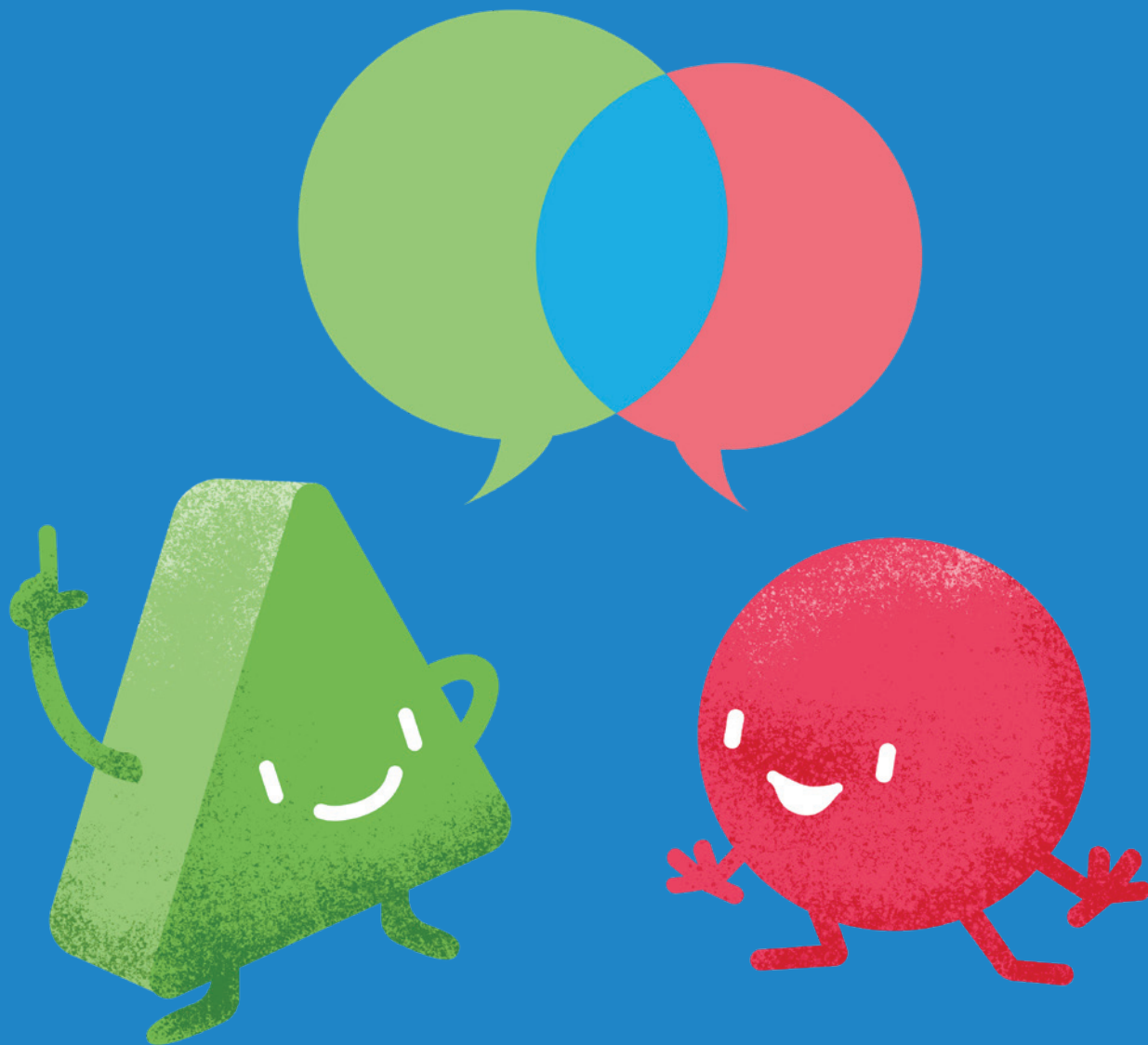


# Applying Safe Behaviours

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING  
TO PEER VIOLENCE AMONGST  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

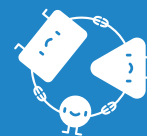
PRACTICE GUIDANCE



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES



Co-funded by the Rights,  
Equality and Citizenship  
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European Union



Applying  
Safe  
Behaviours

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING  
TO PEER VIOLENCE

# Impressum

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# Applying Safe Behaviours

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING  
TO PEER VIOLENCE AMONGST  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



**Applying  
Safe  
Behaviours**

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING  
TO PEER VIOLENCE

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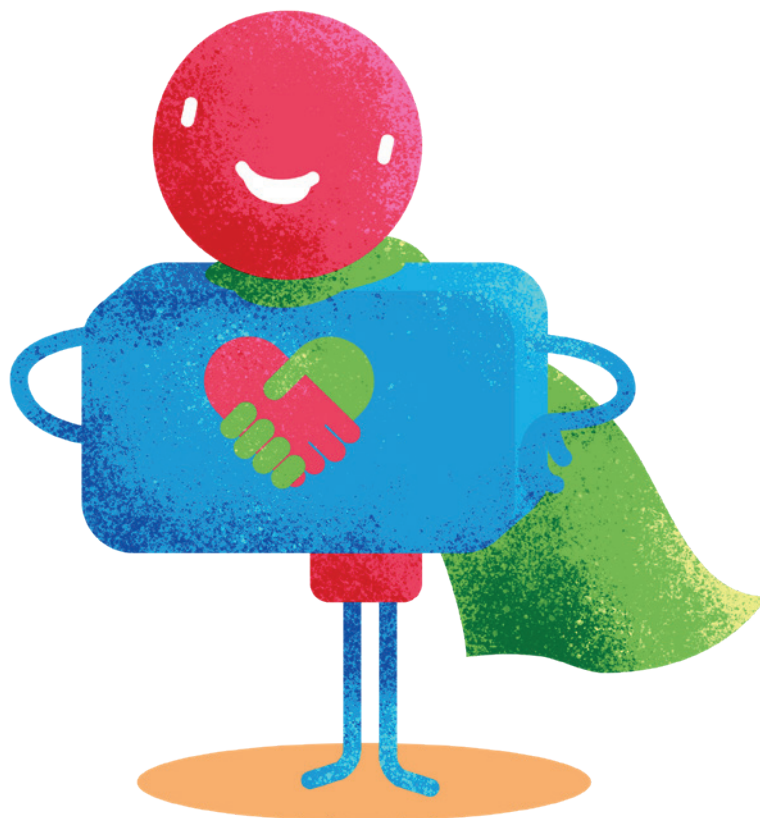
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# Foreword

Children and young people without parental care and in vulnerable families are more likely than their peers to experience human rights violations such as violence. As a consequence of their experiences, they are more vulnerable to becoming victims of violence from their peers, or carrying out violence towards their peers.<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite the prevalence of violence – and despite the critical importance of being treated with dignity and respect if children and young people are to develop the bonds they need to become their strongest selves – the child and youth care practitioners and other adults supporting children and young people often experience challenges in responding effectively to peer on peer violence.

The *Applying Safe Behaviours* project – which operates thanks to a grant from the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union – aims to address this problem, and this Practice Guidance is a key output of that project.

The project is coordinated by SOS Children's Villages International and implemented in partnership with SOS Children's Villages member associations in Belgium, France, Italy, Romania and Spain. We are grateful for the support of these member associations and all the partners who contributed to the project and this Practice Guidance.

“Nothing about us without us” is a common saying, and it has particular relevance to the *Applying Safe Behaviours* project. To address the challenge of peer violence, children and young people must be involved. Accordingly, this project has listened to *the voices* and needs of children and young people, with the aim of building their capacity and knowledge. Indeed, a key objective of the project is to make children and young people *active agents* in creating a safe environment for themselves and their peers.

It is important to highlight that peer on peer violence happens everywhere and that factors in the wider environment in which children and young people live can heighten the risk of being impacted, whether they are a target, initiator, or witness to the violence.

This project also focuses on enabling child and youth care practitioners to respond appropriately. This requires developing a *multi-sectoral approach* in which everyone involved in the provision of care – including those responsible for setting policy and creating an organisational culture supportive of safeguarding – has a shared understanding of the issues and the role each service provider should play. Therefore, this project aims to involve, inform, and advise managers, policy makers and other decision makers so they are aware of the need for safeguarding policies to prevent and respond to peer on peer violence.



1. Brodie & Pearce, 2017

This Practice Guidance fills a vital need, and we are pleased that it approaches the challenges in such a comprehensive way. We will share the resources across the SOS Children's Villages federation, and we hope that the guidance, together with the accompanying training materials, are used widely around the world, contributing to reducing peer violence and creating a safe environment among children and young people who have lost parental care.



Ingrid Maria Johansen  
CEO, SOS Children's Villages International

# Foreword from the International Young Expert Group

The following points have been developed by the young people who are part of the International Young Expert Group for the project. This is what they would like those who care for and work with children and young people to know about peer on peer violence.

**Peer on peer violence is more common when a child is considered different**

*It may include verbal abuse, shaming, body shaming, social exclusion, peer pressure and hate. It can take the form of sexism, racism, homophobia, and discrimination based on your economic status or ethnicity. Teaching tolerance and acceptance to children is something adults must do.*

**Children and young people deal with it in many different contexts, often without adults witnessing it**

*Violence can happen everywhere: online and on social media, in schools, in alternative care, in social and sport clubs, in the streets or public transportation. There is not always an adult present.*

**Alternative care experience should not be seen as a weakness. For this to happen, children in alternative care should be supported more**  
*Make it clear that alternative care experience can be valuable, and help to break myths about alternative care. Children in alternative care don't always have a fixed figure to go to in case of peer on peer violence. Difficult group dynamics can lead to peer on peer violence in alternative care and other group settings as well.*

**Talk more about peer on peer violence with children, young people, and adults**

*Violence should not be a taboo topic. Talk about it and put words into action, so that children can recognize it, report it and maybe avoid it. Role-plays are good tools to start this dialogue.*

**Building self-esteem is crucial**

*Low self-esteem can trigger aggressive behaviour and lead to peer violence. We should work together to transform differences into personal powers and empower all children and young people!*

**Peer to peer support is helpful, but a responsible adult needs to be present**

*Young people can be there for their peers who are affected by violence. They can help them report to an adult, they can listen to them, and give advice from their own personal experiences.*

**Adults should never consider peer on peer violence as a silly game between children**

*Adults must take the words of children seriously when they report an act of peer on peer violence. Don't make them think they are exaggerating! Make sure to always validate their emotions! Be good role models for kids and young people!*

**Children and young people do not talk about peer on peer violence because they are afraid of the consequences**

*They fear that the situation might get worse and they are scared others would not believe them. Rejection is scary! In other cases, children don't realize what violence is because not enough importance is given to it or because it is normalized.*

**All children need support when they are affected by peer on peer violence**

*Both the initiators and the targeted children are affected by peer on peer violence. They both need a trustworthy and responsible person to listen to them. It is not about punishing or blaming, but about finding solutions together. Keep in mind that the initiator may have been a victim of violence too.*

**Confidentiality is a must**

*Explain and respect confidentiality rules. Don't talk about our story to everybody, and ask us before sharing it!*

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**SECTION 1**

**Introduction  
to the Practice  
Guidance**

## SECTION 1

# Introduction to the Practice Guidance

### WHY IS THIS PRACTICE GUIDANCE NEEDED?

Peer relationships are important to children and young people. They help set social norms, build confidence and social skills, and can influence behaviours and life choices. What we hope is that all children and young people are able to form safe and protective peer relationships. However, when peer on peer violence occurs, this is harmful and can have a detrimental impact on a child or young person's emotional, physical and mental well-being.

Before writing this Practice Guidance, we conducted a scoping exercise in order to gather information about peer on peer violence in the countries of the five SOS Children's Villages associations participating in the EU co-funded project "Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence Among Children Without or at Risk of Losing Parental Care" – Belgium, France, Italy, Romania and Spain. There were two principle elements to the scoping: peer-to-peer interviews conducted by young people, and an online questionnaire completed by child and youth care practitioners and other stakeholders. Group discussions with care-experienced children and young people and those from vulnerable families also contributed to the information gathering exercise. All the information we gathered has shaped the content of this Practice Guidance.

We learned that peer on peer violence affects:

- The child or young person who is directly targeted by peer on peer violence.
- The initiator of peer on peer violence.
- Other children and young people, for example, as witnesses to events of peer on peer violence.

In this Practice Guidance we will collectively recognize these children and young people as being "impacted" by peer on peer violence.

We also learned how important it is that everyone tasked with caring for and supporting children and young people should have an understanding of peer on peer violence, how it might be prevented, and the support needed by those who have been impacted by it. Children and young people asked us particularly to share information that would help improve the response and support they receive when impacted by peer on peer violence.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICE GUIDANCE?

Children and young people told us that all the spaces in which they interact, live, learn, and socialize, can become unsafe due to peer on peer violence. Therefore, this Practice Guidance has the aim of informing the support for, and protection of, children and young people in all settings.

To this end, the Practice Guidance sets out information which we hope will contribute to the creation of safe and caring environments for children and young people. This includes three principle aspects related to achieving:

- Well-trained and aware staff, care practitioners and other stakeholders.
- Organizational safeguarding policies and practice that fully incorporate actions to prevent and appropriately respond to peer on peer violence.
- Children and young people are able to seek and receive all the support they need if impacted by peer on peer violence.

## WHO IS THIS PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR?

This Practice Guidance has been developed to inform and equip all those who care for and work with children and young people who may be at risk of or are experiencing peer on peer violence.

First and foremost, this means those directly working with and caring for children and young people on a day-to-day basis – as for example, primary caregivers as well as those working in different sectors including education, social work, health, sports and social activities, law enforcement, the judiciary, faith-based organizations and internet/website providers etc. It is also relevant for anyone else whose role it is to address the different underlying causes of violence - including those of social exclusion, stigma and discrimination.

In this manner, the Practice Guidance promotes a multi-sectoral approach that encourages a shared understanding of issues related to peer on peer violence and of the roles each caregiver and service provider can play.

In addition, this Practice Guidance should constitute a useful means for informing and advising policymakers, decision makers and legislators regarding the requirements of children and young people impacted by peer on peer violence and strategies to prevent such circumstances. This Practice Guidance is also relevant for all those advocating for positive reforms in the protection of children and young people.

## LIMITATIONS OF THIS PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Before moving on, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the Practice Guidance and how, given the breadth and complexity of the subject matter, this document **cannot cover every detail on any given topic**. What it seeks to do however, is provide a broad understanding that can be built upon, and to encourage you to work with and explore the topics further.

## WHAT DOES THIS PRACTICE GUIDANCE CONTAIN?

This Practice Guidance contains the following Sections:

Section 1. Introduction to the Practice Guidance

Section 2. Terminology

Section 3. Guiding principles

Section 4. What is peer on peer violence?

Section 5. The voices of children and young people

Section 6. Who is impacted by peer on peer violence and why?

Section 7. Identifying concerning behaviours

Section 8. Creating safe spaces: The importance of a Peer on Peer Violence Safeguarding Policy

Section 9. Relationship-based practice: Skills and knowledge for responding to peer on peer violence

Section 10: Restorative Practice

Section 11. Children and young people: Respectful relationships and life skills

Section 12. Advocating for Change

## HOW TO USE THIS PRACTICE GUIDANCE

This Practice Guidance has been designed to meet two clear functions:

**As a reference document** for everyone caring for and working with children and young people. It is designed to be user-friendly and has clearly defined sections dealing with different aspects of peer on peer violence. It also serves as an effective prompt for discussion when working together with colleagues from other agencies, helping them to understand some of the areas which need to be addressed for children and young people at risk of or experiencing peer on peer violence.

**As part of a wider training and development programme** to prepare those working with and caring for children and young people at risk of or impacted by peer on peer violence. We encourage that those who read and use this Practice Guidance attend the training specifically developed for this project. This corresponding training course is offered by SOS Children's Villages and has been designed to make the content of the Practice Guidance as relevant as possible to stakeholders in each participating country.

In addition to the content, throughout the Practice Guidance you will see these icons where you will find additional content:



**TIPS AND TOOLS:** Additional ideas, information or activities you might want to undertake.



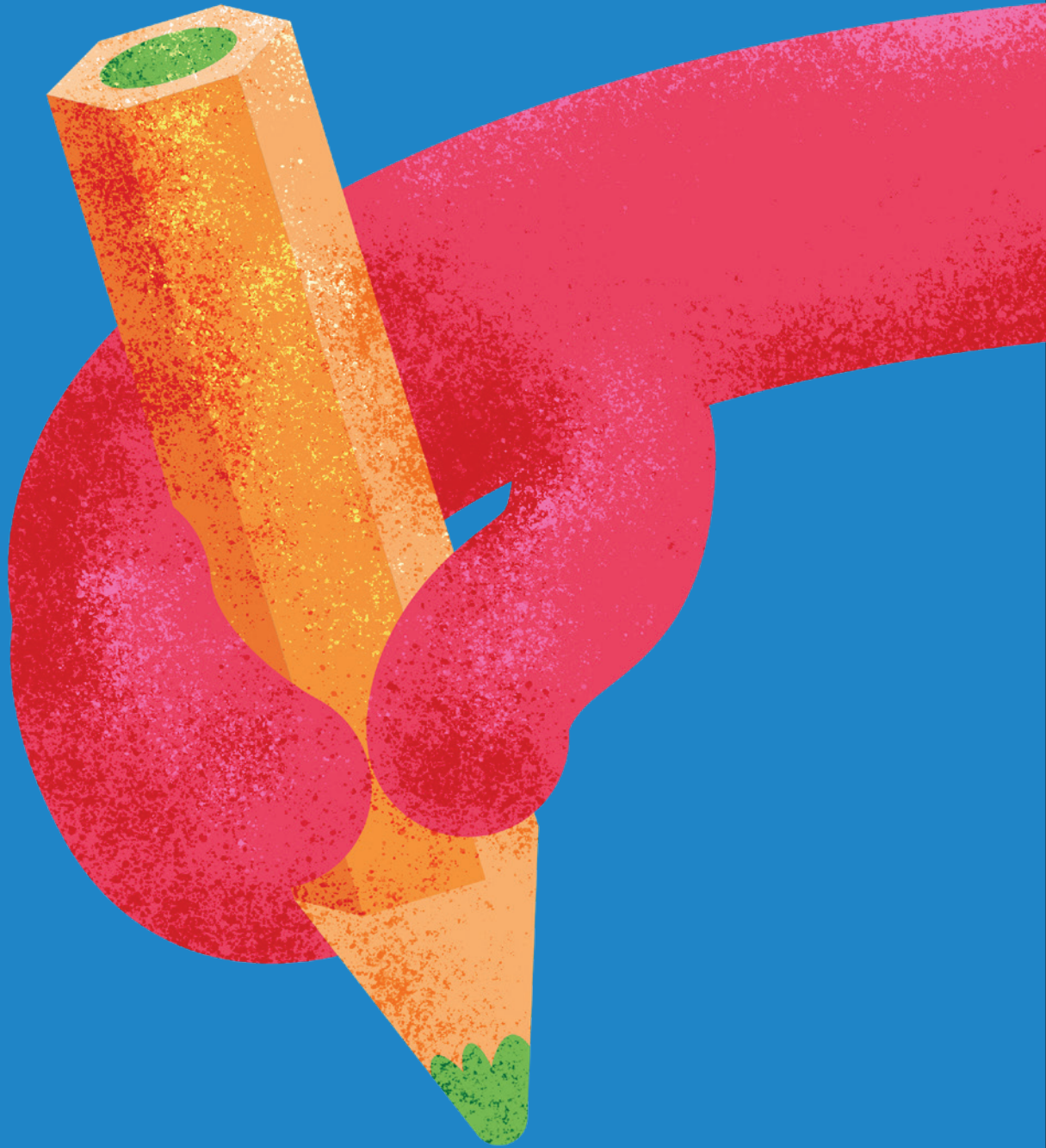
**READ AND CONSIDER:** Suggestions of additional reading material which may enhance the reader's understanding. This material is predominantly in English.



**WATCH AND CONSIDER:** Suggestions of additional video material which may enhance your understanding of the topics under discussion. This material is in English.

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**SECTION 2**

**Terminology**

## SECTION 2

# Terminology

### INTRODUCTION

In this Section we will provide a glossary of terms we have used throughout the Practice Guidance.

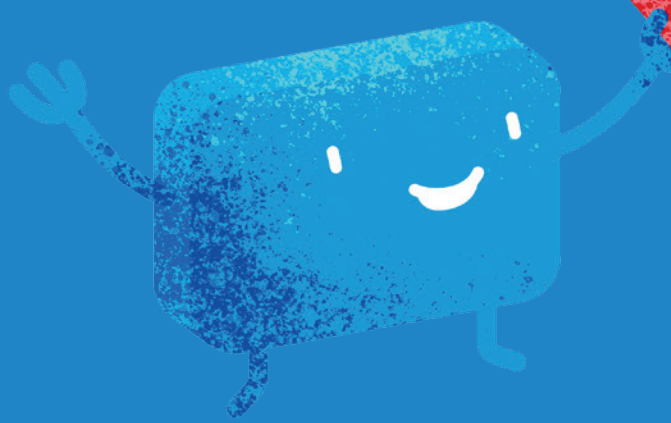
We have used the phrase “children and young people” to denote children, young people and young adults aged 0-24 years old. In addition, we use the phrase “those who care for and work with children” as shorthand for the range of child and youth care practitioners and other professionals who hold responsibility for children and young people’s care, protection, well-being, and development.

The overall definition of peer on peer violence that we have used in this Practice Guidance can also be found in Section 4.

### Terminology

TERM/ PHRASE	MEANING
<b>Additional Support Needs (ASN)</b>	Children and young people with ASN includes for example, those with physical or other disabilities, mental health concerns and learning difficulties, etc. For example, they may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
<b>Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)</b>	Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a term used to describe traumatic events experienced by children. They are defined as highly stressful events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. It can be a single event or incident, or prolonged threats to a child or young person’s safety, security or bodily integrity. These experiences require significant social, emotional, neurobiological, psychological and behavioural adaptations to survive.

