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**Overview of responding to concerns**

Ensure adults, children and young adults who may have been abused by another adult, child or young person are protected and supported.

Provide the child or young person who may have carried out the abuse with the appropriate help

Make sure your organisation's response to any allegations is fair and consistent and any risks posed to children are managed appropriately.

**Types of allegations**

There are many ways that a child may be abusive towards others. A child who is displaying abusive behaviour may not realise they are doing so.

When a child abuses another child, it is sometimes called 'peer on peer abuse' or 'peer abuse' (Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health, 2017).

Allegations may involve:

[bullying or cyberbullying](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/bullying/)

[emotional abuse](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/emotional-abuse/)

[online abuse](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/online-abuse/)

[physical abuse](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/physical-abuse/)

[sexting](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/sexting-advice-for-professionals/)

[harmful sexual behaviour](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/harmful-sexual-behaviour/)

[sexual abuse](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse/).

**Identifying concerns**

Concerns might be raised by:

a child or adult making a direct allegation of abuse by a child or young person

a child or adult telling you they're uncomfortable with a child or young person's behaviour. They may not realise the behaviour is abusive

a member of staff or volunteer observing behaviour that gives cause for concern

you being informed that a child or young person is the subject of an investigation

a child or young person telling you they have harmed someone else or are at risk of doing so.

**Responding to concerns**

When responding to an allegation of abuse made against a child, it's important to consider the needs of everyone involved.

[> Find out more about how to respond when a child tells you they've been abused](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/recognising-and-responding-to-abuse/)

**Talking to a child who tells you they have behaved abusively**

Sometimes a child may tell you directly that they have behaved abusively towards someone else. If this happens:

reassure the child that they've done the right thing by telling you about it

listen carefully to the child and let them tell their whole story. Don't try to investigate or quiz the child, but make sure you understand what they're saying

use non-judgmental language

remember that a child who is telling you they've abused someone else is a child in need of support

tell them that you now have to do what you can to keep them and the other children involved safe

explain what you are going to do next and that you will need to speak to other people who can help

reassure the child that they can get help to change their behaviour and move forward with their life

you may want to suggest the child contacts [Childline](https://www.childline.org.uk/) for support.

Never promise to keep what a child tells you a secret. Explain that you need to talk to other people who can help keep them and the other children involved safe.

**Talking to a child who may be behaving abusively**

If allegations have been made against a child you should speak to your nominated child protection lead, who can advise you on the best way to proceed. If you confront the child about the allegations before taking advice, it may make the situation worse.

For more advice about speaking to a child who may be behaving abusively, contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk.

Sometimes you may have noticed a child behaving inappropriately and you may need to talk to them about this immediately, in order to manage the behaviour. Remember that they may not realise their behaviour is unacceptable. Talk to them calmly and explain why their behaviour is unsuitable and what they can do to improve it.

It's helpful to have a code of conduct which everyone in your organisations agrees to, and which you can refer to when managing behaviour.

Be aware that a child who displays challenging behaviour may be doing so because they have experienced abuse or neglect. If you think this may be the case, follow your organisation's child protection procedures.

[> Find out more about managing sexualised behaviour in schools](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/schools/managing-sexualised-behaviour-in-schools-online-courses/)

**Making notes**

It's important to keep accurate and detailed notes on any concerns you have about a child. You will need to share this record with your nominated child protection lead. Include:

the child's details (name, age, address)

what the child said or did that gave you cause for concern (if the child made a verbal disclosure, write down their exact words)

the details of any other children involved or impacted.

**Deciding if a concern is a child protection issue**

When a child or young person behaves inappropriately towards another child, a decision needs to be made about whether there is a child protection concern.

Your organisation's nominated child protection lead should make this decision in consultation with:

the volunteer or staff member who is responsible for the supervision/pastoral care of the children involved

the senior manager or trustee responsible for safeguarding

any other agencies you know are working with the child

the local child protection services if necessary.

**When an allegation is a child protection concern**

An allegation becomes a child protection concern when there's a significant difference of power between the child who is displaying abusive behaviour and the person being abused, for example when:

there's an age difference of more than two years

there's a significant difference in terms of size or level of ability

the child displaying abusive behaviour holds a position of power (such as being a helper, volunteer or informal leader)

the child being abused is significantly more vulnerable than the other child or young person.

It is also a child protection concern when:

the behaviour involves sexual assault or physical assault

the child who has experienced the abusive behaviour has suffered significant harm

the behaviour forms part of a pattern of concerning behaviour by the child or young person who is being abusive

the child carrying out the abuse is displaying harmful sexual behaviour

you are concerned that the child carrying out the abuse may be doing so because they have experienced abuse themselves.

**When you're not sure**

If you aren't sure whether a child or young person's behaviour is abusive, you could contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you, give you expert advice and take

action to protect the child as appropriate. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

You should also discuss the matter with your local authority child protection services.

**Telling parents that their child has abused someone else**

The child's parents or carers should be told what has happened, as long as it doesn't increase the risk to the child.

Ask the child how they would like their parents/carers to be told. You could suggest:

talking to parents first without the child there, then summarising everything with the child present

helping the child tell their parents in their own words, with you present for support.

It's important for parents and children to talk about what's happened and begin to come to terms with it as a family.

When talking to parents or carers, remember that the news their child has behaved abusively may be a shock. Reassure them that support is available to help their child change their behaviour and move forward.

**Support for parents**

You should also make sure that the parents/carers are offered appropriate support. Some organisations that may be helpful for parents/carers include:

[Family Lives](https://www.familylives.org.uk/) which helps parents/carers to deal with a range of challenges

[The Lucy Faithfull Foundation](https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/) which provides support around child sexual abuse/harmful sexual behaviour

**Reporting concerns**

If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on 999. If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

Follow your organisational child protection procedures. Organisations that work with children and families must have safeguarding policies and procedures in place.

Contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.

Contact your local child protection services. Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.

Contact the police

Services will risk assess the situation and take action to protect the child as appropriate either through statutory involvement or other support. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

Guidance on managing allegations made against a child

Statutory guidance across the UK highlights the responsibility of those in the education, community and care sectors to safeguard children from all forms of abuse and neglect.

[Child protection in England](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/england/)

[Child protection in Northern Ireland](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/northern-ireland/)

[Child protection in Scotland](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/scotland/)

[Child protection in Wales](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/wales/)

In England, [Keeping children safe in education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2) requires schools to have a child protection policy that includes:

procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse

information about how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be recorded, investigated and dealt with

clear processes for how any child involved with or affected by peer on peer abuse will be supported

a clear statement that abuse should never be tolerated or passed off as "banter", "just having a laugh" or "part of growing up"

recognition that peer on peer abuse can be gendered but also that all peer on peer abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously

information about the different forms peer on peer abuse can take

(Department for Education, 2018).

This policy was last reviewed on: 09/06/25

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