

HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

What is Harmful Sexual Behaviour?

Harmful sexual behaviour is an explosive area of safeguarding. It can be extremely complex to manage. There is often an emotional response from adults. In addition there is significant fallout for both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator, both children.

The NSPCC defines harmful sexual behaviour as: 'developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive.'

They also add that: 'problematic sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate or socially unexpected sexualised behaviour which doesn't have an overt element of victimisation or abuse.'

While this definition is a good starting point, schools need to think about what these behaviours look like in practice. Staff will have differing approaches and ideas. Staff training is vital to ensuring a consistent approach is taken. For example, simply reading part 5 of Keeping Children Safe in Education will not ensure a culture of openness and honesty about the experiences of children, young people and adults.

So what else do you need to know?

At the end of this document (Appendix 1), you will see a summary of the legal definitions you can refer.

<https://www.brook.org.uk/education/sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool/> have a helpful tool which 'traffic lights' behaviours so that you can see - at a glance - what is considered developmentally 'normal'. You must sign up for their training if you want to use this. However a number of local safeguarding partnerships have it publicly available on their websites.

If you use this activity with staff members, it will help promote a consistent approach. Remember that this activity does not cover all sexualised behaviours. You or your staff might be able to add further statements.

What should you do if there is an incident in school?

- Ensure that the alleged victim is safe and is not promised confidentiality.
- Ensure that other children are safe from the alleged perpetrator.
- Refer immediately to the DSL and make a written report (facts and what the child presents).

The DSL should

- Provide support for both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator.

- Consider whether to report to Children's Social Care and/or the Police.
- **If reported - Children's Social Care and/or the Police will advise as to how to proceed.**
- Inform the parents of the victim – unless this would put the victim at greater risk of harm.
- Carry out a risk assessment to ensure that both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator's needs are managed in school. This should also include any other children who have been victims or witnesses.
- Carry out an assessment regarding the school site location and what measures might be needed to better protect children and young people in the future.
- The school consider how to protect the identity and privacy of both the alleged victim and alleged perpetrator, especially with regards to social media. This would include a potential communication plan.

What if the incident happened outside school?

In many cases, harmful sexual behaviour incidents happen outside school. You may find out about the following:

- A child or young person has experienced HSB from a sibling at home.
- A child or young person has experienced HSB online.
- A child or young person has experienced HSB from another child or young person in an out- of- school setting. This may involve a child or young person from another school.
- A child or young person has perpetrated HSB with a sibling at home, online or in an out-of-school setting. This may involve children or young person from another school.

Schools still have a legal and moral responsibility for victims and perpetrators who are pupils on roll. In all the above scenarios, it is important to ensure that referrals have been made to the right agencies, risk assessments are carried out, and those involved have the support they need.

How do you provide support for both the victim and perpetrator?

This can be extremely challenging. It will depend on whether you are managing this entirely in- house or whether you have support from Social Care. Some of the following ideas might help.

For the perpetrator

Resilience based approaches have been found to be successful in supporting behaviour change (Hackett, 2014).

The core elements of resilience-based approaches with children and young people who displayed harmful sexual behaviours include:

- Developing supportive relationships for children and young people with at least one key non-abusive adult in their lives.
- Helping children and young people to build positive and reciprocal peer relationships.
- Encouraging school success and educational achievement.
- Nurturing children and young people's talents and interests.
- Building family resilience by offering primary caregivers a safe person they can confide in.
- Encouraging participation in positive and self-esteem-building activities.
- Developing autonomy in planning for their futures without HSB

For the victim

- Ensure that the child or young person and their parents know how you are going to keep them safe in school going forward. For some, a formalised plan and access to the risk assessment might be helpful.
- Provide a 'safe adult' – someone who is able to talk with the child or young person about their experiences in an informal way. This person might be someone with whom they have a particularly good relationship. Make sure that if the child or young person nominate someone, the adult is willing or happy to talk; and that they (the adult in question) is supported to carry out this key role.
- Make a referral to counselling services. Some schools have their own counsellor. Others will have access to CAMHs (or CYPS as it is called in some areas).
- Encourage the child or young person to seek support from Young Minds if the referral to formal counselling has a long waiting list <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/> (This link is useful for parents and staff too).
- Make sure other children and young people know what to do to support each other. In many cases it is the fear of peer response which can cause ongoing social difficulties.
- Have a safe place for the child or young person to go when they feel overwhelmed by the feelings caused by their experiences.
- Make sure that the child or young person can trust that what was decided will be carried out. If your school already uses restorative approaches, this might be helpful to help rebuild the school community.
- Support the rebuilding of self-esteem so that the child or young person knows that they are valued and important despite what they have experienced. Most importantly reinforce that it was NOT their fault.