<b>Alternative care</b>	Formal alternative care is all care provided in a family environment which has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not as a result of administrative or judicial measures. For more information please see the 2009 UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.
<b>Alternative care settings</b>	These are places in which children and young people are legally cared for by people other than their birth parents.
<b>Child/ children</b>	Every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 1).
<b>Impacted by peer on peer violence</b>	This refers to the children or young people who are directly targeted by peer on peer violence, initiators of peer on peer violence, and others who may be affected in some way, for example, as witnesses to events.
<b>Peer on peer violence</b>	Harm that occurs when there is any kind of physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse or coercive control exercised between children and young people. It includes bullying and intimidation, cyberbullying, sexual, emotional and physical violence, harassment and intimidation.
<b>Those who care for or work with children and young people</b>	Shorthand to describe a range of adults who either provide direct care and services for children, including those in alternative care settings, and/or who have responsibility for managing or coordinating services, e.g. care practitioners, teachers, social workers, social pedagogues, police, etc.
<b>Young person</b>	The UN defines youth (young people) as those between the ages of 15 and 24 years old (UN General Assembly 2001, 56th Session).



**SECTION 3**

# Guiding Principles



## SECTION 3

# Guiding Principles

## INTRODUCTION

This Section outlines seven cross-cutting principles that should be considered and applied throughout the guidance offered in this publication. These principles are structured within an overarching child- and youth-centred approach that recognizes children and young people as diverse and autonomous individuals and rights holders. The principles listed below are all as equally important as one another.

## SEVEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### PRINCIPLE 1: PROMOTING AND PROTECTING ALL HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The human rights to which all children and young people are entitled should inform the support offered to those at risk of, or impacted by, peer on peer violence. This means paying particular attention to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) which establishes adults as duty bearers and children as rights holders. Although the UN CRC specifically outlines the rights of those up to the age of 17 years, in this Practice Guidance we also recognize the importance of young people over this age who should also receive care and support with due respect for and fulfillment of all their human rights.

All child rights are of equal importance. However, among the Articles in the UN CRC there are a number that we would like to highlight as they particularly require consideration in relation to children at risk of, or impacted by, peer on peer violence. This includes for example, those articles that highlight the right to protection (Articles 32-36) and access to basic services including those of health care, social security and education (Articles 24, 26 and 28). Children with disabilities have the right to special assistance (Article 23), while there are articles that safeguard children's cultural identity (Article 30) and protect them from discrimination (Article 2).

A rights-based approach should inform and guide a thoughtful and caring response when supporting children and young people affected by peer on peer violence.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: FULL AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**

The UN CRC stipulates the important obligation to obtain and take due account of children's views on all matters affecting them (Article 12). The implications of such participation in decision-making are numerous.

First, children and young people – individually and as a group – must be offered or be able to request and be given information regarding any circumstances they find themselves in. All the information they are given should be relevant to their age and maturity, and should be easy to understand if their “participation” is to be meaningful. Second, this information must be realistic in terms of opportunities and support that is truly available.

Third, the views of the child or young person must be obtained in a manner and in a context which enables them to express their views freely. They should not feel pressured or constrained in any way when giving an opinion. Fourth, the child or young person must be informed from the start that it may not be possible to make decisions and act in a way that is totally in accordance with their requests and wishes. Children and young people should always be told how and why decisions were made.

Responding appropriately to the principle of “participation” does not just mean “consultation.” It has to guarantee the full and meaningful participation of a child or young person and thus, the commitment of all adults to promoting and ensuring this. When participation takes place on this level, it contributes significantly to a child or young person's empowerment, as well as enhancing and building on their resilience – factors that are essential in securing optimal outcomes for those affected by peer on peer violence.

Finally, and of no less importance, children and young people who have participated in this way in the decision-making process are particularly well-positioned to contribute their views to efforts to improve the overall provision of policies, services and support, as well as to procedures that can further enhance the prevention of, and response to, peer on peer violence.

## **PRINCIPLE 3: BEST INTERESTS PRINCIPLE**

The UN CRC requires all decisions and actions to be taken “in the best interests of the child” (Article 3.1). On the one hand, this means the views and wishes of the child or young person are very important when deciding what actions are in the best interest of the child. However, it may also mean that after taking all factors and information into consideration, decisions may have to go partly or wholly against the views and wishes of a child in order for their best interests to be met. This can be a delicate balance to achieve, and once again underscores the importance of providing, discussing, and explaining all relevant information, options, and decisions with the child or young person in the context of transparency and support.

This principle also means the recognition that each child and young person is unique. Accordingly, responses and support offered should be flexible and take on an individual approach that is fully in accordance with their circumstances.

**PRINCIPLE 4: BUILDING SUSTAINED RELATIONSHIPS OF CARE, TRUST AND RESPECT AND MAINTAINING A CHILD AND YOUTH-CENTRED APPROACH**

This Practice Guidance systematically takes the position that the way support is provided to children and young people should always be through a child/youth-centred approach which ensures they feel safe, cared for, valued and respected. It recognizes the importance of children and young people growing up in a loving and caring environment and the manner in which we should all be fully engaged in making this happen.

**PRINCIPLE 5: AN INTER-SECTORAL APPROACH**

This Practice Guidance highlights the fact that the prevention of, and any support offered to children and young people impacted by, peer on peer violence means understanding and taking actions that address multiple factors in the wider societal, cultural and economic context in which they live and may be putting them at risk. This requires a high level of inter-sectoral engagement and coordination that will best facilitate the prevention of violence and the most appropriate response.

**PRINCIPLE 6: A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH**

A trauma-informed approach recognizes the manner in which adverse experiences, such as experiencing and witnessing violence, can result in trauma. Trauma may be the result of:

“A single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s physical, social and emotional well-being.”<sup>1</sup>

A trauma-informed approach enables professionals, care practitioners, and others to respond in a way that promotes safety, prevents re-traumatization, and empowers the children and young people who have been impacted. A trauma-informed approach



1. SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative (2014). SAMHSA'S Concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Office of Policy, Planning and Innovation. Available at: [https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA\\_Trauma.pdf](https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf)

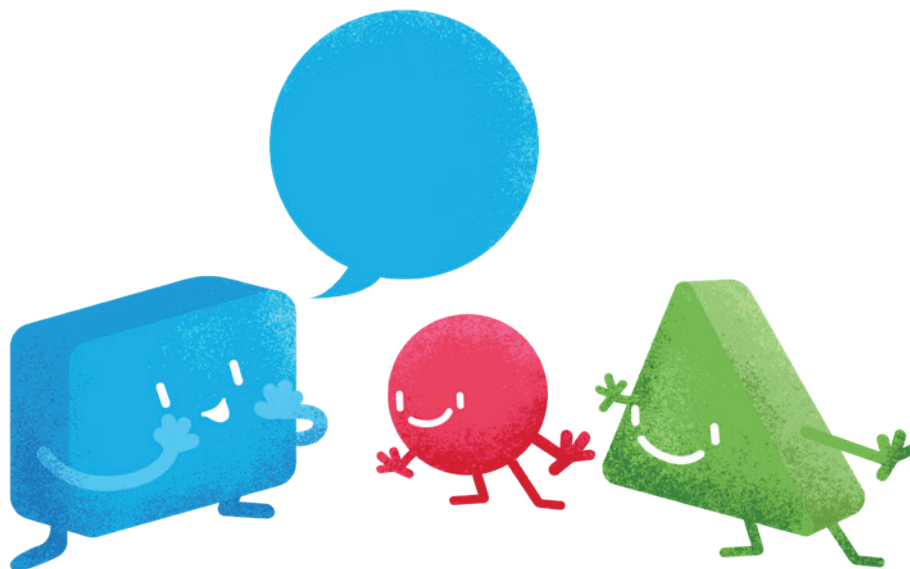


means recognizing the impact of trauma and working purposefully to provide safe environments and reduce exposure to trauma or re-traumatization.<sup>2</sup> A trauma-informed organization ensures all policies and practices are underpinned by a trauma-informed approach.<sup>3</sup>

### PRINCIPLE 7: CARING FOR THE CARERS

The sensitive nature of peer on peer violence can have an impact on those who care for and support children and young people through situations of peer on peer violence. Staff, volunteers, and others in this role may take issues they are dealing with very personally and can experience stress, sadness or fear. Therefore, knowing about ways to practice personal self-care and receiving regular support and supervision is essential for ensuring the well-being of front line workers, care practitioners and others.<sup>4</sup>

This requires line managers, organizational leaders, and others who are experienced and trained in offering this support. They should be able to offer supervision in an understanding and caring manner, and create an open and safe environment in which everyone is encouraged to openly address challenges they may be facing and seek adequate support.<sup>5</sup>



2. Please see: SOS Children's Villages International trauma-informed practices project – Practice Guidance, Organizational Development Guidance Document and e-learning programme available at: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*

5. Please see: SOS Children's Villages International's trauma-informed practices project – Practice Guidance, Organizational Development Guidance Document and e-learning programme, etc. Available at: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>



**READ AND CONSIDER:**

SOS Children's Villages International (2013), "Securing Children's Rights: A guide for professionals working in alternative care." Council of Europe. Available at: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/7318-securing-childrens-rights-a-guide-for-professionals-working-with-children-in-alternative-care.html>

SOS Children's Villages International (2009), "Children and young people in care: Discover your rights!" Council of Europe. Available at: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/8015-children-and-young-people-in-care-discover-your-rights.html>

SOS Children's Villages, "I've Got Rights."  
Available at: [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/9ea5795c-faa4-4c0e-9c29-1a0e2c059258/UN\\_Convention\\_Poster.pdf](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/9ea5795c-faa4-4c0e-9c29-1a0e2c059258/UN_Convention_Poster.pdf)

You will find a range of resources related to child participation at this link:  
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/topics/child-participation/>

SOS Children's Villages International, "Safe Places, Thriving Children: Embedding Trauma-Informed Practices into Alternative Care Settings" project. Practice Guidance, Organizational Development Guidance Document and e-learning programme, etc. Available at: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

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## SECTION 4

# What is peer on peer violence?

## SECTION 4

# What is peer on peer violence?

### INTRODUCTION

In this Section we will explore the definition of peer on peer violence. We will also think about the different spaces in which children may experience peer on peer violence.

### PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE

Peer on peer violence is recognized as behaviour that is harmful to children and young people who are involved in such behaviour.

As mentioned previously in this Practice Guidance, children and young people who are “**impacted**” by peer on peer violence include those who are targeted, are initiators, or become affected in other ways, for example if they have witnessed events.

Furthermore, for the purposes of this Practice Guidance, the following definition will be used to define peer on peer violence:

“Harm that occurs when there is any kind of physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse or coercive control exercised between children and young people. It includes bullying and intimidation, cyberbullying, sexual, emotional and physical violence, harassment and intimidation.”

Below we offer a short explanation, but not exhaustive description, of these different forms of peer on peer violence:

**Bullying and intimidation:** Behaviour, speech and actions such as taunting, stalking, ridiculing, and putting others down which is likely to violate a child’s dignity, and/ or make them feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated, and/or creates a hostile and unkind environment. It can also include prejudice motivated bullying such as racism and other forms of discrimination.

**Physical abuse:** Such as hitting, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm.

**Online bullying and harassment/cyberbullying:** For example, the use of phones, instant messaging, email, chat rooms or social networking sites to harass, put down,

threaten, intimidate, taunt, and ridicule someone. It includes online “sexting,” for example, someone sharing sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others, or sending sexually explicit messages.

**Sexual harassment:** This can be defined as unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. It can include sexual comments, such as telling sexual stories, making lewd comments, making sexual remarks as for instance, referring to clothes and appearance, calling someone sexualized names, and making sexual “jokes” or taunting. It is actions that may cause children and young people to feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated and/or create a hostile, offensive or sexualized environment.

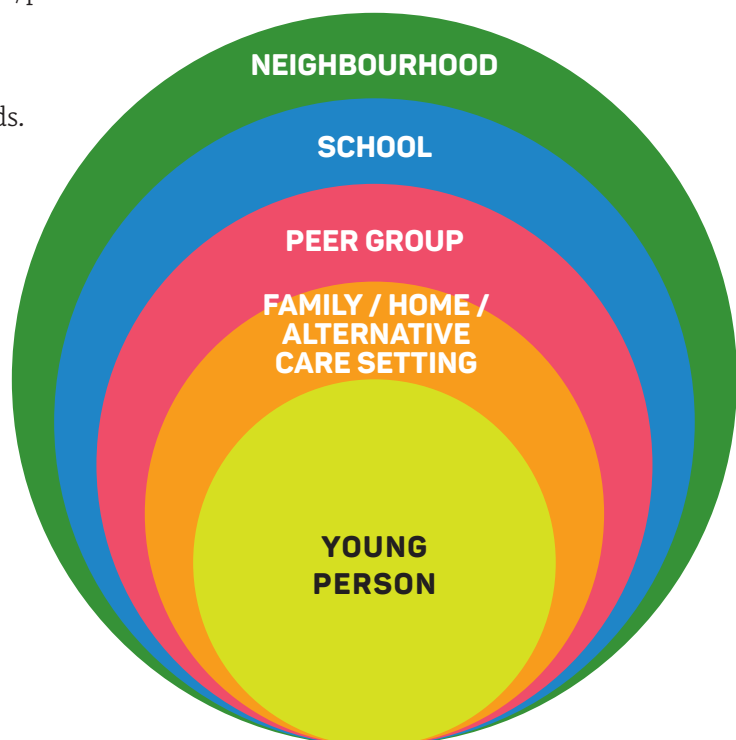
**Sexual abuse:** Sexually harmful behaviour which may include sexual assault/rape, inappropriate or unwanted sexualized touching, pressurising, or forcing or coercing someone to take part in sexual acts, sexual or sexist name calling, and use of inappropriate sexual language.

It is important to recognize that a child or young person may be impacted by more than one form of violence at any given time.

## WHERE DOES PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE OCCUR?

During a scoping exercise (please see Section 5) we asked children and young people about the places they felt unsafe. They spoke about the following settings:

- At school.
- In social spaces – such as sports clubs, youth clubs and while participating in other social/recreational activities/parties.
- While online.
- In public spaces –for example in the streets, in parks and playgrounds.
- On public transport.
- In the family home.
- In alternative care settings – including residential and family-based care.
- At work.



Based on this knowledge, all the information in this Practice Guidance is applicable to the different settings in which children and young people may be exposed to peer on peer violence.



#### **READ AND CONSIDER:**

These links will take you to a website providing further explanation of the different forms of on peer violence and additional resources:

<https://www.theeducationpeople.org/our-expertise/safeguarding/safeguarding-priorities/peer-on-peer-abuse/>

and

<https://safeguarding.network/content/safeguarding-resources/peer-peer-abuse/>

This link will take you to a range of resources on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>



#### **WATCH AND CONSIDER:**

Childnet International has produced a series of short scenarios for young people, some of which address peer on peer violence. The videos are helpful because they show how peer on peer violence can occur and escalate. They also show the ways that children and young people can be drawn into peer on peer violence. You will find one such scenario at this link:

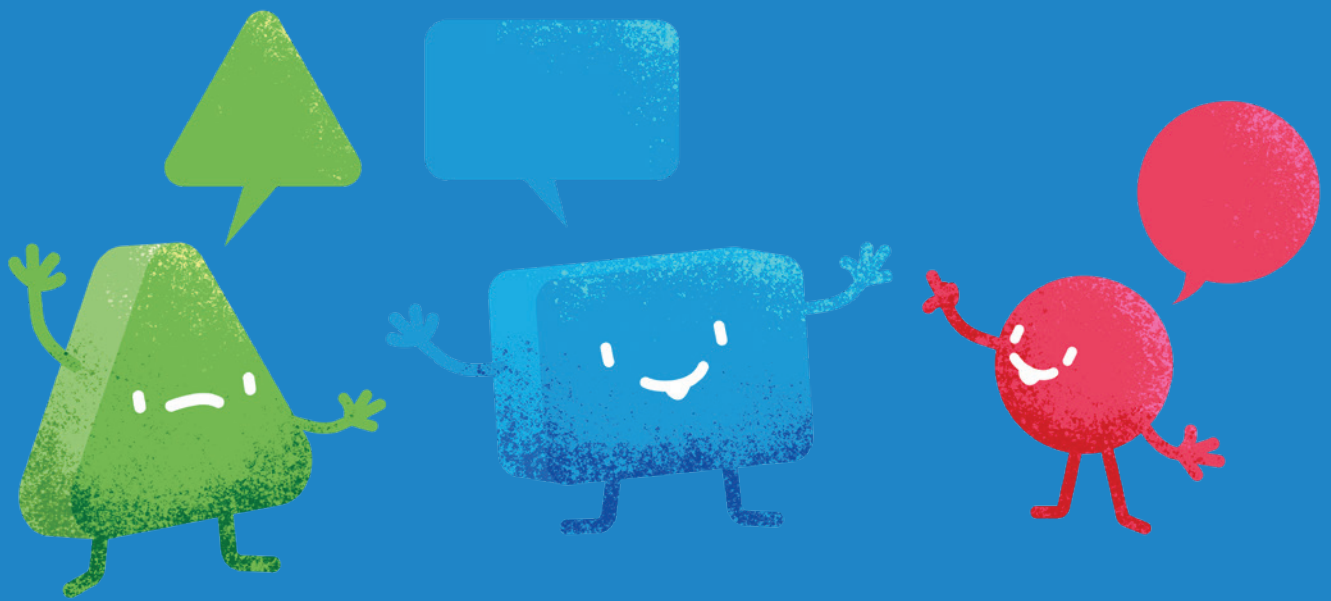
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_tG52x8gNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_tG52x8gNE)

In this short film George Curtis from the University of Bedfordshire considers the particular issues associated with safeguarding in cases of peer on peer sexual exploitation and violence. Available at:

<https://childhub.org/en/child-protection-multimedia-resources/peer-peer-child-sexual-exploitation-george-curtis?language=uk>

At this link you will find a short video produced by The Safeguarding Alliance on "what is peer on peer violence": [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYna\\_yzImK8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYna_yzImK8).

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## **SECTION 5**

# **The voices of children and young people**

## SECTION 5

# The voices of children and young people

### INTRODUCTION

The content of this Practice Guidance has been informed by a detailed scoping exercise that was carried out in each of the five countries participating in this project: Belgium, France, Italy, Romania and Spain. This included:

- Peer-to-peer interviews.
- An online questionnaire completed by 121 child and youth care practitioners and other stakeholders.
- Group discussions with children and young people in Italy, Romania and Spain.

In this Section we will explore the information we were provided by children and young people.

### WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

In total, 46 peer-to-peer interviews were conducted by and with young people. In consultation with members of the project's International Young Expert Group comprised of two young experts from each country, the following three key questions were chosen and used during the interviews:

1. What do you think adults should do to prevent peer on peer violence?
2. What do you think adults should do to support children and young people who have been harmed by other children and young people?
3. What do you think adults should do to support children and young people who cause harm to other children and young people?

In addition, a series of workshops were held with children and young people in the participating countries to explore the topic of peer on peer violence from their perspective and ways that peers might support each other.

The information in the table below contains a summary of the amazing information children young people provided.



## What children and young people told us

SUBJECT	FINDINGS
<p><b>Equality and respect for diversity</b></p>	<p>“Teach very young children that we are all equal; that there are boys, there are girls, there is everything. That they can be black, that they can be white, that they can be of any race, that they can like anything, but that they are all, at the end of the day, children, and they will grow up and they will all do the same.”</p> <p>Intolerance of others and power imbalances can result in peer on peer violence. Children and young people can become more vulnerable to peer on peer violence if for instance, they belong to a different ethnicity or religion, sexual orientation, or perhaps come from a poor socio-economic background. Children and young people who experience mental-ill health or have a disability may also be at higher risk of experiencing peer on peer violence. To prevent peer on peer violence, it is important to understand and address these concerns.</p> <p>In order to help prevent and respond appropriately to peer on peer violence, children and young people want adults to play a role in “guiding” and “educating” them with regards to positive social and cultural values and behaviours. This includes promoting “respect” for, and value of, diversity and “equality.” They should “teach” the importance of being kind to one another. Attitudes and feelings of superiority, power and discrimination should be addressed so that children and young people can live in an environment that promotes unity and friendship. They also want to understand what is “right and wrong” behaviour.</p>
<p><b>Adult as role models</b></p>	<p>“Besides, as a society, not only parents and educators and schools and so on are responsible for the image they project – all the children look up to adult people and if you set a good example with your behaviour, children also see it and copy it, so that is important.”</p> <p>Children and young people see adults as role models and will replicate the good or bad behaviour they observe. If children and young people observe violence in adults, especially those who play a significant role in their lives such as primary caregivers and teachers, this can lead to the occurrence of peer on peer violence. They want adults to realize how they should always strive to be these good role models. This means helping children understand by example, the importance of everyone treating each other equally and with care and respect.</p>

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**Raising awareness and talking about peer on peer violence**

“Talk about [peer violence] a lot. Raise awareness about it. Tell children what's going on in the world and talk a lot about what can be done about it... And I say, talk to the children a lot to prevent it, to avoid it as much as possible. And yes, discuss it. Don't ignore it. Really discuss it.”

In order to prevent and effectively respond to peer on peer violence, children and young people said this violence must be acknowledged and not ignored. They want the topic of violence and the harm it can cause to be spoken about openly, particularly those subjects that may normally be taboo such as sex and sex education. These issues should not be hidden.

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**Having a “responsible” adult to turn to**

“Of course, the first people you turn to are usually people you trust. You look for an ally. Then, there are also some reference figures to turn to, e.g. psychologists, social workers, the police or other skilled and competent people. People you can go to and discuss things, even if the situation doesn't seem so bad for you.”

Children and young people said they need someone – a “responsible adult” – they can turn to when they face difficulties. They want someone they can trust, who they are not afraid of, and who will truly listen to them. Responsible adults must address situations of peer on peer violence in a confidential, supportive and caring manner. They must not ignore situations of peer on peer violence and they should continue to offer support until the situation for all those involved has been resolved – they must not abandon or reject anyone.

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**Feeling loved and cared for**

“I don't want to sound too cliché, but usually the bully who commits acts of violence comes from a position of discomfort, most of the time. If the bully is a child and everything is going well in his life, he feels loved, listened to, cared for, he usually doesn't wake up in the morning saying, today I'm going to school and I'll beat my classmate.”

Children and young people who experience neglect or do not feel loved, protected and cared for, may have feelings of anger, lack self-esteem and feel rejected. Young people said this in turn can manifest itself in abusive behaviour towards peers. To prevent peer on peer violence, it is important that all children and young people feel loved, cared and protected.

