, and there is a duty on settings to ensure they take action to keep children/young people safe.

What to look for

Sometimes children/young people or their friends report sexual violence or harassment. At other times staff may observe something of concern and intervene. Often children/young people do not disclose their experiences. Staff should be aware of the possible signs and consider with their safeguarding lead how to open up a conversation. Children/young people may be feeling angry, upset, stressed, worried, scared and confused, and having:

- flashbacks;
- difficulty sleeping and night terrors;
- anxiety;
- difficulty concentrating;
- blocking out the memory and/or avoiding remembering what happened;
- being unable to remember exactly what happened;
- difficulty in trusting people;
- thinking that no one else understands them;
- reliving the experience of sexual abuse.

Some children/young people may not perceive they are being abused or harassed and need to work through sex and relationships education to understand their experiences. However, sometimes lessons about sex, relationships and consent could bring back bad memories that were very hard to deal with.

What to do if you suspect a young person has suffered sexual violence or sexual harassment

- Concerns, whether observed or disclosed, should be taken seriously and reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead without delay.
- Take any immediate action to keep children/young people safe.
- Provide reassurance and support to everyone involved. It is particularly essential that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously, regardless of how long it has taken them to come forward, and they should never be made to feel ashamed for making a report or their experience minimised.
- Don't promise confidentiality, but explain that only people who need to know will be told.
- Listen carefully, reflect back, be non-judgemental and don't ask leading questions.
- Write up a thorough factual summary after the child/young person has finished.
- If there is an online element, do not view or forward this – you may refer to DfE advice on searching, screening and confiscation, and the UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people. (See Derek for more information)