St. Francis' College
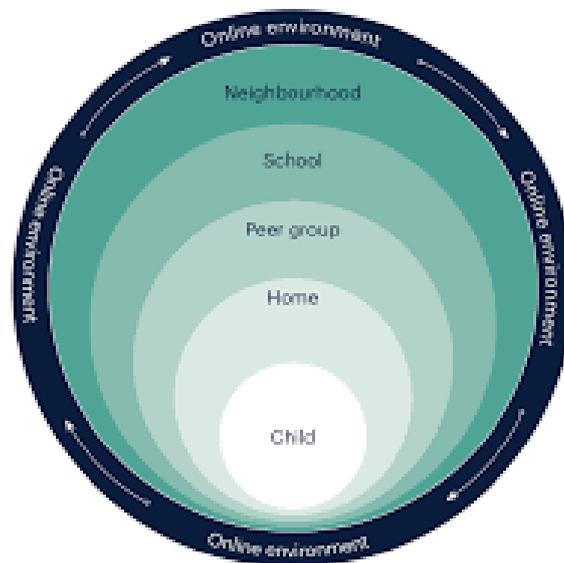## Peer on Peer Abuse Policy

Introduction

The 'College' refers to all the staff and pupils of the Prep Department and Senior School which includes Early Years Foundation stage (EYFS), Pre-Prep (Key Stage 1), Prep (Key Stage 2), and Senior School (Key Stages 3-5).

The governors, Senior Leadership Team and all staff at St Francis College are committed to the prevention, early identification, and appropriate management of peer-on-peer abuse both within and beyond the College.

What is peer-on-peer abuse?

For this policy, peer-on-peer abuse is any form of physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse and coercive control, undertaken between children, and within any relationship held by children (both intimate and non-intimate), friendships and wider peer groups. Peer-on-peer abuse can take various forms, including (but not exclusively):

- Bullying, including cyber bullying.
- Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, pulling hair or anything else causing physical harm.
- Relationship abuse, domestic violence and abuse.
- Child sexual exploitation.
- Youth and serious youth violence.
- Harmful sexual behaviour, including violent sexual behaviour such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault.
- Sexual harassment, such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes or online sexual harassment which may be stand alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse.
- Upskirting, which involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing.
- Inductions and/or hazing rituals.
- Prejudice-based violence, including but not limited to gender-based violence.

It is important to understand that peer-on-peer abuse can happen in person and/or online. The College recognises the importance of teaching about online safety and online behaviour as the online environment can facilitate peer-on-peer abuse within and outside of school. The College has policies on online safety and mobile phone use to recognise this.

Peer-on-Peer Abuse Policy:

The College believes that to protect children we should be aware of the nature and level of risk to which our students are or may be exposed. It is important to acknowledge that just because we are not aware of any student suffering peer-on-peer abuse, that does not mean that it is not happening.

The College is also committed to putting in place clear strategies and a whole-College contextual safeguarding approach to responding to peer-on-peer abuse. We recognise that the introduction of this policy is a preventative measure and that the College does not simply wish to only respond to alleged incidents of peer-on-peer abuse. As such, the College will focus on the systems and

structures that exist within the College, how to prevent peer-on-peer abuse, identification of peer-on-peer abuse and how the College responds and intervenes when an allegation is made.

This policy is the overarching policy for any issue that could constitute peer-on-peer abuse, though it needs to be read in conjunction with other College policies and government guidance, namely the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021). This policy sets out the College strategy for improving prevention and identifying and appropriately managing Peer-on-Peer abuse. It applies to all staff and governors, and it is reviewed annually by the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the pastoral team, though may be updated more regularly if required to address any risks to student safety.

This policy clearly recognises that abuse should never be passed off as "banter", "having a laugh" or "part of growing up". It is fully compliant with the statutory guidance of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021).

This policy does not use the terms "victim" or "perpetrator" because the College takes a safeguarding approach to all individuals involved in concerns or allegations about peer-on-peer abuse, including those who are alleged to have been abused, and those who are alleged to have abused their peers. In addition to any sanctions for the latter, the Designated Safeguarding Lead and his team will also consider what other safeguarding and child protection needs are necessary for the latter. This is because research shows that many children who present harmful behaviours towards their peers are themselves vulnerable and may have been victimised by peers, parents, or adults in the community or online. This policy applies to all students regardless of age.

In accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021), the College recognises that whilst all reports of sexual violence or sexual harassment should be taken seriously, staff should be aware that it is more likely that girls will be the subjects of sexual violence and harassment and more likely it will be undertaken by boys. However, the College recognises that it is essential that all victims are reassured that they are being taken seriously and kept safe. No student will ever be given the impression that they are creating a problem by reporting sexual violence or sexual harassment.