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**Providing individual and caring support for those impacted by peer on peer violence**

“Mainly give them love and make them feel like what they really are. Because they are suffering a situation of harassment but they are not less than anyone else. No, they just got into that situation and they had to live that part. And the main thing is to make them feel valid, that they value themselves, that they can go on their way without problems.”

Those children and young people impacted by peer on peer violence may feel stigmatized and ashamed by what is happening/has happened. They may experience feelings of worthlessness, rejection, isolation, inferiority and pain. They may feel helpless and now know how to cope with the situation or how to keep themselves safe. Children and young people should know they have no reason to feel ashamed and that it is important to speak about experiences rather than hide them away. They should be offered support in realizing their self-worth and own self-esteem. They should also be reassured about what will happen to them and how their future can be a positive one. Children and young people need support to cope with their situation and to know that someone will be there for them for as long as necessary.

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**Confidentiality and fear of reporting**

“At the beginning, adults may have to force children a little, but not too much (to avoid the opposite result), and children may show reluctance, but afterwards they may realize it’s a good opportunity to talk with a trusted person that won’t disclose their secrets to other...”

Children and young people said they need to trust those they turn to and that involves feeling safe if they report any concerns. They are fearful of retribution from anyone who has initiated the violence as well as rejection by friends for being a “tell-tale.” This means adults should observe regulations concerning confidentiality and the sharing of information only on a “need to know” basis. It is suggested that there are ways children can report concerns anonymously as for example through “post boxes.”

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**Providing a safe space**

“If I knew that there is a safe space nearby where I can go and say that, for example, someone made fun of me, I would feel at ease and less worried. In short, young people need more neutral spaces where they can talk.”

Children and young people said everywhere they interact, live, learn and socialize should be a safe space. In addition, they would like a specific child and youth friendly safe space within the organizations they attend so they have somewhere they can go and sit and speak about their experiences, worries, fears and concerns.

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**Supporting children and young people who initiate violence**

“I believe that they should be supported without being judged. Because, regardless of the reason for the aggression, whether it was physical, emotional, sexual, or via social media... whatever it was, we must make the child feel understood, not judged and, above all, accompanied in the process of overcoming or acceptance.”

Children and young people who initiate violence should be understood and supported rather than “punished.” It must be recognized that they themselves could be facing challenging and difficult circumstances that contribute to their behaviour. Adults working with initiators of violence should adopt a calm attitude and not address violence with further aggression or negative and accusatory attitudes. Children and young people should be supported in a way that helps them recognize right from wrong while being helped in a positive and constructive manner to change their behaviour.

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**Responsible adults should seek a full understanding of each situation**

“So, I think adults should put themselves in children’s shoes, listening to them, having a much more attentive and caring approach, because only in this way they would be able to perceive and understand...”

It is important that responsible adults should always seek a full understanding of what has happened when they are supporting children and young people impacted in any way by peer on peer violence. They should carefully assess the situation, the actions, the motivation, and any impact before making decisions how to respond and support all those involved.

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### Individual and group dynamics and peer pressure

“Group pressure can also play a role. For example, some young people may not like a particular person, and group pressure naturally leads to peers not liking that person either, and if one person goes a little further than that, and then several others follow, eventually it can turn into actual violence.”

“If you don’t drink or smoke or don’t party or don’t do drugs, you are not cool and you get bullied.”

Children and young people recognize the role individual and group dynamics play on peer on peer violence. Some individuals initiate violence against other individuals and groups of children and young people also target individuals. Groups may also be in conflict with other groups.

A group of children or young people purposefully excluding someone from their group is identified as a form of bullying and intimidation. Some specifically “join” a group who are instigating violence for reasons of self-protection, even if these are not peers they would usually choose to be friends with. Children and young people are particularly hurt when it is someone they consider a friend who becomes the initiator of violence against them or, joins a group that is harming them. Children and young people may also be affected by peer pressure which leads them to act in ways they would not usually and/or do not feel happy about. Adults should be aware of how peer relationships, including group dynamics, play a role in peer on peer violence.

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### Participation in decision making

“Adults should [say] “We involve you in all the choices and we want to let you know that we are here for you.”

The participation of children and young people is important to them and should be facilitated so that they are fully involved in any decisions being made about their lives. This is both on a personal level as well as involvement in a more structured response to peer on peer violence by organizations.

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**Supporting  
children in  
alternative care**

“I have always seen violence between a group and an individual. The strength of the group: “I am stronger because I am in a group, with my friends, while you are alone and I target you.” It’s quite common, even in community homes. There is always that little group. I have lived in a community home, so I experienced this kind of dynamic directly. There could also be a second dynamic between groups, Group 1 vs Group 2...”

Children in alternative care interact and are impacted by peer on peer violence in the wider settings of their community, e.g. in school and when they socialize, in the same way as other children. However, children and young people drew attention to a number of specific factors related to being care-experienced.

One such issue is group violence and how in residential care there is particular opportunity for forming themselves into groups, e.g. as friends or those that share a bedroom/dormitory, etc. These groupings might become natural conduits for inflicting peer on peer violence on others as for example, when a new child arrives at the care setting who is seen as an interloper or disrupts the dynamics of an existing group.

Some care-experienced children and young people feel caregivers, whether in a residential setting or foster care, do not always have the necessary skills and understanding to support them on issues related to peer on peer violence. Care-experienced children and young people may also be seen by their peers as being “different” and this can also render them more vulnerable to peer violence. Unhappiness and instability in care may also result in a child or young people exhibiting aggression towards their peers.

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### **Training and capacity building for adults**

“Train the adults a bit more, so that they have less tendency to be dismissive, they pay a little more attention and then use a bit more psychology...there are certain basics that I think everyone ought to know something about. I think that when you work with children in child protection measures, having training is a bit of a minimum requirement, I think it’s only logical. You work with children whose profiles are more or less different, who have experienced different levels of terrible things, but nobody is trained to listen to what they say, to be able to help them in the best way possible, to support them as they should be supported.”

Adults need the skills, knowledge and training that will help them recognize, prevent and respond to peer on peer violence. They need the appropriate understanding and skills to respond in a caring and careful manner. Adults should have the ability to engage in active listening, to ensure no-one feel stigmatized or ashamed by what has happened, and to help children and young people re/gain confidence and self-esteem. This includes not just parents, care practitioners and teachers, but all adults that hold responsibility for the support and protection of children through a multi-sectoral approach.

Parents and other care practitioners may specifically need help in changing their own behaviour and attitudes toward violence so they become positive role models. They may also need help building their capacity and skills to better support the children in their care.

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### **A multi-sectoral approach**

“Yes, looking for help and giving help where necessary. Yes, calling in as many agencies as possible to really help them.”

A responsible adult who is working to support children and young people impacted by peer on peer violence should also engage and work with other professional colleagues, parents, and others if and when appropriate.

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**Peer support**

“Maybe friends and peers could be other important reference figures to talk to, to confide in, to open up to on a friendly level.”

Children and young people said they should feel able to turn to each other and offer each other emotional support when something bad happens. They would like to be able to share what happened to them with a friend, as this is someone they can rely on and with whom there is already trust. They think they might be able to encourage those impacted by violence to speak to a responsible adult. It is also suggested that perhaps younger children could turn to older children and young people for support. However, they do have concerns especially when reporting peer on peer violence in case they themselves then become a target or are seen as a “snitch.”

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All the above-mentioned issues have been instrumental in informing the content and development of this Practice Guidance. In addition, content has been informed by responses from a comprehensive survey completed by 121 child and youth care practitioners and other professionals in the participating countries. They were asked about the occurrence of peer on peer violence in their country. They were also asked about the skills, understanding and other attributes needed when supporting children and young people impacted by peer on peer violence.

Further examples of what children and young people told us can also be found throughout this Practice Guidance in speech bubbles.







**SECTION 6**

**Who is  
impacted by  
peer on peer  
violence and  
why?**

## SECTION 6

# Who is impacted by peer on peer violence and why?

### INTRODUCTION

In order to effectively prevent and respond to peer on peer violence, it is absolutely essential we understand who is impacted by it and why it happens.

Girls and boys of all ages are impacted by peer on peer violence - this includes those who are directly targeted, those who initiate the violence, and those who are affected by it in other ways. We also noted previously in this Practice Guidance that peer on peer violence can happen in the many different spaces they interact, such as where they live, learn and socialize.

In addition, research tells us there are a range of socio-economic and cultural factors that can increase the risk of peer on peer violence occurring. In this Section of the Practice Guidance we will provide a short introduction to some of these issues which are important to recognize and understand.

### WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE?

“They teased me a bit and bullied me because I was “the new girl,” because I was shy and I wasn’t like them.”

“Then, they look for weakness. For example, my weakness is my mother. Because my mother, I don’t need to say this, but she passed away two years ago, and it’s alright, I have overcome it, but in the end my classmates were mean to me, some of them would tease me because of that.”

Factors that contribute to children and young people being impacted by peer on peer violence include:

### Social norms and values

Social norms are those unwritten rules of behaviour that influence and drive attitudes and actions. They inform our values and this in turn can influence:

- How well children and young people are protected.
- The heightened risk of peer on peer violence occurring.
- The acceptance of violence.
- The degree to which violence is reported and responded to.

Research<sup>6</sup>, including the information provided by children and young people during the scoping exercise for this project (please see Section 5 for more information), draws our attention to the way social norms and values - alongside other factors associated with the context and environment in which children live, learn and socialize - can have a significant impact on their vulnerability to involvement in peer on peer violence.

For example, some social norms may promote feelings of superiority, power and discrimination rather than values of unity, equality and respect for diversity. In this way, some children and young people may respond to their environment by believing themselves to be superior and become emboldened, which in turn may lead to them instigating peer on peer violence. Other children and young people, because of being perceived as having a weaker social standing - for example, coming from a very socio-economic poor household - may be more vulnerable to being targeted by peers.

Children and young people also told us that those living in a context where there is violence, neglect or discrimination, or where they do not feel loved, protected and cared for, may have feelings of anger, lack self-esteem and feel rejected. In some children and young people these feelings may result in abusive behaviour towards peers. On the other hand, this may make some children and young people more vulnerable to being targeted by violence.

The range of such factors that can contribute to risk of peer on peer violence include, but are not limited to:



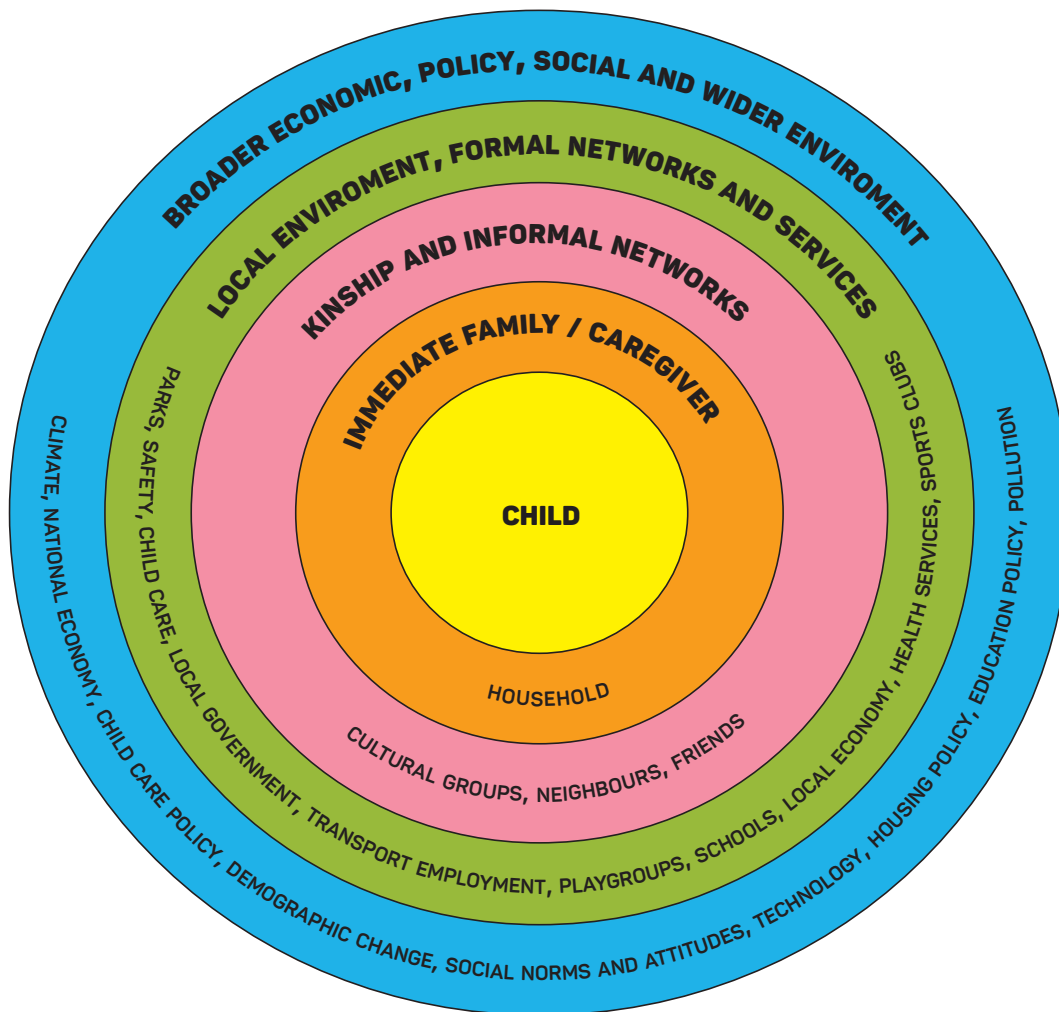
6. See for example: International Institute for Child Rights and Development & Child Hub (2021) Regional Research on violence against Children in schools in South east Europe. Child Protection Hub for South East Europe; Know Violence in Childhood (2017) *Ending Violence in Childhood* Global Report 2017. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India; UNICEF (2018) Making the connection. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/making-connection>. See also UNICEF (2014) Hidden in plain sight. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/85661/file/Hidden\\_in\\_plain\\_sight\\_statistical\\_analysis\\_Summary\\_EN\\_2\\_Sept\\_2014.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/85661/file/Hidden_in_plain_sight_statistical_analysis_Summary_EN_2_Sept_2014.pdf) <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence> <https://somepomed.org/articulos/contents/mobipreview.htm?9/48/9985?view=print>; Hawkins et al (2000) Predictors of Youth Violence <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/179065.pdf>; Ferrara et al. (2019) 45:76 Physical, psychological and social impact of school violence on children. Italian Journal of Paediatrics. Available at: <https://ijponline.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s13052-019-0669-z.pdf>

- Coming from vulnerable and marginalized socio-economic backgrounds.
- Coming from different cultures, religions, or another country, e.g. refugee and migrant children or those from an ethnic minority.
- Living in a violent neighbourhood or household.
- Having parents or other primary caregivers whose attitudes are favourable to violence.
- Lacking parental/care practitioner support and/or indifferent or poor engagement and relationships with caregivers.
- Having Additional Support Needs (ASN) as for example those with a physical disability, learning or other intellectual difficulty, mental health issues, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- Because of sexual orientation and/or gender identity – for example identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and others (LGBTQ+).
- Having had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse, severe neglect, having witnessed violence, or experienced other traumatic events such as domestic abuse, war, death of a loved one, or loss of parental care.
- Being perceived as quieter, weaker, or less intellectual.
- Because of appearance – for example children and young people who might be seen as overweight, wear spectacles, or are not dressed well/the same as peers.
- Influence of mass media, e.g. exposure to violence on television and movies, etc.
- The age of children and young people, i.e. some age groups may be more at risk of initiating and being targets of peer on peer violence.
- Alcohol and drug use.
- Lack of or poor social policies and safeguarding policies, poor access to services, and a weak child protection system – including for example, lack of safe reporting mechanisms.
- If you are caring for and/or supporting children and young people who are living in **alternative care settings**, an additional consideration is the risk they may face due to discrimination because of being care-experienced.

When thinking about risk factors, it will be helpful to take a responsive approach based on what is known as an **ecological model**. Using this model means exploring and understanding the influences of micro and macro systems, how they impact the lives of children and young people, and in turn, result in children and young people being impacted by peer on peer violence.<sup>7</sup>



7. Please see: SOS Children's Villages International's project on trauma-informed practices – Resources available at: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices> and McLeod, S. (2020) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html>



### BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL (ADAPTED<sup>8</sup>)

#### Gender

Both girls and boys are impacted by peer on peer violence but they may experience it in different ways and at different stages of their childhood and adolescence. When considering ways to address the vulnerability of children and young people, it is important that we understand the role different social and gender values and attitudes can play.

For example, girls and boys throughout the world are often treated differently and there may be different expectations of them. An example might be patriarchal norms that govern the behaviour of girls who are expected to conform to ideas of femininity and demure behaviour. As they grow older, girls may have restricted freedom, be warned about not bringing shame on the family, and be required to be obedient and modest. The inequality of their standing in society can place them at risk of being targeted by peer on peer violence. Furthermore, they may feel they have to keep silent if they are recipients of such violence, especially if it was sexual violence.



8. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311843438\\_Housing\\_Children\\_South\\_Auckland\\_The\\_Housing\\_Pathways\\_Longitudinal\\_Study/figures?lo=1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311843438_Housing_Children_South_Auckland_The_Housing_Pathways_Longitudinal_Study/figures?lo=1)

Meanwhile boys may be expected to display their masculinity and encouraged to have a more overt presence in society. This in turn can influence the way boys are more likely to be involved in physical violence in order to prove their manhood and their standing in their local community. They may become more susceptible to risky behaviours such as joining gangs and using drugs and alcohol, which in turn has been linked to escalating violent behaviours among young men. It also puts those boys who are perceived as not fulfilling masculine expectations at heightened risk of being targeted by peers. Boys may also feel unable to ask for help as being seen to be vulnerable would not be acceptable.

### Children in alternative care

Thinking about circumstances that might specifically apply to children and young people in alternative care, the researcher Christine Barter conducted two studies about peer on peer violence in alternative care settings. In her first study,<sup>9</sup> she collected information from young people in 14 small scale residential settings. In her findings, she acknowledged that young people in care face the same overall risks of violence as other peers, as they too interact, socialize, learn, and play in the same spaces as other children in their community. However, residential group living can present particular opportunities for the development of “peer group hierarchies” or “pecking orders,” and therefore, a context in which peer violence will be experienced. This may involve the use of power and influence by one or two young people in particular, and their ability to exert physical strength as well as emotional manipulation and intimidation on others. Change in group dynamics can also be problematic, as for example when prompted by the arrival of a new young person into the care setting.

Barter’s research found much of the peer violence happening in the residential homes was being hidden from staff and that considerable pressure was placed on peers not to report it. Other reasons young people said they were unwilling to confide in staff included lack of trust in them, as well as a concern they could not, or would not, want to solve the problem. Indeed, it was thought staff may even exacerbate the situation. Young people did not want to get themselves involved or to be identified as someone who tells on their peers.

A second study<sup>10</sup> by Christine Barter and Eleanor Luftman considered peer on peer violence in foster care. They confirmed that “very little is known about peer violence in foster care,” while raising a concern that due to their status and accompanying discrimination because they were being “looked-after,” fostered children and young people may be at a higher risk of experiencing negative peer reactions and interactions.



9. Barter, C. (2003) Young People in Residential Care Talk about Peer Violence. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, Vol 2 (2). Available at: [https://www.celcis.org/application/files/9016/2324/8217/Peer\\_Violence.pdf](https://www.celcis.org/application/files/9016/2324/8217/Peer_Violence.pdf)

10. Luftman, E. & Barter, C. (2016) Peer violence in foster care: A review of the research evidence. *Child and Family Social Work*, Vol 22 (2). Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295858600\\_Peer\\_violence\\_in\\_foster\\_care\\_A\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_research\\_evidence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295858600_Peer_violence_in_foster_care_A_review_of_the_research_evidence)

**READ AND CONSIDER:**

This book offers a contextualized account of peer on peer violence, looking at the interplay between different environments and personal choice. It uses an extended case study to illustrate its points.

Firmin, C. (2017) *Abuse between young people: A contextual account*. London, Routledge.

The REVIS Project – “Responding to peer violence among children in schools and adjacent settings” - brings together child protection organizations in Southeastern Europe to work together to reduce violence against children, build capacity and knowledge among childcare professionals, and empower children in tackling harmful practices. More information can be found at: <https://childhub.org/en/series-of-child-protection-materials/revis>

This link will take you to a range of resources on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children’s Villages International as part of the “Safe Places, Thriving Children” project: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

**WATCH AND CONSIDER:**

These BBC Teaching resources are very helpful in demonstrating what it feels like to be impacted by peer on peer violence. The following two videos show short animated true stories of what it feels like to be the initiator of peer on peer violence, and what the implications can be of being a target of peer on peer violence.

“The effect of being bullied” – available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIL1rluUbIM>

“Being a bully” – available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_B6ro7M4mZg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_B6ro7M4mZg)

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**SECTION 7**

**Identifying  
concerning  
behaviours**

## SECTION 7

# Identifying concerning behaviours

“So, first of all, adults should identify the phenomenon and all the parties involved.”

“It’s very difficult to identify these types of violence, from my point of view.”

“I have to thank my teacher that was able to understand that I was struggling and broke the cycle before it became more serious.”

## INTRODUCTION

During the scoping exercise for this project, child and youth care practitioners and other stakeholders told us they want to improve their ability to recognize when a child or young person’s behaviour towards peers becomes concerning. They said determining the thresholds between appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviours was particularly challenging.

When making judgements regarding peer on peer violence, it is helpful to have an understanding of child development - as it refers to the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development that occurs throughout a child and young person’s life - as well as knowledge of expected age-related behaviours and concerning behaviours. **However**, it is also important we acknowledge the complexity of these topics and how the provision of in-depth information requires more space than can be dedicated to this matter in this particular Practice Guidance. Therefore, in this Section, we provide only a **general introduction and brief overview** of expected behaviour as it relates to relationships between peers from early childhood to late adolescence.

We would urge you to undertake further detailed reading on the subject, and if possible, seek training on identifying concerning behaviour in relation to peer on peer violence. **Furthermore, it is very important to note that every child or young person is different - they will grow, learn, mature and develop abilities at their own individual pace.** This means, when we work with a child or young person, we must fully assess and understand their unique situation.

## CHILD AND ADOLESCENT BEHAVIOUR AND RISKS OF PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE

Children and young people of all ages are impacted by peer on peer violence.<sup>11</sup> But at different ages and different stages of development, they may become more at risk. The findings of the scoping exercise for this project, for example, illustrated how child and youth care practitioners and other professionals in the five countries participating in this project believe that children aged 11 to 15 years are those most vulnerable to peer on peer violence, closely followed by 16 to 18 year olds.