Preventing Harmful Sexual Behaviour - Curriculum

RHSE/PHSE curriculum and assemblies should be coordinated. This should enable you to teach children and young people how to keep themselves safe and behave safely and respectfully.

Whilst it is important to ensure that this teaching is age-appropriate, these are some things, concerning HSB, that need to be taught across the age ranges:

- Respect
- Consent
- Healthy Relationships
- Online safety and relationships
- How to report abuse or harm

These elements should be taught in a coherent and well-managed way. We have provided some guidance for this below:

- **Respect**

Linking clearly with all aspects of your work, Respect needs to be taught explicitly.

<https://respectme.org.uk/> Scotland's anti-bullying resource has some good ideas for this.

- **Consent**

The classic 'Cup of tea' has been used a lot and probably needs to be replaced with something new. Suppose you haven't used it though; you can find it here <http://www.consentiseverything.com>. They also have more ideas and resources you can use.

- **Healthy Relationships**

Again, this is important for preventing HSB and ensuring that your children and young people know how to recognise when relationships are not healthy. For older children and young people, we think this website might be quite helpful <https://enough.campaign.gov.uk/> this website puts this in context.

- **Online safety and relationships**

There are lots of resources here: <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools/topics/mental-wellbeing/overview>. They are useful to help children and young people of all ages to develop their knowledge and skills around online relationships and how to keep themselves safe from harmful sexual behaviour.

- **How to report abuse or harm**

Think about how you encourage your children and young people to report abuse and harm. Will it enable a teenage girl to disclose harassment from one of her classmates? Will it enable a boy to tell you that one of his peers tried to touch him in the toilets? Relationships and connections are key to this. Talk to your children and young people and ask what would enable them to report.

Pupil Voice

Talking to children and young people about their experiences in each area can also help direct what should be taught and how best to teach it. This is particularly important concerning what children and young people are exposed to online. Safer Internet Day 2023 has some useful resources in this respect [UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

Further prevention

In addition to the general preventative curriculum in your school, it is important to have an idea of children or young people who might be more at risk of developing harmful sexual behaviours – then think about targeted interventions

General Risks of developing Harmful Sexual Behaviours

Children and young people are more at risk of developing harmful sexual behaviour because of a combination of the following:

- Experiences of childhood trauma – including sexual abuse.
- Chaotic and damaging home lives.
- Exposure to Domestic Abuse in all its forms.
- Prolonged exposure to a toxic emotional environment at home.

- Potential interventions for these potentially traumatic experiences. Introducing a whole school Trauma Informed/Shame Sensitive approach, embedded in your safeguarding culture, is the key here. Please do contact Debbie if you are interested in more information about this.

Tackling misogynistic language and behaviours

Recognise that male children and young people with misogynistic attitudes are more likely to treat the women and girls they interact with without respect. Challenging and changing these attitudes is vital to prevent them from progressing this lack of respect into HSB.

Exposure to online influencers (sometimes referred to as INCELS or, originally, involuntary celibates) can lead to a type of radicalisation which promotes HSB from a base of misogyny and violence towards women.

Potential interventions for these behaviours

There is a really good whole-school approach to tackling sexism and HSB throughout your school, whatever your phase <https://equaliteach.co.uk/education/classroom-resources/outside-the-box/>.

We recommend providing positive role models for your boys and young men. Look to the world of sport, and music and work locally to come and work with and speak to members of the schools' community to show how functioning male adults approach their interactions and relationships with women.

Pornography

There is an opportunity for prevention identified by young people who identify that they have trouble managing pornography. A large proportion of children and young people exposed to pornography identify that this was one of the key motivators in their HSB.

Potential interventions for this behaviour – Saferinternet.org.uk have a really good resource to use with young people here <https://saferinternet.org.uk/online-issue/pornography>