What is contextual safeguarding?

The College adopts a contextual safeguarding approach, which is about changing the way that professionals approach child protection when risks occur outside of the family, thereby requiring all those within a local safeguarding partnership to consider how they work alongside one another, not simply refer into children's social care, to create safe spaces.
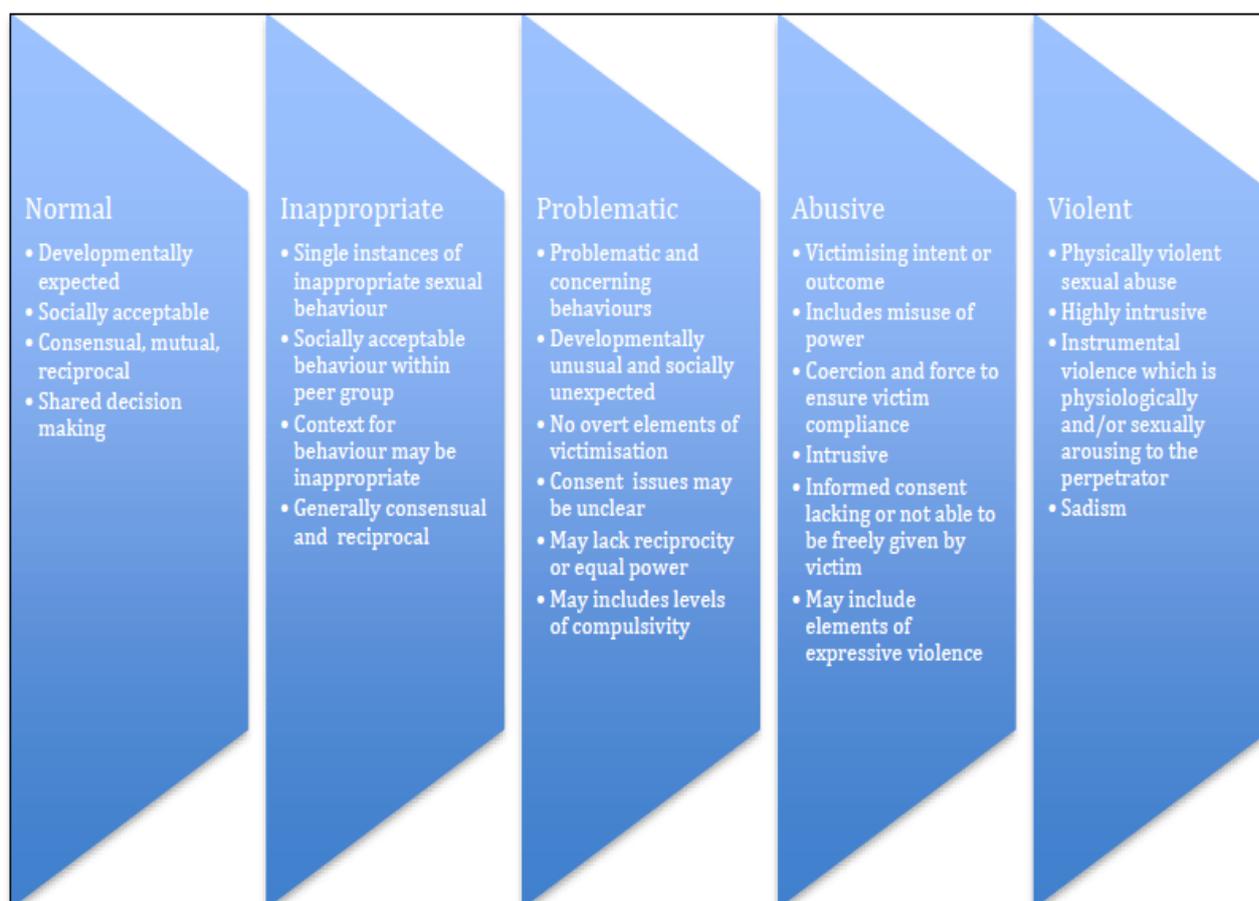
The College adopts a whole community contextual safeguarding approach through:

1. Being aware of and understanding the impact that wider social contexts may be having on our students, e.g., sexual harassment and honour-based abuse.

2. Creating a safe culture at the College by implementing policies and procedures that address Peer-on-Peer abuse and harmful attitudes; promote healthy relationships and attitudes towards sexuality and gender, identify areas of risk in the College and offer staff training on potential bias and stereotypical assumptions.

3. Developing positive and individual relationships with students to identify any changes in behaviour and/or attendance.