It is also important when we think about responding to peer on peer violence that we consider the degrees of behaviour we may see or hear about. For example, peer on peer violence may vary in degree, from a child pushing another in the playground to severe physical violence. It may veer from sexualised remarks to sexual assault, or from ill-considered remarks to specific and vicious verbal and emotional abuse.

The information in the chart below provides **a simple and generalized overview** of some behaviours we might observe in children and young people. This information relates to:

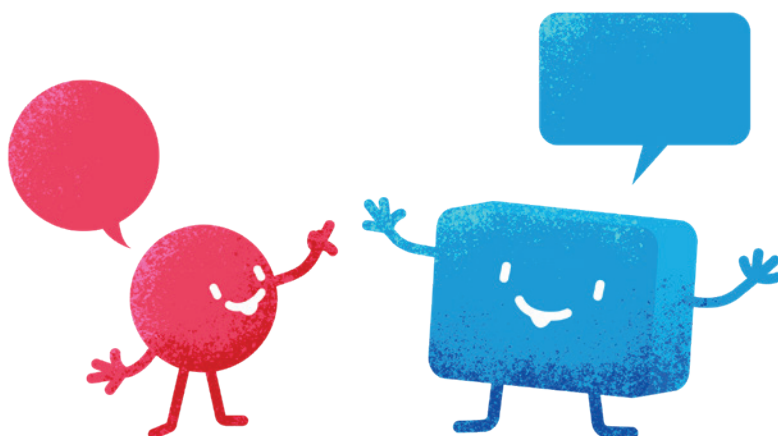
- Four different age categories.
- Some expected development/typical behaviours in relationships between peers.
- Some signs of concerning behaviours and risks for peer on peer violence.

We have not included information in relation to sexual behaviour as this is provided in a separate chart later in this Section. Furthermore, in Section 9, page 94, you will find additional information that may help you recognize if a child or young person may have been exposed to violence.



11. Know Violence in Childhood (2017) Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India. See also: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44293/#> and, The Welsh Government in partnership with NSPCC & Barnardo's Wales (2020) *Guidance for education settings on peer sexual abuse, exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour*. Available at <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/guidance-for-education-settings-on-peer-sexual-abuse-exploitation-and-harmful-sexual-behaviour.pdf>

DEVELOPMENTS AND BEHAVIOURS OF PEERS ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP	
	Development and typical behaviours (Skills and behaviours you might expect to see children develop in accordance with healthy development)
<p><b>Early childhood (2-4 years)</b></p>	<p>Learning to share.</p> <p>Turn taking.</p> <p>Being gentle with others.</p> <p>Dealing with basic frustrations and the emotions caused by them.</p> <p>Note: This happens mostly in the family, playgroup, nursery or pre-school environment.</p>



12. Much of the information in this column of the chart has been sourced from the publication Know Violence in Childhood (2017) *Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.  
 13. Know Violence in Childhood (2017) *Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.

Signs of concerning behaviours	Risk of peer on peer violence <sup>12</sup>
<p>Excessive aggression towards other children.</p> <p>Extreme meltdowns (screaming/crying) over losing in games or things “not working.”</p> <p>Not participating/ withdrawal/ displaying anxiety/anxious behaviour.</p> <p>Fear of participating in group activity.</p> <p>Note: This is the age that behaviours that may seem “different” than other children their age may indicate “hidden” disabilities or other vulnerabilities including safeguarding concerns and should therefore be reported to and explored by appropriate adults.</p>	<p>It is believed<sup>13</sup> that at this age, much of the violence against children is by their caregivers rather than peers.</p>



<p><b>Middle childhood (5-10 years)</b></p>	<p>Making friends.</p> <p>Joining in group play.</p> <p>Learning kindness and helping others – sharing and taking turns.</p> <p>Learning to work in teams – e.g. at school, during sports.</p> <p>Dealing with peer conflict - e.g. learning conflict management skills and how to deal with rejection from peers.</p> <p>The start of peer and gender-related pressures.</p> <p>Gaining confidence and self-esteem – starting to learn more about who they are, what they look like, and their personal strengths, weaknesses and specific interests, either academically or with sports or creative skills.</p> <p>Starting to understand boundaries.</p> <p>Starting to take ownership of their own behaviour.</p> <p>Realising that doing the right thing is an active choice.</p>
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14. Know Violence in Childhood (2017) *Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.

15. *ibid.*

Physically violent behaviour towards peers that hurt and harm others.

Discriminatory and often “extreme” statements often are a reflection of culture, family values and socialization at this stage.

Greater use of bad language – e.g. swearing and cursing.

Manipulative behaviours such as targeting peers in quiet, isolated areas, or getting a “group” together to do this.

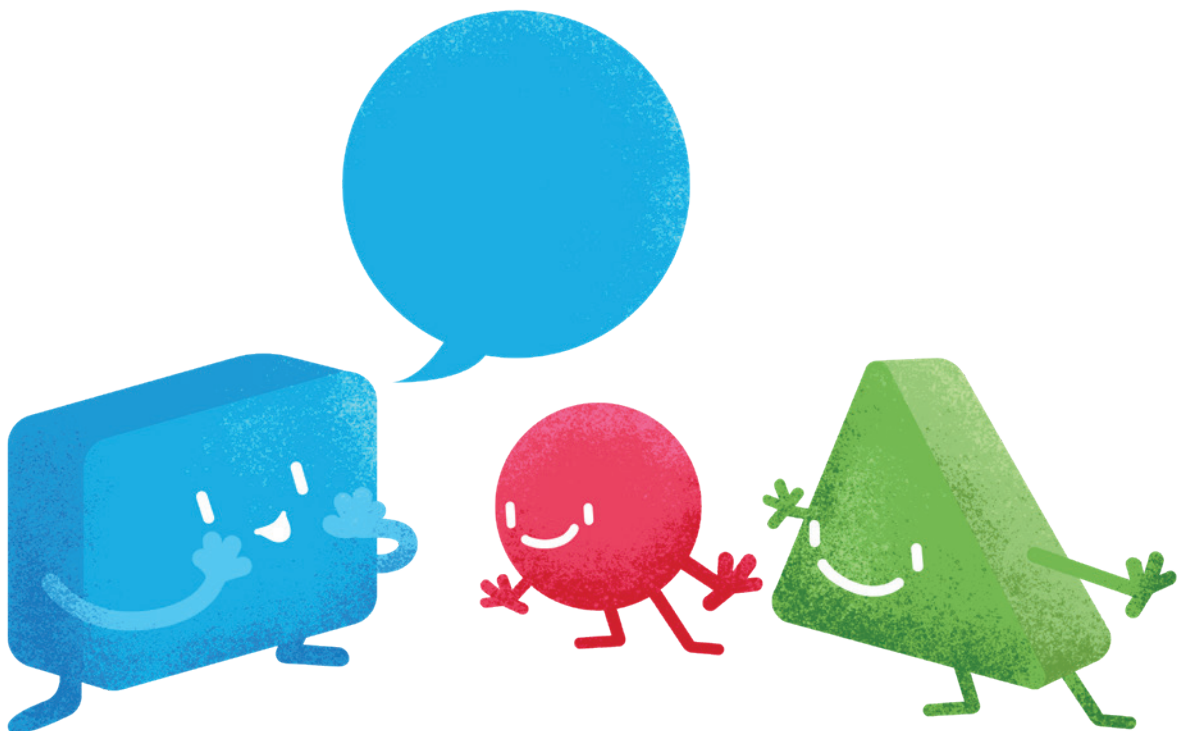
As they grow older and enter school, children spend greater periods of time interacting with peers which can increase their risk of experiencing emotional and physical abuse from peers. It is believed that peer on peer violence is more likely to begin around the age of 6 years.<sup>14</sup>

It is estimated that by middle-childhood, 25–30% of girls and 50% of boys will have experienced some form of physical violence.<sup>15</sup>

Not fitting in perhaps because of clothing, interests, family background, household income and having/not having belongings (e.g. owning mobile phones and other personal equipment, etc.) becomes more of a factor in influencing whether someone is included or excluded from peer groups/friendships with potentially heightened vulnerability to peer violence.

Fitness levels, sports skills and other social abilities may become more notable in terms of risk of exclusion from the groups and therefore vulnerability to violence.

Academic ability/disabilities such as dyslexia or dyscalculia or other hidden disabilities become more distinct and may determine the standing/vulnerability of a child in peer groups.



<p><b>Early adolescence (11-16 years)</b></p>	<p>Early adolescence is a period of rapid physiological, social and emotional development. It is a period of hormonal development.</p> <p>During this period, children acquire more life and decision-making skills, and develop their sense of self.</p> <p>Young people begin to see more independence and their personal decision-making skills will grow at a rapid pace. They start moving away from the family to find out who and how they want to be, and which group they want to fit into.</p> <p>Peers and peer pressure may play a greater role in determining life choices and what becomes important, as for example personal style (clothes and hair, etc.) and hobbies/interests.</p> <p>It is a time when young people start to become aware of their sexuality and gender orientation, which is part of becoming more aware of their sense of self and identity.</p> <p>Academic pressure will grow and may cause stress but also offer choices for future pathways.</p> <p>This is a time when social media and online activity may particularly influence self-esteem, life choices, interests and values.</p> <p>It may be a time when family issues and challenges may impact behaviour in schools and other settings.</p>
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16. *ibid.*

17. *ibid.*

18. Know Violence in Childhood (2017) *Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.



While this period repeats much of what has already started in the primary years, violent and aggressive behaviours can become heightened.

Extreme defiance to authority figures including teachers, care practitioners and parents.

Controlling of others/forcing others to do things against their will or blackmailing them.

Experimentation with alcohol or drug use with no regards for safety of others or their own personal safety, leading to abusive and sometimes dangerous behaviour.

At this age, adolescents become more independent and interact with more and different groups of people, and so they are increasingly exposed to more risk within the wider community. For example, among children aged 13-15 years old, bullying and becoming involved in physical fights at school become closely interrelated.<sup>16</sup> The “Ending Violence in Childhood”<sup>17</sup> report indicates those who get bullied are likely to bully others, and those who bully others are in turn likely to get bullied.

There is a growth in the physical strength of boys in particular, making some feel more emboldened about using physical force.

As children become more independent in their use of the internet and start to use mobile phones, they become vulnerable to online violence via cyberbullying, sites that promote anorexia, suicide and sexual assault, “sexting,” pornography and grooming for sexual exploitation. They may also post sexualized images of themselves, or have them posted by their peers.

Opportunities tend to expand for boys and contract for girls. Boys may be encouraged to be aggressive and dominant, including sexually. In contrast, girls are correspondingly deprived of social mobility. They are more likely to be bullied with the intention to ridicule, humiliate or socially exclude.

Adolescents are beginning to engage in romantic and sexual relationships. This has implications both for violence being perpetrated and for becoming a victim. In the Violence Against Children Surveys, the main perpetrators for sexual abuse against boys were schoolmates, friends and neighbours. It was estimated that 45-77% of sexual violence against girls was perpetrated by a romantic or intimate partner.<sup>18</sup>

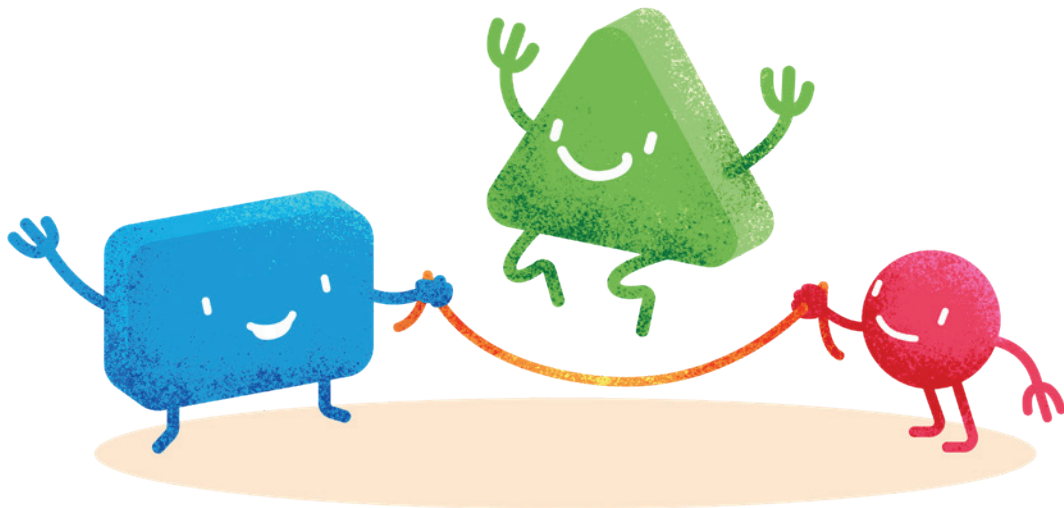


**Late adolescence (17- 19 years)**

Major physical changes have usually occurred by now, although the body is still developing.

Peer group opinions still tend to be important, but as young people mature and start to make more sense of their identity and opinions, this hold can diminish.

Gender roles continue to become increasingly socialized and pressure mounts in terms of conforming to conventional notions of femininity and masculinity. The worlds of girls may be increasingly restricted while boys can now start to take up the role and privileges – and expectations of them – as men.



19. Foshee, V.A., et al. (2004). "Assessing the long-term effects of the Safe Dates program and a booster in preventing and reducing adolescent dating violence victimization and perpetration." *American Journal of Public Health* 94(4): pp. 619-24.

All the risks associated with middle adolescence may still apply, however, harmful risk taking behaviour may become even more excessive, e.g. experimenting with drugs. For young men in particular, the risk of severe alcohol consumption can lead to aggressive or criminal behaviours (gang fighting, stealing, robbery etc.)

Use of weapons, group/gang-induced group violence.

Aggressive coercion of others to do what you want them to do.

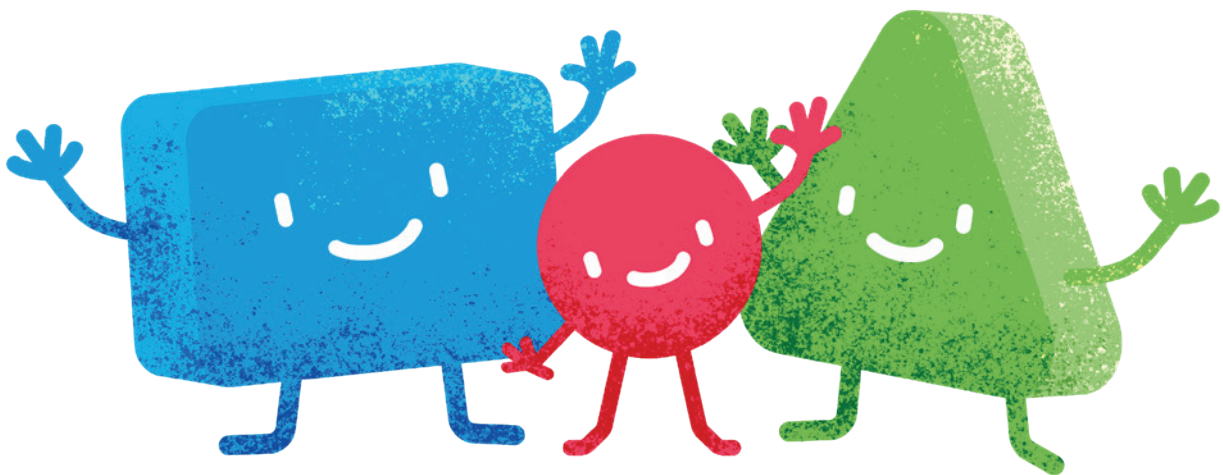
Harmful sexual experimentation.

At this stage, the experiences of girls and boys tend to diverge even further. Girls suffer certain forms of violence more than boys, including intimate partner violence and sexual violence.

The even greater influence and pressure of conformity to gender roles can result in boys being encouraged or expected to become more dominant and aggressive, including sexually. Some reports suggest a high proportion of males first committed rape when they were teenagers.<sup>19</sup>

Boys may be at higher risk of physical violence from peers as for example, being more exposed to youth and gang violence – even resulting in greater exposure to homicide.

Girls remain at higher risk of being ridiculed or socially excluded by peers.



Below is information that has been taken from a chart created for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)<sup>20</sup> in the UK. It was created specifically in relation to sexual behaviour but we have recreated it here as we believe it may also be helpful when considering all forms of peer on peer violence.

HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR FRAMEWORK ADAPTED FROM A FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED FOR THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN (UK)				
Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmentally expected.</li> <li>• Socially acceptable.</li> <li>• Consensual, mutual, reciprocal.</li> <li>• Shared decision-making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single instances of inappropriate behaviour.</li> <li>• Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group.</li> <li>• Context for behaviour may be inappropriate.</li> <li>• Generally consensual and reciprocal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problematic and concerning behaviours.</li> <li>• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected.</li> <li>• No overt elements of victimisation.</li> <li>• Consent issue might be unclear.</li> <li>• May lack reciprocity or equal power.</li> <li>• May include levels of compulsivity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victimizing intent or outcome.</li> <li>• Includes misuse of power.</li> <li>• Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance.</li> <li>• Intrusive.</li> <li>• Informed consent lacking, or not able to be freely given by victim.</li> <li>• May include elements of expressive violence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physically violent sexual abuse.</li> <li>• Highly intrusive.</li> <li>• Instrumental violence which is psychologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator.</li> <li>• Sadism.</li> </ul>



20. Available at the NSPCC website: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1657/harmful-sexual-behaviour-framework.pdf>

## DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Leading on from the information above, we will now provide a very brief overview of concerns specifically around sexual behaviour. Please refer back to Section 4 Page 29 of this Practice Guidance where you will find a brief definition of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Please also refer to Section 6 in which we discuss issues of gender and of societal norms, and the role this can play in rendering girls and boys at risk of different forms of sexual abuse.

There are many influences on children and young people's sexual behaviour. For example, age-appropriate sexual behaviours can be affected by a range of different reasons including, but not limited to:

- Physical and sexual abuse and emotional neglect.
- Accidental/non-accidental exposure to sexually explicit material such as internet pornography, or other forms of pornography.
- Exposure to adult sexual activity.
- Being exposed to family violence.
- Loss and experiencing other traumatic events.

Most sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people will “sit within” a normative development range. The challenge is to identify sexual behaviours that fall outside this range and deciding whether or not the behaviour indicates the occurrence of peer on peer violence.<sup>21</sup>

In the table below you will find a **very general introduction** to what we might expect in terms of sexual development and some inappropriate behaviours up to early adolescence. All behaviour that involves coercion, intimidation or forcing others to take part should be considered harmful.

It is very **important** to remember that all sexual behaviour lies on a developmental spectrum. This means it may not be age-specific but is rather dependent on the individual child or young person's stage of development and context. It means we should always take into consideration the way they can grow, learn, mature and act according to their own circumstances. It is important we carefully assess and question what is happening on a case by case basis. Once again, we urge you to undertake further detailed reading on this subject or, if possible, seek training.

21. For further information, please see: SOS Children's Villages International (2020) *“HOW-TO” GUIDE: Differentiating between Child-to-Child Normal, Problematic and Abusive Behaviours*. SOS Children's Villages International. Available at: [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/09aca19e-1841-46eb-b824-16dce9f310c3/200228-How-to-Guide\\_Child-to-Child](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/09aca19e-1841-46eb-b824-16dce9f310c3/200228-How-to-Guide_Child-to-Child); Also: [https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201705/Children\\_with\\_problem\\_sexual\\_behaviours\\_-and-\\_their\\_families-2012\\_0.pdf](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/201705/Children_with_problem_sexual_behaviours_-and-_their_families-2012_0.pdf) ; Also: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-health-development/sexual-behaviour>

DEVELOPMENTS AND BEHAVIOURS OF PEERS ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP <sup>22</sup>	
	<b>Sexual development</b>
<b>Early childhood (2-4 years)</b>	<p>Little to no inhibitions to nudity.</p> <p>Touching their own private parts.</p> <p>Talking about bodily functions.</p> <p>Showing curiosity about their own and other people's naked bodies.</p> <p>Consensual role playing with their peers as for example, exploring different relationships or roles such as "playing house," playing mummies and daddies, or playing doctor, which may include acting out situations they observe in their own homes.</p> <p><i>It is important to be aware that very young children can have erections and that this is totally normal.</i></p>
<b>Middle childhood (5-10 years)</b>	<p>Asking questions about sex and relationships and where babies come from.</p> <p>Consensually exploring relationships with other children, i.e. through flirting, holding hands with a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" and kissing them on the cheek.</p> <p>Hearing and telling age-appropriate dirty jokes.</p> <p>Younger children (typically up to around 7 years old) tend to be curious about what other children's private parts look like. Acting out "show me yours and I'll show you mine" with same-age children with mutual consent is not necessarily concerning for younger children. It is important to mention that this could cross a boundary if one of the children is uncomfortable or feels unable to say no. This includes touching someone else in private areas of the body which is concerning and considered highly inappropriate.</p> <p>Self-touching including masturbation.</p> <p>Becoming more modest and asking for privacy.</p>



22. Information in this chart has been informed by: the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework that can be found in The Welsh Government in partnership with NSPCC & Barnardo's Wales (2020) *Guidance for education settings on peer sexual abuse, exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/guidance-for-education-settings-on-peer-sexual-abuse-exploitation-and-harmful-sexual-behaviour.pdf>; And: ONG Paicabí on behalf of SOS Children's Villages Region Latin America and the Caribbean (LAAM) (2014) *Guide to Problematic Sexual Behaviours and Abusive Sexual Practices*. Available at: [www.paicabi.cl](http://www.paicabi.cl); And: South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault & Family Violence (2017) *Age Appropriate Sexual Behaviours in Children and Young People Information for carers, professionals and the general public*. Available at: <https://ncsby.org/sites/default/files/Age-appropriate-behaviours-book.pdf>; And: Herefordshire Council (2021) *Peer on Peer Abuse Guidance for schools*. Available at: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/22129/peer-on-peer-abuse-guidance>

Possible concerning behaviours	
	<p>Acting out sexual acts.</p> <p>Excessive touching of own private parts.</p> <p>Trying to touch adult's and other children's private parts.</p> <p>Sexualised play with dolls or soft toys.</p> <p>Forcing other children to be touched on or in private parts (i.e. during playing doctor/role play).</p>
	<p>Forcing or coercing others, including their participation in sexual games.</p> <p>Excessive masturbation and/or masturbation in public.</p> <p>Talking about sex and sexual acts habitually.</p> <p>Expressing wanting to have sexual intercourse with someone.</p> <p>Sexual knowledge appears to be too far advanced for their age once context is considered.</p> <p>Accessing films and magazines or online materials that are inappropriate for this age category, including playing violence or sexual video games.</p> <p>Posting sexual images online.</p> <p>Cyberbullying.</p>

<p><b>Early adolescence (11-16 years)</b></p>	<p>Having or wanting a romantic relationship with a peer (of the same or different gender).</p> <p>Using sexual language and discussing sex with peers.</p> <p>Wanting more privacy – bedroom door closed, bathroom locked, etc.</p> <p>Looking for information about sex in books or online.</p> <p>Masturbating in private.</p> <p>Growing need for more privacy.</p> <p>Having social media accounts that are not monitored by an adult (age and developmental stage related).</p> <p><i>It is uncommon for children this age to display sexual behaviours in public.</i></p>
<p><b>Late adolescence (17-19 years)</b></p>	





<p>Sexual knowledge appears to be too far advanced for their age once context is considered.</p> <p>Overexposure to pornographic materials, both in magazines, films and online.</p> <p>Excessive masturbation and an inability to stop to the point that it hinders participation in day to day life.</p> <p>Inappropriate touching of other peers.</p> <p>Exerting power over someone who is of a significant age difference or developmental stage, i.e. with an older young person who is maybe 2 years older/younger or more.</p> <p>Behaviour that involves force, coercion, intimidation, bribery or threats.</p> <p>Chronic interest in pornography.</p> <p>Showing of genitals in public.</p> <p>Behaviour that involves degrading sexual language.</p> <p>LGBTQI+ targeted bullying.</p>	
	<p>Concerns in late adolescence are similar to those of early adolescence, with heightened risk of rape, sexual contact with those much younger than themselves, voyeurism, and taking sexual images of others with an explicit view to exploiting them.</p>

For further information, please see the references to additional reading materials at the end of this Section.

