



2.1F GUIDANCE ON PEER ABUSE

In a situation where child abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, it should be considered as a child welfare and protection issue for both children.

If a child is displaying problematic or harmful sexual behaviour, it can be difficult to know how to respond so that you are balancing the needs of everyone involved.

All sexual behaviour requires a response. The type of response required, and who offers that response, depends on the behaviour and the child displaying the behaviour.

A balance needs to be struck between the duty to safeguard children who have experienced abuse with the need to support children who have displayed problematic or harmful sexual behaviour.

WHY DO CHILDREN WHO HAVE DISPLAYED PROBLEMATIC OR HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR NEED SUPPORT?

When concerns around problematic or harmful sexual behaviour are identified, it can be an upsetting and confusing time for the child or young person. They may feel shame, embarrassment, guilt or denial about what they have done. When a child feels supported it can help them explore the reasons behind their behaviour and develop strategies to manage it.

Many children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour have experienced abuse or trauma.

A child's sexualised behaviour can also pose a risk to themselves, as well as those around them.

COMPLEX NEEDS

Children and young people who display problematic, harmful or abusive sexual behaviour might have multiple and complex needs. They might need support from a range of services. It is important to work with a range of agencies to provide holistic support that is tailored to each individual child's needs.

For example, children might:

- Struggle to regulate and express their emotions appropriately.
- Experience social anxiety.
- Struggle to understand or comply with 'rules' for social behaviour.
- Find it difficult to empathise with others and respond to other people's needs.
- Find it hard to build secure and confident relationships with others.
- Struggle to understand and respect personal boundaries.



RESPONSE

Each incident of problematic or harmful sexual behaviour will be different. You should gather the facts, assess any risks and make decisions on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the RCB Safeguarding Casework Team and the statutory authorities. Some responses may include:

- Introducing risk mitigations which are proportionate to the behaviour being displayed and in line with the guidance on codes of behaviour (see guidance under **Standard 1**).
- Referring children to the statutory authorities who may refer them to other agencies to assess their needs.
- Working with other agencies to develop a safety plan for the child. A safety plan helps you identify any risks posed to or by a child who has displayed problematic or harmful sexual behaviour and put measures in place to help keep them and other children safe.

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND WITNESSES

Some children might have seen problematic or harmful sexual behaviour taking place, or be friends with someone involved. They might need support to understand and come to terms with what's happened. It is important to ensure that young people can talk to a trusted adult about anything that's confusing or worrying them.

WORKING WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers should be informed that their child has been impacted by peer-on-peer or sexual abuse, as long as this doesn't put the child at risk of further harm. The statutory authorities can provide advice and support as to who is best placed to have this conversation.