4. Contributing to local child protection agendas and working with agencies, such as Hertfordshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. The College recognises that many students live outside of Hertfordshire and the College is committed to working with all local agencies that have links to its students.

Sexual behaviours:

The Simon Hackett continuum demonstrates the range of sexual behaviours presented by children which is helpful when seeking to understand a student's sexual behaviour and deciding what (if any) action needs to be taken. Hackett's continuum relates exclusively to sexual behaviours and is not exhaustive.

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
• Developmentally expected • Socially acceptable • Consensual, mutual, reciprocal • Shared decision making	• Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour • Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group • Context for behaviour may be inappropriate • Generally consensual and reciprocal	• Problematic and concerning behaviours • Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected • No overt elements of victimisation • Consent issues may be unclear • May lack reciprocity or equal power • May includes levels of compulsivity	• Victimising intent or outcome • Includes misuse of power • Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance • Intrusive • Informed consent lacking or not able to be freely given by victim • May include elements of expressive violence	• Physically violent sexual abuse • Highly intrusive • Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator • Sadism

How can a child who is being abused by their peers be identified?

All staff should be alert to the wellbeing of students and to the signs of abuse. The College's Senior Leadership Team regularly review the behaviour incident logs which can help identify any changes in

behaviour and/or concerning patters or trends. All staff are trained on how to use MyConcern, which the DSL and Deputy DSLs and Head read daily.

Signs that a child may be suffering from peer-to-peer abuse include:

- Failing to attend school, disengaging from lessons or struggling to carry out school or co-curricular activities to the standard ordinarily expected.
- Regularly feeling sick or unwell in the morning.
- Physical injuries, including unexplained bruises and cuts.
- Experiencing difficulties with mental health and/or wellbeing.
- Becoming withdrawn, experiencing headaches, anxiety and panic attacks, suffering from nightmares or lack of / too much sleep.
- Broader changes in behaviour.

Abuse effects children differently and the above list is not exhaustive. The presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily indicate abuse. The behaviour that the student presents will depend on their circumstances.

The College recognises that any child can be vulnerable to peer-on-peer abuse due to the strength of peer influence during adolescence and staff should be alert to signs of abuse amongst all students. Individual and situational factors can increase a student's vulnerability to abuse by their peers. Peer group dynamics can also play a significant role in determining a student's vulnerability to such abuse. For example, students who are more likely to follow others' lead are more vulnerable. Students exploring sexuality and gender are also particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Research suggests that:

- Peer-on-peer abuse may affect boys differently from girls and that this difference may result from societal norms rather than their biological make up. The barriers to disclosure may also be different.

- Children with SEND and/or disabilities are three times more likely to be abused than their peers without SEND and/or disabilities. This is due to assumptions that indicators of abuse (such as behaviour, injury or mood) are related to the special educational needs or disability. These students are also disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying and harassment and may experience communication barriers and difficulties in disclosing abuse.

College Approach to Peer-on-Peer abuse:

St Francis' College actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of peer-on-peer abuse by:

1. Educating all governors, its staff, its parents and its students about this issue. This includes annual training as well as ongoing training throughout the year. This training covers the nature, prevalence and effects of abuse and how to prevent it, identify it and respond to it. This includes contextual safeguarding, identification of specific behaviours (including online behaviours), the importance of taking seriously all forms and allegations of peer-on-peer abuse regardless of how 'low level' they may seem and not disregarding abuse as "banter". All governors, staff, parents and students are also educated on online safety and social

media and how to educate students to use online platforms positively and safely.

2. Educating students about the nature and prevalence of peer-on-peer abuse, positive, responsible and safe use of social media and the facts about consent, via the Computer Science, PSHE and wider curriculum. These include assemblies and tutor times, as well as responses to national and international matters (e.g., issues of sexual harassment and gender equality). The School Council meet the Headmistress and Head Girl and Deputy Head Girls meet the Deputy Head where issues related to preventing Peer-on-Peer abuse are discussed. Educating students about consent includes teaching them basic facts, such as: a child under 13 can never consent to any sexual activity, the age of consent is 16 and that sexual intercourse without consent is rape.

3. Engaging parents on issues related to peer-on-peer abuse and communicating about issues as they arise at an early stage.

4. Supporting the welfare of all students by drawing upon local and national resources that prioritise mental health. Each tutor room has a list of contacts, inside and outside of school, that can provide help and support.

5. Facilitate counselling, where required.

6. Work collaboratively to address equality issues, to promote positive values and to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect amongst all in the school community.