Professionals who identify children and young people exhibiting problematic and sexually abusive behaviours should:

- Ensure they have a good understanding of child development principles, including ages and stages.
- Understand cyber-safety strategies and e-safety principles relevant for different ages and stages, and be competent and comfortable in talking with children and young people about these issues.
- Be able to refer a child or young person to other professionals who are skilled in this area if they are not comfortable talking about these issues themselves.

### Children and young people with additional support needs (ASN)

Children or young people with ASN can experience normal physical and sexual development. However, these children and young people also tend to be overrepresented in the population of young people displaying concerning sexually abusive behaviour and need more guidance and monitoring from kind and trusted adults around them.

The impact of these issues may mean these children and young people struggle to understand the social rules around sexual practices and relationships. Fixations may also emerge, as for example, around online sexually explicit materials, and may develop quickly if not detected and managed early.

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#### WATCH AND CONSIDER:



UNICEF has produced this short video to show how the adolescent brain develops. It was produced alongside their publication “The Adolescent Brain.” Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1FRco3Bjyk>

Some interesting video clips on child development can be found in TED Talks. The link below takes you to a particularly interesting presentation which shows the interplay of development and environment given by Helen Pearson.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Dv2Hdf5TRg>

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### READ AND CONSIDER:

SOS Children's Villages International (2020) *"HOW-TO" GUIDE: Differentiating between Child-to-Child Normal, Problematic and Abusive Behaviours*. SOS Children's Villages International. Available at: [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/09aca19e-1841-46eb-b824-16dce9f310c3/200228-How-to-Guide\\_Child-to-Child](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/09aca19e-1841-46eb-b824-16dce9f310c3/200228-How-to-Guide_Child-to-Child)

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault & Family Violence (SECASA) (2017) *Age Appropriate Sexual Behaviours in Children and Young People: Information for carers, professionals and the general public*. South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault & Family Violence. Available at: <https://ncsby.org/sites/default/files/Age-appropriate-behaviours-book.pdf>

Welsh Government in partnership with NSPCC & Barnardo's Wales (2020) *Guidance for education settings on peer sexual abuse, exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/guidance-for-education-settings-on-peer-sexual-abuse-exploitation-and-harmful-sexual-behaviour.pdf>

ONG Paicabí on behalf of SOS Children's Villages Region Latin America and the Caribbean (LAAM) (2014) *Guide to Problematic Sexual Behaviours and Abusive Sexual Practices*. Available at: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/23748539-4ee6-4b8d-9828-ddd316cbacdc/Guide-to-Problematic-Sexual-Behaviours-and-Abusive-Sexual-Practises.pdf>

Herefordshire Council (2021) *Peer on Peer Abuse Guidance for schools*. Available at: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/22129/peer-on-peer-abuse-guidance>

At these links you will find additional information on identifying harmful sexual behavior: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng55>

<https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/beyond-referrals-levers-for-addressing-harmful-sexual-behaviour-in-schools>





**SECTION 8**

**Creating  
safe spaces:  
The importance  
of a Peer on  
Peer Violence  
Safeguarding  
Policy**



## SECTION 8

# Creating safe spaces: The importance of a Peer on Peer Violence Safeguarding Policy

### INTRODUCTION

Organizations, and all those working in and associated with them, have a duty to keep children safe from harm. This applies to situations of abuse that happen from an adult to child or young person, as well as peer on peer violence. And so, regardless of the services an organization is providing – for example this might be a residential care provider, a school, sports club or youth centre – it is important there is a Safeguarding Policy in place.

An organization may have or might choose to develop an overarching Safeguarding Policy that encompasses both adult on child violence as well as peer on peer violence. It may decide however, to have two distinct policies. In this case these two policies should be very closely aligned to each other particularly as there will be identical and/or similar procedures and guidance in both. Whichever form an organization's Safeguarding Policy takes, its existence is important because it provides everyone working in or associated with the organizations with clear guidance and procedures **how to** prevent and respond to violence, and their roles and responsibilities.

If you are working in or are associated with an organization, it will be important you know whether or not there already is a Peer on Peer Violence (PPV) Safeguarding Policy, understand what it contains, and know what your role is in its implementation. If there is no existing Policy, **you may be able to advocate** for the development of one. You might be asked to take a role in the development of such policy or in reviewing an existing one. To help with such actions, in this Section of the Practice Guidance we provide a brief overview of what a Peer on Peer Safeguarding Policy is.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The act of developing and implementing a new policy - or reviewing a current one - within an organization is recognized as part of an **organizational development and change process**. This involves a process of adapting and developing strategies that will help improve capacity, practice, and effectiveness. Achieving this as part of developing an organization's PPV Safeguarding Policy requires steps to:

- Examine and review the organization's current culture and practices and how this affects the way it functions and delivers services that should keep children and young people safe from peer on peer violence.
- Identify where positive changes can be made.
- Take appropriate actions to make such change, including adapting and improving structures, policies and practices.

It also involves reviewing and making necessary changes to the **culture** of an organization. **Organizational culture** has been defined as the "set of beliefs, values and meanings that are shared by members of an organization."<sup>23</sup> These are values that should be embedded and reflected in all the actions taken by those working within, or associated in any other way, with an organization to ensure children and young people are protected.

We have provided an example of an Organizational Development Process Guidance Document in the "read and consider" box at the end of this Section. This document was developed as part of a previous SOS Children's Villages International project on trauma-informed practices but is also applicable in outlining the steps that could be taken to develop a PPV Safeguarding Policy.

## WHAT SHOULD A PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE SAFEGUARDING POLICY CONTAIN?

An organization's PPV Safeguarding Policy should clearly state the aims and objectives of preventing, identifying and responding to risks and occurrences of peer on peer violence in an appropriate and caring manner. It should include strategies, procedures, guidance and activities, as well as explaining the roles of those responsible, for the:



23. Austin, M. J. & Claassen, J. (2008) "Impact of organizational culture: implications for introducing evidence-based practice" *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 5:1, pp. 321-359. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23639839\\_Impact\\_of\\_Organizational\\_Change\\_on\\_Organizational\\_Culture\\_Implications\\_for\\_Introducing\\_Evidence-Based\\_Practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23639839_Impact_of_Organizational_Change_on_Organizational_Culture_Implications_for_Introducing_Evidence-Based_Practice)

1. Prevention of peer on peer violence.
2. Identification and reporting of peer on peer violence.
3. Response to children and young people impacted by peer on peer violence.
4. Dissemination of the PPV Safeguarding policy.
5. Monitoring and revision of the Policy.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE SAFEGUARDING POLICY

As many people as possible working in or associated with an organization should be involved in developing and implementing a PPV Safeguarding Policy. This includes for example, professional workers, volunteers, care practitioners, and most importantly, children and young people as well as other service users.

In particular, those leading such a process should recognize how being involved in an organizational development and change process may take some people out of their “comfort zone.” For example, it can cause feelings of stress, anxiety, resentment, or fear for those involved. To help address such concerns, it will be important make sure:

- Through consultation, everyone is made to feel an integral and important part of the changes being made – that they are co-owners of the process.
- Information is shared with everyone regarding the scope of the process, expected changes to the culture of the organization, anticipated timelines for policy development and implementing changes, etc.
- Space is provided for reflection, questions and feedback.

### The role of a Safeguarding Officer

An organization should have a **named member of staff** who has been trained to undertake the role of **Safeguarding Officer**. If an organization is a very large one, this may be a specifically appointed position. However if an organization is small, it may be a role undertaken by a current member of staff as an additional responsibility. The nominated Safeguarding Officer should take lead responsibility for the protection of children and young people within their organization. This includes playing a central role in receiving reports of, and coordinating response to, alleged cases of peer on peer violence. It is important that the nominated Safeguarding Officer receives appropriate training and development opportunities and is supported by the organization to develop further into their role.



### The role of children and young people

It is essential to involve children and young people in the development of a PPV Safeguarding Policy that effectively responds to the risks they face. This participation should be full and meaningful (please see Section 3). One of the reasons it is so important is because they know about and understand the risks that exist and will have excellent ideas about ways to address them.

### An inter-sectoral approach

Throughout the process of developing and implementing an organization's work on peer on peer violence, including the development of a PPV Safeguarding Policy, it is important to consider a multi-sectoral approach and involvement of colleagues from other organizations. One important reason for this is, as we will see in other parts of this Practice Guidance, circumstances in the wider context of where children interact, live and socialize can be major factors in their risk of being impacted by peer on peer violence. It therefore requires such an approach to prevent and respond to these risks.

## BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE SAFEGUARDING POLICY

### Taking a contextual safeguarding approach

We cannot develop effective practices that prevent and respond to peer on peer violence if we do not have a good understanding of all the **factors that leave children and young people at risk of being impacted by peer on peer violence**. This means taking a contextual safeguarding approach. As we discussed in Section 6, this means knowing how and why children and young people in your care might be affected, and made more vulnerable to peer on peer violence, by factors in the environment in which they interact, live, learn and socialize. To make sure any PPV Safeguarding Policy is effective, as well as the role you might play in preventing and responding to peer on peer violence, it is important to understand the **real situations children and young people are facing**. One way this can be achieved is by undertaking a **risk assessment**.

Even if a risk assessment is not being carried out as part of a Safeguarding Policy development process, you may still want to instigate some form of assessment. This is because, **in your own role**, in order to help prevent violence and to respond appropriately, it is important you learn about and understand why some children and young people are more at risk of being targeted by, or initiating, peer on peer violence.

This means thinking about:

- **Where does peer on peer violence happen?** Remember that children and young people feel at risk in many different places. Peer on peer violence can also happen in places and spaces that may be out of the vision of adults. This includes in changing rooms, bedrooms, toilets and shower rooms, for example. In the **Tips and tools box** below, we have provided some ideas for carrying out a mapping exercise that might help you find some relevant information.
- **What factors are contributing to the continuation of peer on peer violence?** Remember that different social norms, values and other factors within the context and environments children and young people live, learn and socialize may make them more vulnerable to being targeted by or initiating peer on peer violence - for example issues of social exclusion, discrimination, gender, etc.
- **What role do adults play?** During the scoping exercise for this project, children and young people said that adults are very important role models. For example, children and young people told us they learn bad behaviour from adults such as those who discriminate against children and young people and do not treat them all equally. If they observe adults – especially those they are close to - using violence, then they may “copy” this behaviour. In addition, children and young people told us that having a “responsible” adult they can trust and share their feelings and concerns with is a very important factor in them reporting risks or incidences of peer on peer violence.

### Consulting children and young people

Children and young people are one of the most important sources of information. They can tell us all about the risks and challenges they are facing as well as ways to address them. However, asking children and young people to talk about and maybe reveal experiences of violence is a sensitive process. It is important to make sure that the way you gather information is ethical, safe, and guarantees confidentiality. Participatory risk assessments should be conducted by those trained to undertake such exercises. You may also think about carrying out an anonymous survey among children and young people. You might be able to conduct the assessment utilising adults that children and young people already identify as “responsible” adults that they trust and are willing to share information with.



## TIPS AND TOOLS:

### A Mapping Exercise

It is important to ask children and young people about the places they feel safe and the places they do not feel safe in your building/premises/setting or community space.

- Do a safety walk around your premises and identify areas where adult supervision is generally limited or not present.
  - With consideration to the age and gender of children and young people, ask them to make a drawing/map of the premises/building/setting or even a section of a neighbourhood. For example, you might use an ecomap which is a visual means of a child or young person showing spaces they live, learn and socialize in. You can find more information about ecomaps that you might adapt at this website: <https://safeguarding.network/content/ecomaps/>. With reference to peer on peer violence, ask each group to identify physical spaces where peer on peer violence might potentially take place and/or identify spaces where they feel safe and unsafe from such violence.
  - You might also use the mapping exercise to ask children and young people what factors contribute to their feeling safe or unsafe in these spaces, what influences these feelings, or why they think peer on peer violence occurs in these spaces. However, as some of the topics under exploration are very sensitive, this exercise should be carefully facilitated by someone who has the training and professional skills to support such a mapping.
  - You might use such exercises as Venn diagramming so they can map out who children and young people feel they can or cannot turn to if peer on peer violence were to happen in these spaces.
  - Ask children and young people to share their maps/findings with each other.
  - Support a dialogue between adults and children and young people on what would make the building/setting/premises safer.
-

## STAFF RECRUITMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

“Train the adults a bit more, so that they have less tendency to be dismissive, they pay a little more attention and then use a bit more psychology... there are certain basics that I think everyone ought to know something about. I think that when you work with children in child protection measures, having training is a bit of a minimum requirement, I think it's only logical. You work with children whose profiles are more or less different, who have experienced different levels of terrible things, but nobody is trained to listen to what they say, to be able to help them in the best way possible, to support them as they should be supported.”

“Then, parents should be helped to help their children; they should learn how to interact with their children, in case of problems. They should be more understanding and present, in order to figure out if there is something wrong. A sort of parenting training.”

Young people told us about the importance of having adults who are well-trained and understand the issue of peer on peer violence. They also spoke about the role they should play in keeping them safe.

Your organization's PPV Safeguarding Policy should recognize the importance of staff and other associated adults having the necessary training, skills, knowledge and approaches to implement all elements of the Policy and corresponding procedures. It is also important that recruitment procedures are committed to engaging staff, volunteers, care practitioners and other personnel who are willing and able to protect and support children and young people.



### WATCH AND CONSIDER:

This link will take you to a series of e-learning modules developed as a resource on trauma-informed practices by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

Carlene Firmin gave a helpful TED Talk about contextual safeguarding. It looks at how the environments children interact in that are associated with peer on peer violence, and how contextual safeguarding could help to better protect children and young people. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCFZQcaIgDM&t=321s>

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### READ AND CONSIDER:

This link will take you to a range of resources on trauma-informed organizational development developed by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

This link will take you to an example of a peer on peer abuse toolkit by Farrer & co. (2019) *Peer-on-peer abuse toolkit*: <https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/farrer--co-safeguarding-peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit-2019.pdf>

This link will take you to a publication from the Department of Education in Northern Ireland - Effective Responses to Bullying (2022)  
Available at: [https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/Effective%20Responses%20to%20Bullying%20Behaviour%20%28January%202022%29\\_4.pdf](https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/Effective%20Responses%20to%20Bullying%20Behaviour%20%28January%202022%29_4.pdf)

World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) *School-based Violence- A Practical Handbook*. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/324930>

At this link you will find an example of a local authority model for a Peer on Peer Violence policy. Available at: <https://nscp.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/media/feahta12/guidancemodelpolicypeerpeerabuse.pdf>

This link will take you to the Keeping Children Safe website where you can use an organization assessment tool for safeguarding: [https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI6Mbq-92a9gIVCLp3Ch3P\\_QsQEAAAYASAAEgIzk\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI6Mbq-92a9gIVCLp3Ch3P_QsQEAAAYASAAEgIzk_D_BwE)

The REVIS Project - "Responding to peer Violence among children in Schools and adjacent settings" - brings together child protection organizations in South-Eastern Europe to work together to reduce violence against children and build capacity and knowledge among childcare professions and empower children in tackling harmful practices. More information can be found at: <https://childhub.org/en/series-of-child-protection-materials/revis>  
For more in depth information on Active Listening please see: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html>

Using case studies, "Holding Fast" is a book about that is helpful for managers and staff in gaining a better understanding of the difficulties that can be encountered in organizations that provide care - especially when embarking on change programmes.

Kahn, W.A. (2005) *Holding Fast: The struggle to create resilient caregiving organizations*. New York: Routledge (only available to purchase)



## **SECTION 9**

# **Relationship- based practice: Skills and knowledge for responding to peer on peer violence**

## SECTION 9

# Relationship-based practice: Skills and knowledge for responding to peer on peer violence

### INTRODUCTION

“A responsible adult could help.”

“The responsible adult is the one that can help you, basically.”

“I believe that they should be supported without being judged.”

“Train the adults a bit more, so that they have less tendency to be dismissive, they pay a little more attention...”

“So, it’s important to understand the motivation that leads a person to bully a classmate, a friend, or even a stranger.”

Throughout the scoping exercise undertaken to inform this Practice Guidance, children and young people told us how important it is for them to be able to turn to a “responsible” adult when they face difficulties – including those at risk of being targeted, as well as those who initiate or are affected in some other way, by peer on peer violence.

Children and young people want these “responsible” adults to be kind, caring and trustworthy. Most importantly, they told us it is not just “how” adults support them but the **manner** in which they are supported that is very important. For example, they want them to be trained and skilled in communicating (including listening carefully), being able to understand each child or young person’s situation, and to respond to all those at risk of or impacted by peer on peer violence in a constructive and supportive manner.

In this Section we will think about the knowledge, values, and skills that will help you play a role in keeping children and young people safe and respond to their concerns in the manner they have highlighted.



## RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICE

Let us remind ourselves how children and young people told us they want “responsible” adults they can turn to when impacted by peer on peer violence. This might be a role you undertake in your capacity as for example, a primary care practitioner, a teacher, a social club leader, etc. It requires skills and understanding that help build a trusting relationship between you and the children and young people. One approach to realizing this role is through relationship-based practice. This is an approach founded on understanding, empathy and respect.

Some of the ways we can use relationship-based practice<sup>24</sup> include:

- Supporting **all** children and young people in developing and maintaining positive relationships.
- Recognizing that distress, frustrations, pain, and anger may be reactions to adverse experiences and how the internal (e.g. thoughts and emotions) and external worlds (e.g. behaviour) of children and young people are inter-linked – for example a child’s anger might be an expression of an underlying unmet emotional need.
- Understanding and acknowledging the way broader external factors within the environments children and young people live, learn, and socialize can influence their behaviours (please refer back to Sections 6 and 8).
- Behaving in a way that demonstrates respect and trust for a child or young person, valuing their thoughts, and respecting their fears, concerns, and wishes.

So for example, when working with a child or young person who may have initiated violence, relationship-based practice means being exploring the meanings behind their behaviour. Responding to “concerning” behaviour means:

- Taking a non-judgemental and investigative approach so you can uncover what might not be initially apparent.
- Working sensitively with the child or young person and their wider network so you can make sense of what might be “acted out,” i.e. communicated through their actions.
- Making decisions regarding support and interventions that focus on enabling the child or young person to express and process their feelings in safer and more contained ways, and through this, discover what needs to change to prevent it happening again.

Let us now explore some of these issues in more detail.



24. Rachael Owens, R., Ruch, G., Firmin, C., Millar, H/ & Remes, E. (2020) Relationship-based practice and Contextual Safeguarding Key Messages for Practice. Contextual Safeguarding & The International Centre Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking. Available at: <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/resources/briefings/practice-briefings>

## UNDERSTANDING THE BACKGROUND, BEHAVIOUR AND REACTIONS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR CARE

“I don’t want to sound too cliché, but usually the bully who commits acts of violence comes from a position of discomfort, most of the time. If the bully is a child and everything is going well in his life, he feels loved, listened to, cared for, he usually doesn’t wake up in the morning saying, today I’m going to school and I’ll beat my classmate.”

When responding to issues of peer on peer violence, it is important to not react immediately. It is essential to take the time to understand the reasons children and young people are at risk of or impacted by peer on peer violence. This includes finding out about, and taking into consideration, the influence of wider negative social values and cultural norms or adverse experiences that may either put them at heightened risk of being targeted or becoming initiators of peer on peer violence.

*Please go back to page 44 in Section 6 of this Practice Guidance and look at the factors we listed that may contribute to children and young people being impacted by peer on peer violence – including factors that make them vulnerable to being targeted by or becoming initiators of peer or peer violence. You will also find more information in Sections 5 and 9.*

### Fight, flight and freeze



“Both physical and verbal violence is a way of communicating something; It’s not about what children are saying, but what they’re trying to convey. Very often we just scold or punish a kid, increasing his anger. Sometimes anger itself is an implied help request...”

Children and young people may react differently to adverse experiences and situations they are faced with (or have faced), and this can also place them at risk of becoming initiators or targets of violence.

For example, a child or young person that has experienced or is experiencing physical violence and/or emotional abuse, or feeling neglected and unloved, may react with anger that leads them to initiating peer on peer violence. This behaviour may be a way of compensating for feeling vulnerable and lacking control over their lives. Likewise, someone who is targeted by peer on peer violence may themselves become an initiator due to feelings of anger, revenge, or a need to stay in control.

On the other hand, children and young people who are coping with such adverse experiences may act in a way that makes them seem “weaker” which in turn can make them more vulnerable and at higher risk of becoming targets of peer on peer violence.

One way to explain children and young people's individual responses to adverse experiences and the way they deal with stressful situations is through the lens of three coping styles known as **Fight, Flight, or Freeze**.

**Fight** is where someone will react to situations with aggressive behaviour as for example, through shouting, physical violence, defiance, bad language, refusing to do things, confronting and challenging those in charge, etc. They are effectively exhibiting a reaction in order to “protect” themselves from a perceived threat. This for example, may be the reason a child initiates peer on peer violence against others.

**Flight** is where a protective instinct kicks in to get away from a situation, often literally, by running away or avoiding the situation.

**Freeze** is where someone keeps their emotions inside. They tend to not be able to express themselves and literally freeze up inside with fear and anxiety. They may not stand up for themselves and often let others treat them badly without responding. They feel unable to do anything to change a situation. This for example, can put a child or young person at risk of being easily bullied.

To repeat, the first coping style – **Fight** – is more often associated with those who initiate peer on peer violence. **Flight** or **Freeze** are more commonly associated with those who are targets of the violence.

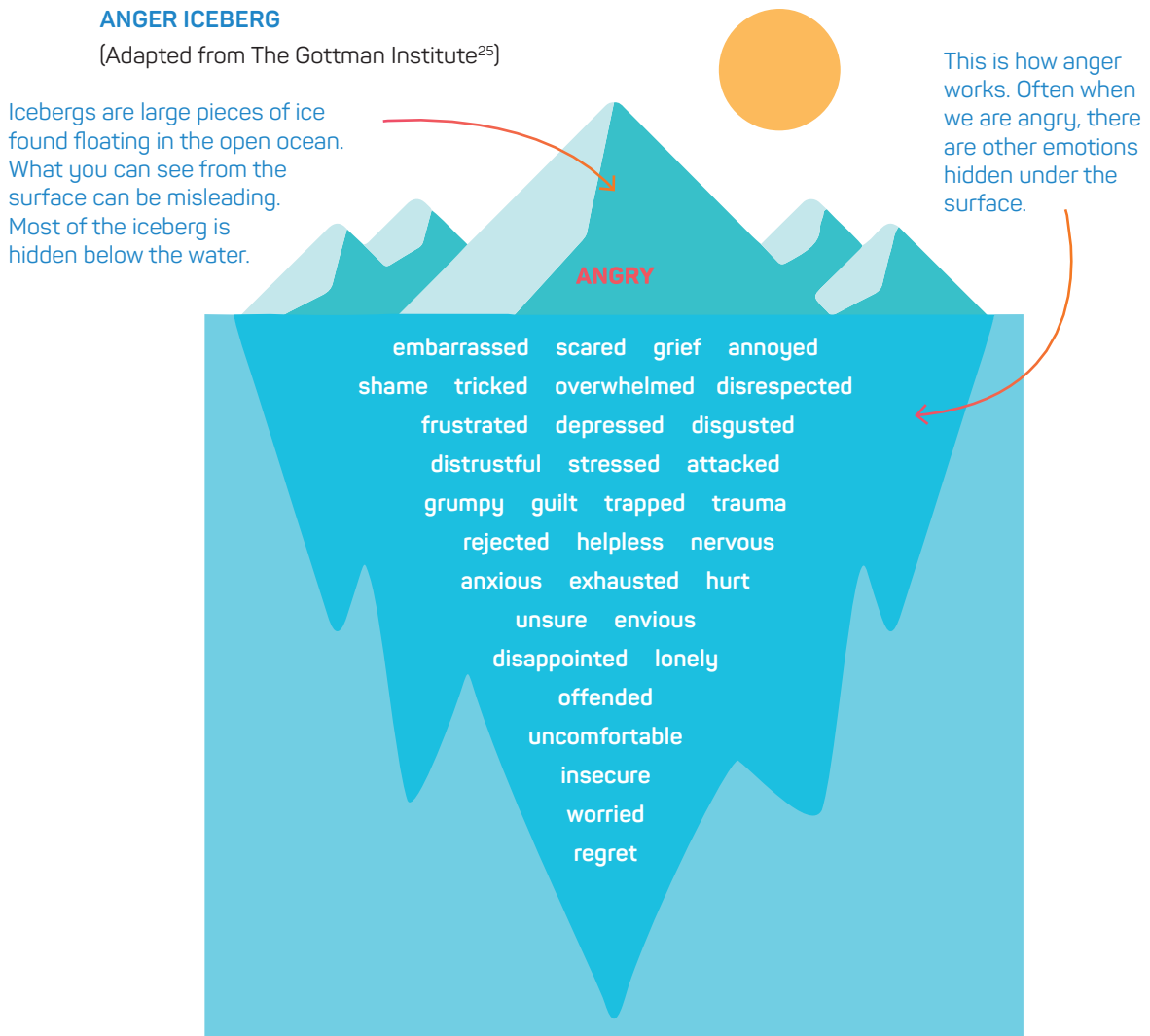
These three coping styles are in contrast to the positive life skills that can help prevent children and young people being impacted by peer on peer violence – skills that will help them gain and maintain a healthy sense of self, self-esteem, and personal boundaries. We will discuss the importance of children and young people attaining these life skills in more detail in Section 11 of this Practice Guidance.

### Reacting sideways

In a similar way to the coping style of **“Fight,” reacting sideways** is another term for someone exhibiting defiant behaviour such as shouting, aggression, or violence to others that is quite out of context. For example, a child or young person may suddenly lash out and hurt a peer for, what appears to be, no apparent reason.

These behaviours often link to the suppressing of emotions such as anger, frustration, fear, or sadness, which may be the result of a current or previous adverse experience. Examples can vary from situations such as if someone they are close to is diagnosed with cancer, witnessing parents hitting each other, being pressured by someone online, or being separated from a parent. The list can go on but the result is often the same in terms of reacting sideways.

The following diagram helps us to remember that the behaviour you may see on the outside may only be a small visible expression of all the deeper feelings and emotions underneath.



25. <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/the-anger-iceberg-2/>

## Social expectations and expressing emotions

Something else for us to consider is the way children and young people may have “learned” not to communicate their feelings and emotions with those adults entrusted with their care. For example, they may have grown up in a setting where girls are expected to cry but there is little tolerance of boys expressing emotions like crying, sadness, or being afraid. Or boys may have been given messages such as “don’t be so weak, just get on with it” or “toughen up because big boys don’t cry.”<sup>26</sup>

*You will find further information on some of the topics we have just explored, including a Practice Guidance and a series of e-learning modules also developed by SOS Children’s Villages International on the topic of trauma-informed practices at this link: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>*

## HOW WE RESPOND

“If an adult does not appear trustworthy, it’s useless...”

“The first thing to do is to trust, in other words, not to play down what the victim suffered, I think it is like if my classmate is bullying me, the teacher will not say “Don’t you think you are exaggerating?” Well, the teacher in this case, not to say the school, but first trust, then support...”

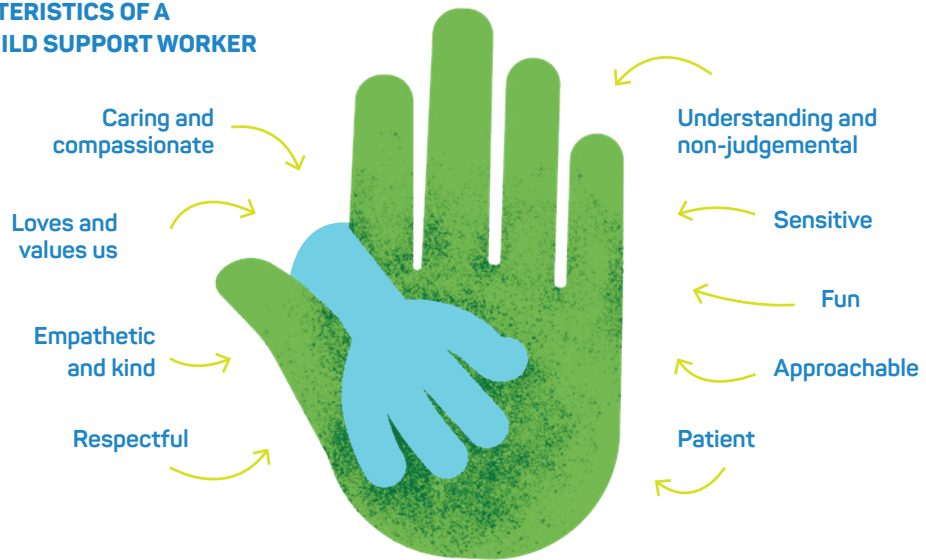
“In my experience, the most important thing for those who are bullied is to feel that they are not alone and to have an adult figure of trust. The bullies, on the other hand, need/are looking for the attention they have never received, so it is important to give them that kind of attention. It’s important to give them a trustworthy person that is able to explain things to them and that is there for them. If there hasn’t been in the past, there must be now.”

Throughout this Practice Guidance we have noted the importance of children and young people wanting adults they can trust and turn to. Let us remind ourselves how it is both the **manner** in which we support them, as well as having the necessary skills and knowledge so we can respond appropriately, that children and young people are particularly concerned about.



26. Polce-Lynch M. (2002) *Boy talk, How You Can Help Your Son Express His Emotions*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications Inc. Available at: [www.newharbinger.com](http://www.newharbinger.com)

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD CHILD SUPPORT WORKER**



**The manner in which we should respond**

“People prioritize scolding, talking right and wrong and using detention methods, without fully understanding the child’s motivation. At school, certainly professors or a specific reference figure, like the school psychologist, or an external person, who is not part of the school environment, a person with whom children can speak freely outside of school hours, without feeling judged, or worrying that everything they say will influence their school career or the teacher-student relationship.”

“Because I think that when a child causes problems, it’s usually because they themselves have problems, that they can’t manage their emotions, the feelings they experience in their own lives. So try to talk to them with someone qualified to help with that. Try to find out where the problem originates, why they are acting like this.”

Taking a non-judgemental and neutral stance is important. If we respond to children impacted by peer on peer violence in a judgemental way, for example by judging their emotions and/or behaviour, or with punitive measures, their reaction will most probably be to turn further inward and suppress their emotions. In turn there is a risk of even further suppressed and possible harmful behaviour escalating, i.e. **reacting sideways**.

Responses should therefore be considerate of each child or young person’s situation. It will require a careful approach that does not risk further stress or adverse reactions. It requires good communication skills including truly listening and responding to all situations in a calm and thoughtful manner at all times.

## The importance of authentic and caring relationships

As mentioned earlier in this Practice Guidance, relationship-based practice involves developing respect for and trust between yourself and a child or young person. To achieve this, it is important to build relationships with children and young people that are authentic, genuine, stable, and caring. Children and young people are very sensitive and attuned to people's motivations and emotions and will sense when we are being false – which in turn will do more damage than good.

And while it is possible to gain certain skills that will help you build relationships with children and young people, it is important that children and young people can see the genuine interest you have in them. This means actively showing a willingness in connecting with them, learning about who they are, how they got to where they are right now, and understanding their individual needs, interests, and wishes.

## Communication skills

“The young person must know that they can talk about anything, that you are going to listen to them, that you are going to support them at all times, that you are not afraid to comment on all this. Because, after all, I mean, normally the children who are living this cannot talk about this for fear of what may happen, or they even feel that they cannot speak because they are afraid, because they are also ashamed that this is happening to them, that they do not find any solution, that they do not find anyone who can do something for them... The first thing should be, well, to tell them that you can talk at all times, that you are going to help them in any way possible, and that they see that they have support behind them and that they can talk about anything... That's it, the first thing would be to listen to them, to help them, to support them.”

“It's better to say it than to keep it to yourself because it can get worse. And it is true. And well, also in schools, teachers, principals and heads of studies should do more, because many times they listen to the children, but they don't do anything.”

Children and young people told us they want to be listened to and taken seriously by the adults they turn to. We also know that encouraging children and young people to talk is an essential tool in helping them express emotions and making sense of how they feel.

In this respect, an important skill we can use is that of “active listening”. It is a way of listening that shows we are truly paying attention, and is a way of helping children and young people feel comfortable reaching out and talking to us. This in turn will help us find out what we “need to know” about any situation before deciding on next steps. Below are some of the techniques we can use when actively listening:

**TIPS AND TOOLS:****ACTIVE LISTENING**

Active listening is when we very carefully listen to the child or young person without immediately offering advice or suggestions. The aim is to really understand what the child or young person is saying and to let them know that we have really understood what they are telling us. We should make sure the conversation takes place in a safe environment for the child or young person, and we should always consider the issue of confidentiality.

Here are some steps to consider in this process:

- Try and listen with all your senses and give your full attention to the child or young person when they are speaking. Make sure you do not give the impression that you are not interested in what they are saying or it is unimportant or “boring.” For example, do not be distracted by checking your mobile phone or checking the time on your watch when listening to them.
  - Showing you are listening can be done by maintaining eye contact, nodding your head, saying “yes,” or simply encouraging them to continue by saying “go on,” “ok,” and using your voice to encourage someone by saying “aha,” etc.
  - When the child or young person talks, try to understand the emotional content of their words as well as the facts. For example, underneath what they are saying or doing, do they seem angry? Afraid? Sad? Depressed?
  - You can acknowledge the emotion you are hearing about, therefore showing that you are listening and validating their feelings. For example, “I can see that you are really angry about this,” or when someone is tearful you might say, “I can see this is making you very sad.” You “name” the emotion that you “see.” Be careful not to speculate though and only name the emotion if you are sure that is the emotion you are hearing about.
  - Let the child or young person know that you have been listening and you understand both the facts and the emotion of what they are trying to communicate. You can do this by rephrasing what they say (use different words for what they said to check if you have understood it right) and relaying this back to them. If they say you have not got it right, then try again to rephrase what you have said.
  - You can also use encouraging open questions such as, “can you tell me more about this” or “could you give an example.”
-





- Wait for the child or young person to go at their own pace.
- If the child or young person has challenges in communicating, for example due to a disability or because of their young age, you can try to communicate your understanding in a non-verbal way or find help from someone who can communicate with them. This is particularly important when engaging with a child or young person for example who is neurodiverse and non-communicative, has a hearing disability or speech impediment, or comes from a different country or culture.
- Create a warm and non-threatening environment for the child or young person. For example, while being mindful of their personal space, sit alongside them rather than behind a desk. Use soft seating if you can, but also be mindful of maintaining comfortable personal space between the two of you. Sit at the same level as the child or young person.

This is the start of a respectful conversation where the point of view and story of the child or young person is the central point of the discussion.

### Respect for confidentiality

“At the beginning... children may show reluctance, but afterwards they may realize it’s a good opportunity to talk with a trusted person that won’t disclose their secrets to others.”

Children and young people told us that some of the reasons they do not report peer on peer violence include concerns that adults might not maintain confidentiality and this could put them at risk of being identified, and of possible retribution from their peers. They are fearful of being ridiculed or ostracized by peers.

Children and young people want us to make sure confidentiality is respected. To this end, we all have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality and share information in a safe and secure manner with only those who need to know.

They would also like different ways they can report any concerns including those that are:

- Easily accessible.
- Safe.
- Confidential.



**TIPS AND TOOLS:**

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION SHARING**

Confidentiality is a very important issue linked to sharing information and sharing it only with the necessary people on a “need to know” basis. It also means collecting, sharing and storing information in a safe way and according to agreed data protection and safeguarding protocols that should have been developed in your own organization. This requires consideration of:

- Information about a child or young person only being shared with/ made accessible to those who need to know/are authorised.
- Safe methods of sharing information about the concern(s) or allegation(s) with other relevant agencies when they are involved.
- Placing a reference number for a child or young person rather than their name on their file with only an authorised person(s) knowing and keeping the name in a different safe location. If the file is stored electronically, make sure it is password protected.
- Storing paper files in locked cabinets and using password protected electronic files on computers.
- Having someone responsible for data protection in your organization who ensures everything is in place to keep data confidential and safe.
- Knowing and acting in accordance with your country’s safeguarding and data protection legislation.

Children and young people should always be informed about the information you are making a note of, why it is being gathered, who it might be shared with, and how it may be used. Consideration should also be given to gaining their consent in relation to sharing 45 severity of the case. For example, it may not always be necessary to reveal the name of a child reporting an alleged incident.

**Providing a safe space**

“If I knew that there is a safe space nearby where I can go and say that, for example, someone made fun of me, I would feel at ease and less worried. In short, young people need more neutral spaces where they can talk.”

When responding and supporting children and young people impacted by peer on peer violence think carefully about the actual “spaces” you will use to meet, listen, and talk to them. Children and young people told us they would like the provision of “safe spaces” where they can go to report and speak about their concerns, experiences,

worries, and fears. They told us this should be somewhere that is attractive, has a calm atmosphere, is easily accessible, but also protects anonymity and confidentiality. This space should be comfortable, perhaps with nice soft chairs and pleasant colours.

## PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Let us now think about some further actions and skills you can use when engaging with children and young people in situations where violence has not actually taken place but there is potential for it to occur. These include:

### Creating opportunities to discuss violence

“Talk about it a lot. Raise awareness about it. Tell children what’s going on in the world and talk a lot about what can be done about it... And I say, talk to the children a lot to prevent it, to avoid it as much as possible. And yes, discuss it. Don’t ignore it. Really discuss it.”

“I think that the first thing to do is to make this topic [violence] really important, to talk about it, to make sure it’s not something that just gets passed over. To do that you really have to set things up so that young people and children understand what it means, and not do it.”

“And it’s the same thing with sexual issues. We’ve never been prepared us for that, you know, and we really should have been.”

Children and young people said it is important to talk about and raise awareness of different forms of violence. They said no subject should be taboo. This would not only provide the opportunity to respond to the request of children and young people who identified the need for more guidance on what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, but also allow peers to be active agents of change through carefully supported peer-to-peer communication on the topic. Children and young people also said that being aware of, understanding, and being able to talk about violence can help lead to prevention and early reporting.

### Being a positive role model

“Besides, as a society, not only parents and educators and schools and so on are responsible for the image they project – all the children look up to adult people and if you set a good example with your behaviour, children also see it and copy it, so that is important.”

“Because generally children copy what adults do, what we see at home. So, parents, educators and others should also be a little more careful with their attitudes and what they say. In educators this is not so normal either, but many parents tell you “Give them a slap and fix it yourself” or things like that.”

“But if you talked to him at home, showed him your love and how you behave in these situations, you could be an example to him, and he could mirror your behaviour. And this is a way to prevent child peer violence.”

In this Practice Guidance we have written about the way children and young people learn both positive and negative behaviours and attitudes from adults – specifically those that play a significant role in their lives such as care practitioners, teachers and sporting/social activity supervisors. As adults who work, care for and support children and young people, becoming aware of our position as role models can be an important realization about how we might in fact be unconsciously influencing their development.

### Other factors to consider

Other factors to be aware of when seeking ways to prevent peer on peer violence include:

- Being vigilant about the way groups and individuals interact. Children and young people said we should for example pay attention if a child becomes a “loner,” is not interacting with others in the playground, or shies away from being involved with certain groups. Also be aware of situations where children or young people are more likely to form themselves into groups, as for example in residential care settings where they share houses or dormitories.
- Understanding that peer on peer violence may take place in “private” spaces, as for example, bedrooms in alternative care settings, where adults might not be able to regularly observe the behaviour of children and young people. Quiet corridors or staircases in schools as well as bathrooms are also known to be places where peer on peer violence may take place.
- Not ignoring situations and responding quickly to signs of inappropriate behaviour.
- Helping children and young people understand there may be underlying reasons why a peer behaves the way they do, and that we all need encouragement, support and kindness.

We will discuss the last three topics and other aspects of helping children and young people build the skills and knowledge they said could help towards preventing peer on peer violence in further detail in Section 11.

## IDENTIFICATION, REPORTING AND INFORMATION SHARING

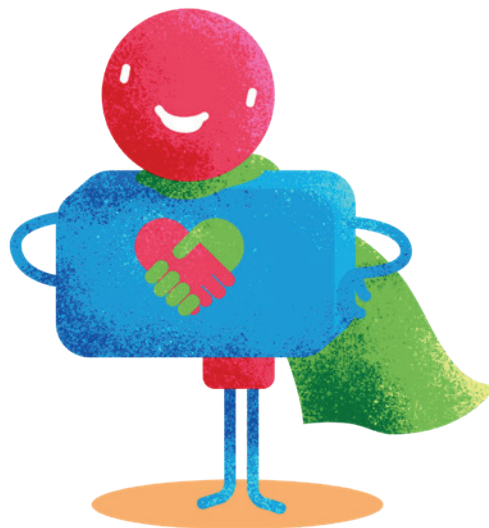
*Please also refer back to Section 8 where we highlight the importance of an organization's PPV Safeguarding Policy, providing clear guidance for children and young people about what they can do and who they can turn to if they witness, are targets of, or are the initiators of peer on peer violence. Likewise, the Policy should contain procedures for adults on how to record and report peer on peer violence – including perceived risk, violence they have witnessed, and violence they have been told about – to a nominated Safeguarding Officer.*

### Identification

You may learn or suspect that peer on peer violence is happening through:

- Your own observations.
- A child or young person involved in the violence has come to you.
- Another child or young person has told you what they believe may be happening, or have they have witnessed.
- Another adult has given you information.

With regards to observing and noticing possible signs of exposure to violence, below is a checklist adapted from guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>27</sup> that might help you. Please also refer back to Section 7.



27. World Health Organization (2019) School-Based Violence Prevention: A Practical Handbook. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/school-based-violence-prevention-a-practical-handbook>

**TIPS AND TOOLS:****IDENTIFYING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE**

The WHO has provided a list of typical signs and symptoms in children and young people who may have been exposed to violence. It is important to note that signs indicating a child or young person may be suffering from peer on peer abuse can also overlap with those indicating other types of abuse. These include:

- Physical marks such as unexplained bruises, scratches, broken bones, and healing wounds.
  - Fear of going to school or joining in other social events.
  - Struggling to fully engage in activities or services your organization provides.
  - Being anxious or nervous.
  - Having few friends or losing friends suddenly.
  - Clothing, electronics, or other personal belongings being lost or destroyed.
  - Low academic and other achievements.
  - Absenteeism from the activities they usually attend.
  - Trying to stay near adults.
  - Not sleeping well and perhaps having nightmares.
  - Psychosomatic complaints, for example, headaches, stomach aches, or other physical ailments.
  - Regularly distressed after spending time online or on their phone (without a reasonable explanation).
  - Broader changes in behaviour including alcohol or substance misuse.
  - Changes in appearance and/or starting to act in a way that is not appropriate for the child's age.
  - Being aggressive, having angry outbursts, and exhibiting abusive behaviour towards others.
  - Being extra vigilant about what is happening around them.
-

### Guidance for immediately responding to disclosure

It is important to be aware of any Safeguarding Policy or other guidance that has been issued by your organization. Find out about any personal responsibility you may have in terms of gathering initial basic information/facts about an alleged case. For example, check to see if your organization has an Incident Reporting Form that you will be expected to use.