7. Creating the conditions in which students can aspire to and achieve safe and healthy relationships. These conditions include a belief espoused by all staff that violence and abuse is never acceptable and that everyone has the right to be safe, where students have mutually trustful and respectful relationships with staff and where students can share concerns openly in a non-judgemental way and an environment of positivity and celebration.

8. Respond to cases of alleged peer-on-peer abuse promptly and appropriately, ensuring that all instances are reported to the College DSL so that they can manage the individual case as well as monitoring any concerning trends or further students who may need support.

Working with other agencies:

St. Francis' College will always actively engage with the Hertfordshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, where appropriate, when it comes to dealing with peer-on-peer abuse. It will also work with other local agencies for students outside of Hertfordshire. The College also works closely with social care and family services, the police and mental health professionals. The relationships that the College has built with these partners are crucial to ensuring that the College is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

The College actively refers concerns and allegations of peer-on-peer abuse where necessary to the Herts MASH and/or other agency providers. This is particularly important because peer-on-peer abuse can be a complex issue, especially when combined with other safeguarding concerns.

Responding to concerns or allegations of peer-on-peer abuse:

It is essential that all concerns and allegations of peer-on-peer abuse are handled sensitively, appropriately and promptly. The College recognises the impact that such concerns and allegations can have on all those involved. The College is also aware that the response to peer-on-peer abuse, including sexual assault, can encourage or undermine the confidence of future subjects of peer-on-peer abuse to come forward in the future.

St Francis' College will:

- Include a thorough investigation of the concern(s) and allegation(s) and the wider context in which they may have occurred. The College and its staff will ensure that students know that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, and any disclosures will be listened to and recorded factually. Students will never be made to feel that they are causing a problem for coming forward to report peer-on-peer abuse.
- Treat all students involved as being at potential risk. While the child allegedly responsible for the abuse may pose a risk of harm to other children, they may also have considerable unmet needs and be at risk of harm themselves. The College will make sure that a safeguarding response is in place for both the student who has allegedly experienced the abuse and the child who has allegedly been responsible for it.
- Ensure consideration of the fact that the abuse may indicate wider safeguarding concerns and consider wider social and cultural contexts – such as the peer group involved, sexuality of individuals and any SEND factors.
- Obtain the views of those impacted by the alleged abuse. Unless unsafe to do so, the DSL or Deputy DSL will consult with parents before any referral is made.
- Consider the wishes of the child who has been allegedly abused and give the child as much control as possible over decisions resulting from the alleged abuse.
- Ensure accurate and factual record keeping is kept of the incident.

If a member of staff thinks for whatever reason that the child may be at risk of experiencing abuse by their peers, or that a child may be at risk of abusing or may be abusing their peer(s), they should use MyConcern and discuss these concerns with the DSL without delay.

The DSL or Deputy DSL may discuss the concern(s) or allegation(s) with the member of staff who has reported them and will take the necessary and immediate steps to ensure the safety of all those involved.

Where any concern(s) or allegation(s) indicate that indecent images of a child or children may have been shared online, the DSL will consider what urgent action can be taken in addition to the actions and duties set out in this policy, to seek specialist help in preventing the image spreading further and removing the images from the internet. **Staff will not view, save or forward any indecent images of a child.**

The DSL will always use his professional judgement to assess the nature and seriousness of the alleged behaviour and determine whether it is appropriate for the alleged behaviour to be dealt with internally – and if so – whether any external specialist support is required.

Where the DSL considers or suspects that the alleged behaviour in question might be abusive or violent, or where it is deemed necessary given the needs and circumstances of those involved, Herts MASH and the police will be notified within 24 hours of the concern being identified. The DSL will

discuss the concern with the relevant agencies and agree on a course of action based on the detailed guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021).

1. Manage internally with help from external and internal specialists, where appropriate and possible.

2. Undertake and/or contribute to inter-agency early help assessment, with targeted help and support.

3. Refer the student to Herts MASH (or their local agency, if not a Hertfordshire resident) for a Section 17 or 47 statutory assessment.

4. Report alleged criminal behaviour to the police. Alleged criminal behaviour will ordinarily be reported to the police, however, there are some circumstances where it may not be appropriate to report behaviour. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

If a report of peer-on-peer abuse is determined to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false, or malicious, the DSL will consider whether the student in question who has made an allegation needs help or may have been abused by someone else and whether this is a cry for help. The DSL may refer the case to Herts MASH or other external agencies. If a report is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the College will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate in addition to any safeguarding measures.

Related Policies:

Child Protection and Safeguarding (in support of Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021))
Online Safety
Behaviour and Sanctions
Whistleblowing
Pastoral Care
Mobile Phone Policy

Created by	J Nichols
Reviewed by	B Goulding
Effective From	September 2021
Next Review Due	September 2022