Things to consider when a child or young person has told you about an alleged case of peer on peer violence, or their fear that it may happen, include:

- Reassuring a child or young person that they have done the right thing in telling you about the situation. Be aware that it may have taken immense courage to come and talk to you, and that they may be worried they will increase their vulnerability to further abuse, or be seen as being a “tell-tale” by their peers.
- Trying to avoid showing shock, embarrassment, or other emotions when listening to what has happened.
- Reassuring a child or young person that you take what they have said seriously.
- As clearly as possible, and with consideration for their age and maturity, explaining to the child or young person what will happen next. For example, what will happen in terms of confidentiality and how you will only share any information with those who absolutely need to know, how you have a responsibility to report any concerns to a specific person, and how yourself or this person may have to ask them more questions.

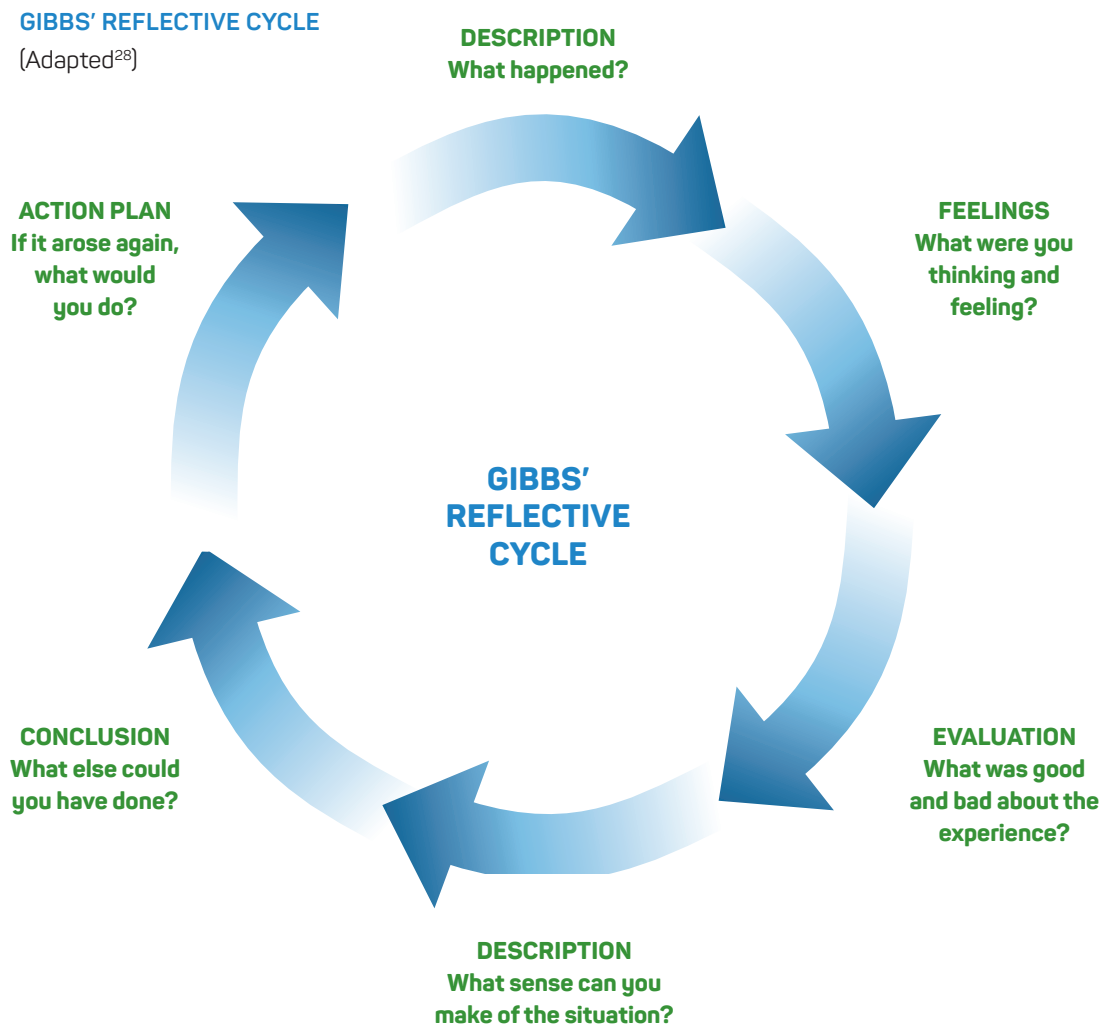
### Initial response - Listening to children and young people and establishing the basic facts

“It’s important to understand what happened and why...”

“Adults should try to understand what happened and why, what triggered this act of physical or verbal violence.”

“But the adults do not bother to ask them what happened. They don’t bother to understand it basically.”

When a child and young person tells us about their experience of peer on peer violence, or indeed about something that is happening to a peer(s), it is important we establish **the basic facts of the situation**. While undertaking this task, please remember the information we have already shared regarding the skills and the manner in which we should communicate with children and young people.



Gathering this initial information will help determine:

- What additional information is needed.
- Who should become involved.
- What response is most helpful in this particular situation.
- If the situation can be supported within your organization or if a referral to other agencies/services needs to take place.

### Using non-directive (open) questions

When gathering initial information, try to ask non-directive questions. These are open questions – the opposite of closed/directive questions. Closed questions are very specific and can be answered with “yes” or “no” or a very short answer. An example of a directive question might be “are you hurt?”. An example of an open question might be “can you tell me a bit more about this?”. While open non-directive questions are preferable, it may be more helpful to use closed follow-up questions to get more specific details or clarification.







### TIPS AND TOOLS:

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU THINK A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS IMMEDIATELY UNSAFE?

- Try and speak to the Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible, either on the phone or in person.
- Find a safe space the child or young person can stay while you go and speak to the Safeguarding Officer.
- Some actions could be taken immediately, e.g. the child or young person could be picked up by caregivers, or leave the building through a safe backdoor, etc.
- You or another member of staff might need to take them back to where they live. Make sure someone is there who can support the child or young person.
- Consider other elements of safeguarding conduct are considered at all times, including not leaving a child alone with an adult for any longer than is necessary. Other adults will need to know where we are and our engagement with the child or young person needs to be transparent.

### Referral to a Safeguarding Officer

Once the basic facts have been established, the situation should immediately be referred to the nominated person(s) in your organization who will determine what needs to happen next. If there is no nominated Safeguarding Officer, you should know who else in your organization has responsibility for leading peer on peer violence cases. It might be your organization has nominated a multi-disciplinary group to take shared responsibility for example.

In Section 8 of this Practice Guidance, we recommended that each organization nominates a member of staff who would take the responsibility of a Safeguarding Officer. However, it may be that the organization does not yet have someone nominated to this role, or you might initially be instructed to go to your line manager with concerns.

It will then be the responsibility of this nominated person to make sure further information is gathered and there is an in-depth understanding of all aspects of the case. Information to be considered will include:

- What actually occurred (or in the case of risk, what might occur).
- Age of the child/young person(s) involved.
- The alleged behaviour/degree of violence/level of harm or risk of harm.
- Effects on those impacted.
- How long the behaviour has been happening.

- How often the behaviour happened (was it a one-time occurrence or of longer duration).
- If this behaviour has been reported previously, has a “responsible” adult already been allocated to those involved and have there been any restorative conversations already. What protective measures are already in place?
- The number of those impacted by the behaviour.
- The cognitive capacity, physical or intellectual disability, and other developmental issues of those involved.
- How coercive was the behaviour. For example, was there use of threats, force, or bribery?
- The age difference between those impacted.
- Motivation/reason of act(s).

### Safety and support plans

Once all the facts are gathered and appropriate responses have been decided upon, you may be involved in the development and implementation of Safety and Support Plans for some or all of the children or young persons who have been involved. Consideration should be given to each child who may have been impacted in some way by the incident and whether a Plan should be developed.

Your organization might have a standardized form to use when developing these Plans. Each Plan should name a **key adult** – preferably the person nominated with Safeguarding Officer responsibilities – who will oversee implementation of the Plan, including the roles and responsibilities of others.

A Safety and Support Plan should contain the following information:

- An overview of the case, e.g. what happened, who was involved, where did this happen and when (date and time if available).
- Relevant background information regarding the child/young person concerned.
- Any specific safety or well-being concerns for the child/young person.
- The response/support that will be offered in a manner that is proportionate to the situation, including actions to address factors that put the child/young person at risk of becoming the target or initiator of the violence.
- Referral of a child or young person to appropriate agencies and service providers if necessary.
- Involvement of parents and other primary caregivers.
- Maintaining the safety of the child/young person and others around them.
- Providing a version of the Plan to the child or young person which is appropriate for their age and level of understanding.

If you are involved in the development of this Plan, remember it is important that children and young people:

- Are provided both practical and emotional support that responds to the careful recognition of their individual wishes, needs and concerns.

- Have a right to express their views and those views should be taken into full consideration in decisions that are being made.
- Should be always kept informed - in a manner appropriate to their maturity and abilities - of what is/will be done, with whom information may be shared, and what decisions are being made and reasons why.
- Understand what will happen next, including the support they will receive, how this will happen, and which adult(s) will be responsible for this offering this support.



### READ AND CONSIDER:

This link will take you to a range of resources on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

This link will take you to an example of a peer on peer abuse toolkit by Farrer & co. (2019) Peer-on-peer abuse toolkit: <https://www.farrer.co.uk/globalassets/clients-and-sectors/safeguarding/farrer--co-safeguarding-peer-on-peer-abuse-toolkit-2019.pdf>

This link will take you to the World Health Organization (WHO) publication (2019); School-based Violence - A Practical Handbook. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/324930>

This publication by the UK Government provides guidance on keeping children safe in residential care - Department for children, schools and families (2009). Safe from Bullying in Children's Homes. Available at: [https://lx.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe\\_from\\_Bullying-Childrens\\_Homes.pdf](https://lx.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe_from_Bullying-Childrens_Homes.pdf)

This book looks at the impact of relationships in relation to how the mind develops. It examines how a child is committed from birth to play a part in a social life and how emotions, bodies, and brains are affected by relationships. Through the practice of social pedagogy this book also emphasizes the importance of relationships. Siegel, D.J. (2020) *The developing mind: how relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. Third Edition. New York: Guilford. (Requires purchase)

"Love Bites" is a respectful relationship education programme for young people aged 15- 17 years old that has been developed by the Government in Australia. You will find helpful reading materials and other resources at: <https://www.napcan.org.au/Programs/love-bites/>

The University of Edinburgh have provided some information about reflective practice. Available at: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/reflecting-on-experience/gibbs-reflective-cycle>

A further website where you will find some other useful reading materials and other resources on social pedagogy is THEMPRA. Available at: <http://www.thempira.org.uk/resources/>



**WATCH AND CONSIDER:**

This link will take you to a series of e-learning modules on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://childhub.org/en/online-learning-materials/trauma-and-alternative-care>

This video is about children in the judicial system, however it provides information about working and building relationships with children and young people. The messages on how to communicate with children is beautifully illustrated by short scenarios and are applicable to any situation where you are trying to build a relationship with a child. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYLWkVHvgOM>

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## SECTION 10

# Restorative practice

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# Restorative practice

“I believe that they should be supported without being judged. Because, regardless of the reason for the aggression, whether it was physical, emotional, sexual, or via social media... whatever it was, we must make the child feel understood, not judged and, above all, accompanied in the process of overcoming or acceptance.”

“The child should feel somehow the love of those around him and, at the same time, by offering him love, you should show, explain him that he doesn't have to do these things, you should teach him that he shouldn't do this.”

“Create more situations where they can feel good first of all, and then realize they can change, each of them inside, and I would try to find the things that help them.”

“Make him understand what one suffers, even if it is because of comments, even if it is because of a stupid push, what another person can suffer and the damage he can cause with basic things, with small things...”

“You cannot force someone to change, you have to support them to change and be helped to change their behaviour.”

“They should understand what kind of discomfort led the instigator to discriminate, hate or humiliate someone else. Educational and reconciliation paths may come in handy.”

### Supporting initiators of peer on peer violence

Children and young people provided us with some key messages about ways to support initiators of peer on peer violence. They told us that punishment will not stop violent behavior, and can in fact make the situation worse. They also said that you cannot force someone to change, but instead we should help them recognize and change their behaviour. To do this, as we have discussed earlier in this Section of the Practice Guidance (and in Section 8), we need to not just understand what motivated their actions, but also consider whether they are also facing difficult situations with which they need support. During the scoping exercise with children and young people, we were told that initiators of violence should be helped to understand that their behaviour is unacceptable, as well as the consequences of what they have done, and how their actions have caused distress and harm to their peers.

### Initiating restorative practice

Children and young people said opportunities to engage with peers so they can better understand each other, understand why peer violence is happening, and speak about the impact it can have on them, would help towards addressing – and in future, preventing – the violence.

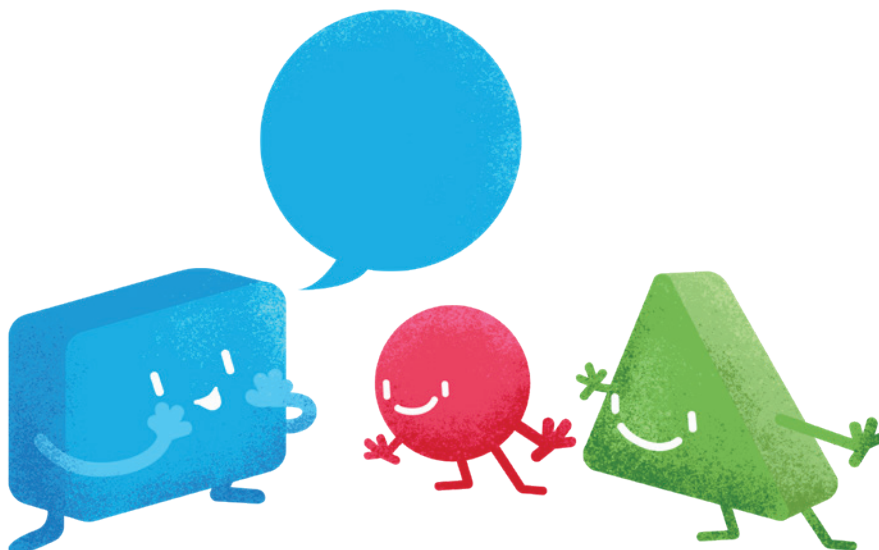
One approach you might take to support them in such initiatives is that of **restorative practice**. This is similar to an approach you may already be familiar with, usually used as part of a restorative justice process. It is a way to support the participation of children and young people in resolving conflict situations. It takes everyone's needs into consideration, involves listening to everyone's views, hearing all sides of the situation, and supports a reconciliation process.

### Identifying if a restorative conversation will be helpful

“The victim and the perpetrator of violence, the bully and the bullied, should come together to talk about the reason of their behaviors, e.g. an aggressive attitude or insulting terms, and to understand they should not behave/talk this way, to avoid hurting people or making them uncomfortable.”

“First, they should talk to the child and find the cause or the reason why he was hurt or hit. Once this cause has been found, they should try wearing the other child's hat, the aggressor's hat, and see why he acts in such manner...”

“So, to my mind... talk to him and tell him that it's wrong to do this, that he could go and reconcile...”



One way of helping to find positive solutions to situations of peer on peer violence is facilitating a “restorative conversation” between peers. A restorative conversation supports the communication between children and young people who are involved in a situation of peer on peer violence. A restorative conversation focuses on the following:



Our role as the facilitator of a restorative conversation is to help bring children and young people together and provide them with an opportunity to communicate with each other in a safe, supportive, and caring environment. However, it is important to first assess whether a restorative conversation is the most appropriate way forward.



### Assessing the applicability of a restorative conversation

Before proceeding, it will be necessary for all those involved in the case to determine whether the use of a restorative “conversation” is the most appropriate way forward. To do this we should first consider such factors as the level of risk and the level/severity of harm/abuse – i.e. is the level of harm so serious that a restorative conversation may not necessarily be an appropriate way forward. There may also be national laws or regulations that mandate for the different actions you must take in relation to the levels of violence. There might be guidance in terms of the level of severity and corresponding responses laid out in your organization’s Safeguarding Policy.

It is also important to emphasize that the decision to engage in a restorative conversation has to be the free choice of the children and young people involved. Anyone has the right to refuse.

### What happens when everyone agrees to a restorative conversation

If everyone has agreed that a restorative conversation is an appropriate approach, the adult who will support and guide the restorative conversation (the principle facilitator, which we suggest is the nominated Safeguarding Officer or someone else who knows the children under your organization’s care and has been trained to take this role) between children and young people, should first work with each child or young person individually.

Again, the emphasis is on children and young people being well prepared and supported during the process. Some may find it easier to be given the questions that will be covered in advance so that they can prepare their answers and perhaps write down what they want to say. It is important to be mindful how this process can be particularly stressful for the initiator of the violence as they may fear they are being put on “trial.” It is important to emphasize that this process is to recognize their actions and seek an understanding and solutions for all rather than focusing on punishment.

### The restorative conversation

When everyone feels ready, the restorative conversation can take place between the initiator and the target(s) of the peer on peer violence, as well as others who may have been affected in some other way.

In the table below we have provided some guidance for the person taking the role as “principle facilitator.” This is in the form of questions. The focus is on “active listening” between all the participants and to ensure there is a respectful and non-judgemental atmosphere. Each child or young person should be given equal opportunity to speak.

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### QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT BE ASKED DURING A RESTORATIVE CONVERSATION

What happened? Some follow up questions to deepen this discussion could be:

- What were you thinking about when the event happened?
- What have you been thinking and feeling since?
- How do you feel now?
- Who else do you think might have been affected by what happened? This will help examine and explore the impact on people and relationships.
- How do you think they might have been affected?

You might finish the conversations with:

- What do you need from each other that will contribute toward making you feel better and help you to move forward?
- What is needed so that we can help “put the wrong right”?

Thank everyone involved for their contribution.

Agree together on a follow up time and meeting to meet either individually or together with the young person(s) involved.

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There should be a written record of the conversation as well as the agreed outcomes, follow up, actions, roles, and responsibilities.

If a need has been identified for the development of a **Safety and Support Plan** for the children or young people involved, this can be filled out/added to before the meeting is adjourned. Remember it is important to involve children and young people in decision-making and identifying the best way forward. The Safety Plan needs to be regularly evaluated and adjusted as necessary.

## Supporting children and young people affected by peer on peer violence

Please remember that children and young people who have not been directly targeted by or initiated peer on peer violence, but nevertheless have been affected by it, should also be offered support. This should include the opportunity to talk to a trusted adult and to be able to explain what has happened and how they feel about it. This can also be followed up by their participation in a restorative practice meeting if helpful, as well as the development of a Safety and Support Plan if appropriate.



### READ AND CONSIDER:

This link will take you to a range of resources on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

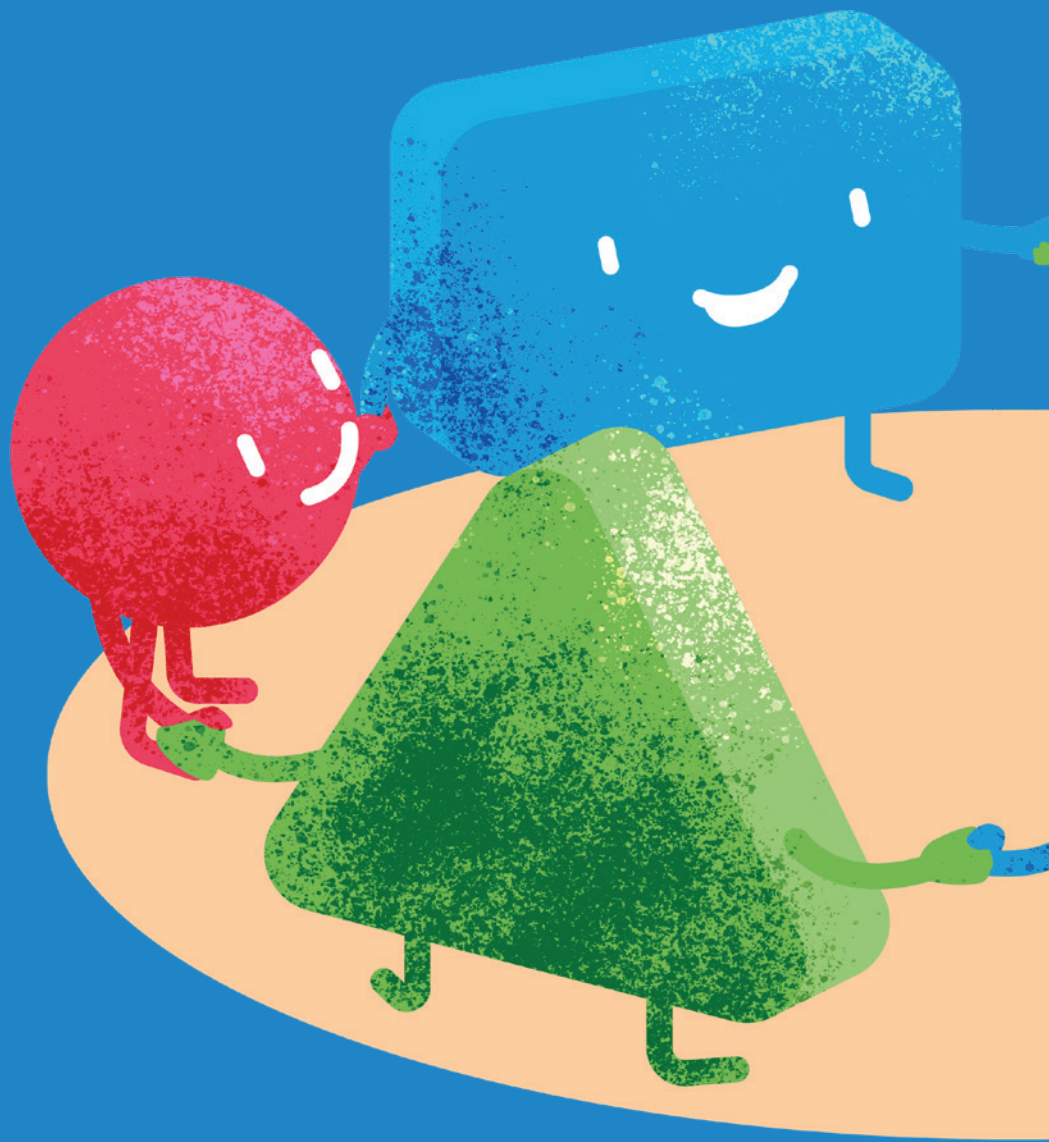
This link will take you to the THEMPRA website where you will find other useful reading materials and other resources on social pedagogy: <http://www.thempira.org.uk/resources/>

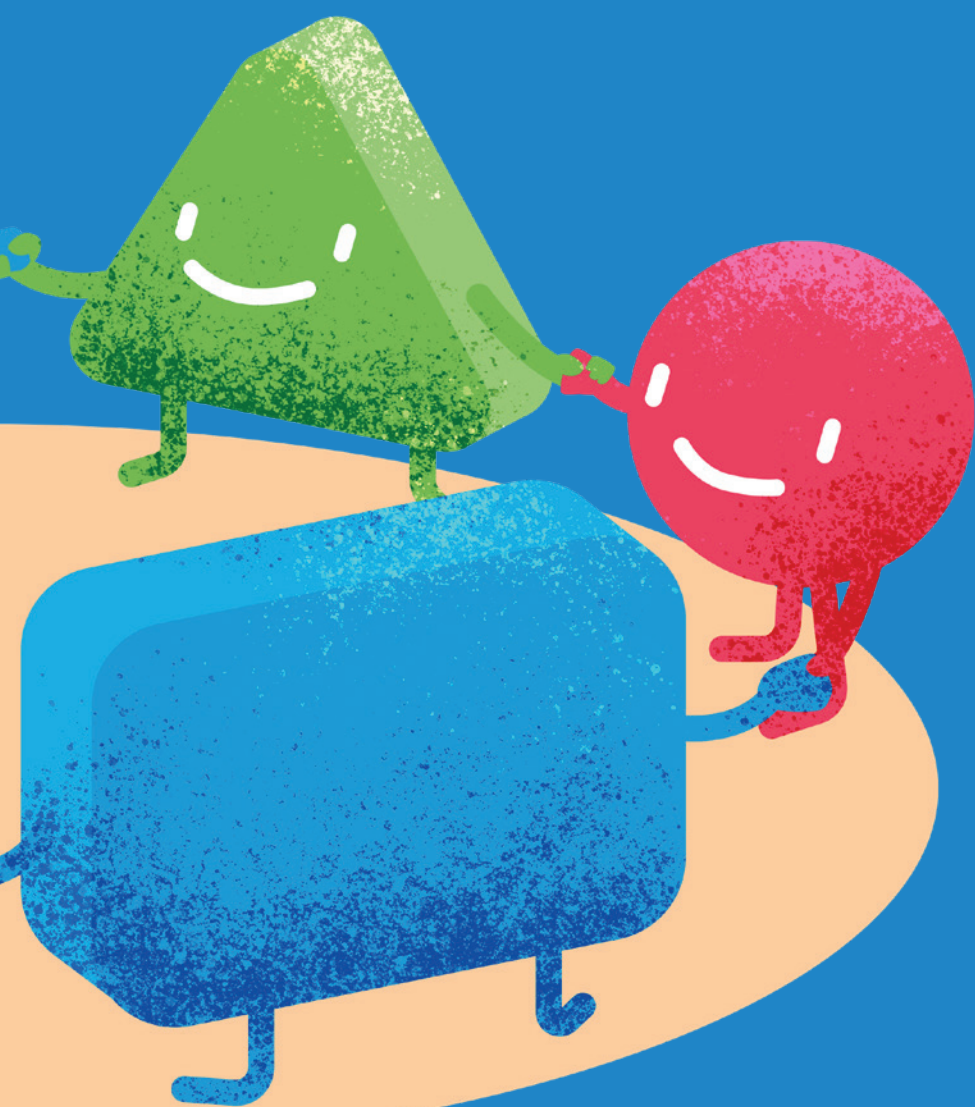


### WATCH AND CONSIDER:

This link will take you to the ChildHub website where you can use the search engine to access resources on peer: <https://childhub.org/en/childhub-search> Just type in "peer on peer abuse."







## **SECTION 11**

# **Children and young people: Respectful relationships and life skills**

## SECTION 11

# Children and young people: Respectful relationships and life skills

### INTRODUCTION

“Try to make them understand that they have to love themselves, that they are worth a lot..”

“Because if you teach your child not to start hitting somebody else without a reason, or to start bullying a child because he has a different skin colour or something, I don’t know, we take examples also from our families.”

“I have always thought that family plays a primary role in this regard. Parents are the first people responsible for shaping up a child behavior, from an early age, and for providing essential information (because it is all about information and mutual respect). If not, this must come from the main educator, a second “channel” (i.e. teachers, school). They have a fundamental educational task in passing on key information, also based on the subjects that children will learn at school, such as civics, which explains the basic social rules and behaviors to follow.”

Alongside other evidence<sup>29</sup>, children and young people told us about the importance of preventing peer on peer violence through attaining and maintaining certain life skills. They said learning about positive social norms and principles, including those of equality, acceptance, friendship, and valuing diversity, would be highly beneficial. Furthermore, they recognize how increased feelings of self-worth and self-esteem could help children and young people become less vulnerable to being impacted by peer on peer violence. They also said they would like opportunities to gain an improved and shared understanding of what harmful behavior is.

In this Section we will briefly explore some of these issues and think about some of the topics that might be discussed and explored with children and young people.



29. Sege, R. et al (2011) Peer violence and violence prevention. Available at: <https://somepomed.org/articulos/contents/mobipreview.htm?9/48/9985?view=print>

## RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

“To begin with, they must educate children from the time they are small, educate them in equality and respect for others.”

“Teach very young children that we are all equal, that there are boys, there are girls, there is everything, that they can be black, that they can be white, that they can be of any race, that they can like anything, but that they are all, at the end of the day, children, and they will grow up and they will all do the same.”

Children and young people told us about the importance of creating a child-friendly and safe environment. As already noted above, they said one way to achieve this would be opportunities to learn together and discuss topics related to positive social and cultural values and principles including those of:

- Equality.
- Valuing diversity.
- Anti-discrimination.
- Mutual support.
- Respect and kindness.
- Unity, bonding and friendship.

One approach that can help in promoting the development of positive and equitable attitudes and behaviours is that of **respectful relationships education**. This is an approach that encourages the use of social and emotional learning – a process by which children and young people may:

- Acquire and effectively apply positive attitudes, values, and norms.
- Build resilience.
- Gain self-esteem.
- Manage emotions and solve problems.
- Understand and show empathy.
- Make responsible decisions.

In the remainder of this Section we are going to explore some of these issues. While we are considering this information, please think about ways it may be possible to create opportunities for shared learning by and between peers, as well as integrating messaging and learning in other ways into the programmes, activities and services you offer – taking into consideration the appropriateness for different ages and maturity. We would also like to call your attention once again to the specific support children living in alternative care may need in relation to these issues and how their experience of losing parental care and/or other adverse childhood experiences may have impacted their self-esteem and resilience.

### Respecting equality and diversity

“They [adults] are called upon to educate, not just to teach, but to promote the respect for diversity against exclusion of weaker persons; this is something they don’t do. Usually disabled children are put in a different classroom and the foreign student is left aside and given an easier text. This kind of attitude doesn’t help them. It actually emphasizes the differences.”

Building on the concept of equality, **respecting differences**, and strengthening acceptance among peers, think of ways you might facilitate discussions and learning that will help children and young people explore and question existing preconceptions they may have about certain groups and individuals. To do this, you might use exercises, case studies and discussion materials to help children and young people explore the following topics together:

- Valuing the uniqueness of each individual.
- The concept of inclusion and the importance of unity so that no-one is excluded due to such differences as their background, where they live, or their abilities.
- The harm negative attitudes such as discrimination and stereotyping can cause and how stereotyping, discrimination and negative assumptions can:
  - » Affect the way they may have been thinking and behaving towards different peers, such as by making judgements on the basis of generalizations rather than looking at individuality and unique personal characteristics, abilities, and achievements. For example, children who are discriminated against just because they are living in alternative care rather than being respected for who they are as individuals.
  - » Lead them to purposely look for behaviour that reinforces the stereotype of certain groups around them because of what they heard in the media, attitudes they learned from caregivers, etc.
- The way stereotyping can encourage prejudice and normalize non-consensual behaviour. For example, the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity may:
  - » Make people think certain jobs or ways of living are for men and others are for women, which could limit the types of jobs people think they can do/the lives they can have.
  - » Contributes to the idea that one person has fewer rights in a relationship than the other.



## Resilience

An important aspect of **resilience** is the manner in which it helps children and young people cope with challenging experiences and recover from setbacks and adverse experiences.

Different factors can influence the development of resilience. For example, some children and young people will develop resilience more naturally than others. This can be related to natural characteristics and even genetic disposition. External factors can also have an impact, as for example, having strong and healthy peer relationships.<sup>30</sup> The chart below illustrates just a small number of other positive and risk factors that can potentially impact the development of resilience in children and young people.

POSITIVE FACTORS	RISK FACTORS
Feeling a sense of control in one's life.	Feeling loss of control over things happening in your life.
Ability of self-control.	Lack of self-control.
Being part of social groups and bonding with others.	Lack of positive social interaction.
At least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, care practitioner, or other adult.	Lack of attachment to a primary caregiver.
A stable and caring home environment in which there is a positive and structured environment including the existence of consistency, fairness, and healthy boundaries.	Witnessing or being part of conflict at home, domestic violence, abuse, and neglect.
Participation in school and the community with a sense of belonging and contribution.	Living in a community with poor services and resources and the inability to provide children and young people with the access to support and services they need.
Being encouraged and helped to build on their strengths and capacities.	Lack of encouragement and interest from those around them.

30. Please see: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

When we are caring for, supporting, and working with children and young people at risk of or impacted by peer on peer violence, it is helpful to consider whether any of these factors are present in their lives and help counteract risks and build on any positive factors.

### Assertiveness

**Assertiveness** is the ability to speak up for ourselves in a way that is honest and respectful. It is being self-assured and confident without being aggressive. When we are assertive, we are able to communicate our personal rights, needs, wants, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings in a direct and honest way that means we have respect for ourselves while also showing consideration and respect for others.

If we consider a spectrum of behaviour, “passive” behaviour would be at one end of the spectrum, assertiveness in the middle, and aggressiveness at the other end. Assertiveness is considered the most balanced way to communicate. The diagram below shows how these three different styles of behaviour might impact the way a child or young person responds to others. It shows how those with a passive style of behaviour may be more vulnerable to being targeted by peer on peer violence, while an aggressive style is often associated with controlling behaviour towards others and can, if not steered in a different direction, lead to behaviour associated with initiating peer on peer violence.



<b>PASSIVE</b>	<b>ASSERTIVE</b>	<b>AGGRESSIVE</b>
Based on keeping your feelings to yourself, and hiding feelings, thoughts, wants, and needs from others.	Based on balance when standing up for your rights, wants, and needs while still listening to and considering the rights, needs, and wants of others.	Based on winning. Doing what is in your best interest without regard for the rights, needs, feelings, or desires of other people.
Saying “yes” when you actually do not want to do something.	Compromising when necessary.	Getting what you want, often without asking.
Taking on the opinion of others, or indeed of a whole group, because you are too worried or afraid to state your own views or do not want to risk being rejected by someone or a group (i.e. in school or a club or in the community).	The ability to get your point across confidently, fairly and with consideration and empathy for someone else’s view.	Using power to get what you want and pushing others to do what you want.
Thinking your needs don’t matter.	Considering your own needs while considering those of others.	Looking out for only yourself.
Giving in to others.	Standing up for yourself.	Bullying others.

In summary, the benefit of helping children and young people to use assertive behaviour in relation to situations of peer on peer violence means they are more likely to:

- Identify their own feelings and strengths.
- Speak up for themselves with confidence.
- Disagree with others without sounding disrespectful or rude.
- Be more in control with their thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Be assertive by using negotiation skills that show reciprocal respect for the other person’s point of view.
- Say “no” without feeling guilty.

A number of these factors are also closely related to ways children and young people can respect the boundaries and personal space of others while also safeguarding their own personal space.

### **Positive, respectful, and healthy relationships**

Positive, respectful, and healthy relationships help a child or young person feel happy and safe, and contributes to building their self-esteem. Think about ways you might support children and young people in building and maintaining positive and healthy friendships (in all contexts, including online) by:

- Providing opportunities for open and honest discussions between children and young people about what makes a healthy relationship – e.g. what do they see as positive behaviour between peers and what is not. Further information can be found in Section 7.
- Helping children and young people think about and discuss what it means to make healthy choices and judgements that will keep them safe as far as is reasonably possible, as for example ways to ensure online privacy and use of safety settings.

Think about ways to build activities and/or messages into the programmes and services you provide that can help children and young people explore some of the key characteristics of positive relationships together, including those of:

- Being honest.
- Listening to each other without interruption.
- Being considerate of the perspective of the opinions, feelings, and wishes of others.
- Negotiating and finding ways of solving difficulties together. You may for instance find the resource at this link helpful – <https://sunshine-parenting.com/5-steps-to-help-kids-resolve-conflicts/>
- Focussing on the good things in each other.
- Praising each other's achievements.
- Not pressuring each other to think or do something they do not want to do.
- Being able to acknowledge when we have done something wrong and to say sorry.
- Finding ways to disagree without causing a fight or someone saying hurtful things.
- Being able to express feelings and opinions without being made to feel stupid, scared, or embarrassed.

You might, for example, facilitate a discussion about some characteristics of a positive:

- Friendship, e.g. enjoying time together.
- Relationship with family or other caregivers, e.g. love and trust.
- Relationship with someone else, e.g. feeling supported by a teacher.

Also think about ways to help children and young people think about and discuss what they can/might do if they are in a relationship that makes them worried, angry, unhappy, sad, and/or includes coercion, pressure or even threat.

### Respecting boundaries and personal space

Knowing and respecting boundaries and understanding personal space are further elements of remaining safe in peer relationships. We have already considered the issue of assertiveness and how it is important for children and young people to be able to say “no” when they do not want to do something – as for example, drink alcohol; steal something; do homework for someone else; hurt someone because they are told; or abandon a friend in need because they are not “in the group.” Knowing boundaries is also a key element of refusing or giving consent to someone – as for example for touch, kissing, intimacy and/or sexual intimacy.

As part of helping children and young people create and maintain healthy boundaries in their relationships with peers, we might:

- Explain that everyone has the right to have their own boundaries.
- Explain and facilitate a conversation about the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe contact (in both physical and in other contexts, e.g. online) including aspects of physical space and touch.
- Facilitate discussions about people needing to seek permission from someone else, e.g. borrowing a book, joining someone else’s game – and that it is the same as touch.
- Help them think about what they can/should do if permission is unclear.
- Help them explore and understand other ways their peers might be saying “no” – for example, they might say “maybe later” or “I don’t know.” There are also non-verbal cues, for example, people shaking their head, or saying nothing.

Support children and young people to explore the issue of giving permission. Explore the importance of being able to recognize and acknowledge when they want to do something or not and how they might do this. Even within the closest friendships, people appreciate and expect to:

- Have their privacy respected, e.g. trust that their friends will not share their phone number or email address without permission.
- Have their boundaries respected, e.g. how closely they interact with people, physically or otherwise.
- Be able to choose when to give and withdraw consent, e.g. it is ok to change our minds.

A clear message should be that coercion, pressure, or threatening someone is not acceptable at any time. Stress the importance of seeking help when a child or young person feels this is happening to them.

You will find some additional materials in the “watch and consider” box below that help explain consent.

### Being aware of different forms of peer on peer violence

“In other cases, children don’t report these situations because they don’t know if they’re dealing with real violence or not, maybe they think it’s a joke and there is no need to do much about nothing.”

Children and young people told us that an important factor associated with protecting themselves is opportunities at school and in other settings to speak openly about violence. It is important to them that violence is not a hidden or taboo subject. They also feel those initiating violence should be helped to understand the harm violence can cause.

It is important they have the time and space to talk about peer on peer violence, including discussing and understanding the different forms it can take – as for example:

- Physical abuse, e.g. pinching, hitting, pushing.
- Bullying and intimidation, as for example verbal abuse (e.g. name calling, spreading rumours) and non-verbal abuse (e.g. maintaining a threatening physical presence).
- Emotional abuse, e.g. making someone feel bad about themselves, trying to control what someone does or says, regularly excluding someone or being coercive such as pressuring someone to do things they do not want to do, or even threatening or bribing them.
- Sexual harassment.
- Sexual abuse.
- Online bullying and harassment/cyberbullying.

We should support children and young people in understanding how all forms of peer on peer violence are harmful, and how it can make those who are targeted:

- Feel humiliated and ashamed.
- Feel scared, sad, and alone.
- Feel like they want to hurt themselves or other people.
- Lose confidence in themselves.
- Miss school and other opportunities.
- Feel hurt and upset long after the violence has happened.

Help them understand that it is not always possible to tell if someone is hurt by bullying, for example, they may react by laughing or smiling, but they are actually hurting inside.

## Who can children and young people turn to?

Children and young people want to know who they can turn to in your organization when they are at risk of or have been impacted by peer on peer violence. It is important they have information and guidance on how to report concerns and who are “trusted” adults within your organization that they can turn to. This includes those adults that have been trained and/or nominated as “trusted adults.” In this respect, it is important that children and young people participate in identifying those adults they trust. They should also be provided with information of other organizations and reporting mechanisms available to them, as for example a national child helpline.



### READ AND CONSIDER:

This link will take you to a range of resources on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children’s Villages International: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/trauma-informed-practices>

This link will lead you to further reading materials and resources related to the topic of resilience: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/#:~:text=The%20single%20most%20common%20factor,%2C%20caregiver%2C%20or%20other%20adult.&text=This%20combination%20of%20supportive%20relationships,is%20the%20foundation%20of%20resilience.>

These links you lead you to further reading materials and other resources on online safety:  
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/online-safety-toolkits/>  
<https://www.childnet.com/resources/pshe-toolkit/>

This link will take you to a publication on negotiation skills - Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (2003) *Conflict Negotiation Skills for Youth*. United National. Available at: [https://www.creducation.net/resources/Conflict\\_Negotiation\\_Skills\\_Youth\\_UNESCAP.pdf](https://www.creducation.net/resources/Conflict_Negotiation_Skills_Youth_UNESCAP.pdf)

Sunshine Parenting: *5 Steps to help kids resolve conflicts*. Available at <https://sunshine-parenting.com/5-steps-to-help-kids-resolve-conflicts/>



**WATCH AND CONSIDER:**

This link will take you to a series of e-learning modules on trauma-informed practices developed by SOS Children's Villages International: <https://childhub.org/en/online-learning-materials/trauma-and-alternative-care>

This link will take you to a short video called "Consent: It's Simple as Tea." This video provides an interesting way to explore what giving or withholding consent means using the offering of a cup of tea as an example.

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrxVavnQ>

At this link you will find a series of videos produced by Harvard University on the topic of resilience. Available at: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/>

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## **SECTION 12**

# **Advocating for Change**

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# Advocating for Change

### INTRODUCTION

Principal stakeholders, and most especially, children and young people, as well as professionals, volunteers, care practitioners and others, can all be powerful advocates for change. By working together or individually, they should be ready to advocate with competent authorities or bodies that can directly or indirectly bring about improvements that create safer spaces for children and young people.

In the remainder of this Section, we will say a few words about a number of key issues for which it may be important to advocate for change.

#### 1. Commitment of services and resources to prevent peer on peer violence

Steps to prevent peer on peer violence are of primary importance. One way to achieve this is to address factors contributing to the manifestation of such violence. This in part requires a commitment to governments and other stakeholders to guarantee open access to a range of universal and targeted support services for all those that need them. This particularly includes those services and resources that will address issues of inequality, social exclusion, and discrimination.

In the first instance, efforts should be made to advocate for, and support the efforts of, central and local government and other relevant stakeholders in gathering accurate evidence showing gaps in such service provision and a commitment to bringing about necessary improvements.

#### 2. Promoting positive attitudes

Social norms and values such as those of discrimination and acceptance of violence and intolerance can greatly increase the risk of peer on peer violence occurring. Such negative attitudes, regardless of who is exhibiting them, must be addressed. This requires us all to play an active role in promoting positive attitudes and challenging negative ones.

### 3. Building workforce capacity

The prevention of peer on peer violence and the way it is responded to is greatly influenced by the ability of those holding responsibility to support, care for, and work with children and young people. Results of the scoping exercise undertaken to inform this Practice Guidance highlighted the need for investment in the strengthening of skills, knowledge, and abilities of all stakeholders, including professionals, primary care practitioners and others. It is felt that the skills and capacities of professional workers and care practitioners for example, should not only include knowledge of practical duties but also the manner in which children and young people are supported.

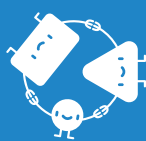
Such capacity building should not only be for those holding primary care responsibilities, but all those who should be contributing to the protection of children through a multi-sectoral approach.

As with the scoping exercise that informed this Practice Guidance, children and young people can and should play an active role in identifying the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they think it is important for professionals, care practitioners and others to have. Likewise, practitioners also have a role to play in informing those responsible for training provision about the exact capacities and knowledge they require.

### 4. Advocacy to strengthen and change laws and policies

An appropriate legal and regulatory framework is important as it provides the necessary mandate, focus, and guidance for organizations and individuals holding responsibility for the protection of children and young people. This applies equally to a strong national normative framework, as well as safeguarding policies within each individual organization.

Alongside children and young people themselves, all those working to guarantee the protection of children should be able to play a role in advocating for changes to laws, regulations and policies where the current arrangements do not work well and where improvements can be made. An example being the strengthening of legislation that requires all organizations working with children and young people to have a Peer on Peer Violence Safeguarding Policy.



# Applying Safe Behaviours

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING  
TO PEER VIOLENCE