

Safeguarding and Child Protection at St Francis

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St Francis

Safeguarding Team:



Mrs Wright
DSL, SPOC



Mrs Richards
Deputy DSL



Mr Turner
Deputy DSL,
DSPOC

Sexual Harassment in Schools

Very recently OFSTED completed it's investigation into sexual harassment in schools and colleges—a large scale review of safeguarding in respect of this one issue. After speaking to over 900 pupils, it became clear to OFSTED that there is a significant issue with sexual harassment in education and the associated gender violence consequences. Here is the link to OFSTED's report <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges>

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment in general is any unwanted sexual attention online and off line that can cause physical, emotional/mental, psychological or economic harm to the victim.

Can this happen in Primary School?

Research suggests that more than a third of sexual abuse reported by any age children is perpetrated by their peers (Peer on Peer Sexual Abuse) - with girls being the victim in the majority of cases. Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any sex. They can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. It is important that we teach all children (boys and girls), of all ages, what is acceptable interaction and what is not, and then what they must do if any unwanted sexual attention happens to them.

What can we do to teach children appropriate interaction?

Boys and girls mix together in every social environment, at every age and many children will never experience sexism, harassment or abuse based on gender. To ensure that our youngest children know how to keep themselves safe we must encourage an open honesty about their experiences so that they know it is always safe to disclose to a trusted adult. Parents and staff should make sure they model the best ways of showing respect between the genders and challenge any attempt by family members, friends, other parents and organisations to undermine that work.

Is it abuse or banter? What is not OK at our school?

- Gender based stereotyping which can lead boys often to believe themselves superior, stronger, more able, more important than girls (even factoring in biological differences -guess what girls can play football and boys can cook, both are genderless activities)
- Banter or inappropriate jokes that normalise a diminished role for girls and women or take away their power, independence and respect (it's only funny if everyone is happy with the joke and that joke does not demean)
- Name calling that is gender or sexual orientation derogatory. Use of the term "gay" as an insult. Linked to this is "Victim blaming"
- Comments on appearance that draw attention to size, body parts, attractiveness
- Sexual comments, obscene gestures, using obscenities (most swear words are sexual in their origin)
- Upskirting (covert photos under clothing), sharing photos, drawing inappropriate images, sexting
- Pulling or removing clothes to reveal the child's body
- Deliberately touching any part of each others body without consent - this includes touching another child's genitals (this does not include developmental exploring of their body)
- Crowding and intimidating to isolate children in a way that makes them uncomfortable
- Coercion/threats to make a child do something they are not comfortable with

Useful Acronyms

DSL: Designated Safeguard Lead

SPOC: Single Point of Contact (PREVENT) - preventing children being impacted by extremism.

CPOMS—Child Protection Online Monitoring Safeguarding System.

KCSIE: Keeping Children Safe In Education—a Government Document.

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

NSPCC: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

MASH: Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. (0300 555 2866)

Legally...

Sexual harassment is illegal and whoever commits these acts can be prosecuted. If a child is over the age of 10 (the age of accountability) then they will be held responsible under the law, possibly leaving that young person with a permanent criminal record. Laws in place to protect victims include: The Sexual Offences Act, The Misuse of Telecommunications Act, The Malicious Communications Act, The Equality Act. Any form of sexual, emotional, physical or malicious assault could lead to criminal proceedings.

Prevention

We need to address the culture of sexual harassment and teach our children about healthy relationships, respectful behaviour, gender roles, stereotyping and equality, body confidence and self-esteem, prejudiced behaviour. It is important that they know that sexual violence and sexual harassment is always wrong and will not be tolerated.

Finally our children must know who to tell and why, so that they can be protected from harm.

Normalising Sexual Harassment

In OFSTED's findings, children and young people said that sexual harassment occurs so frequently that it has become 'commonplace'. 92% of girls, and 74% of boys, said sexist name-calling happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers. The frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal.

What is your child doing on their phone or device?

OFSTED found that where children were being coerced into sending inappropriate images, this was often happening on social media platforms such as What's App and Snapchat. How are you monitoring who your child is communicating with online and offline? Do you know what they are saying and sending? Do you know what your child is seeing and hearing? Who monitors whole class pupil What's App groups—is there a designated parent member to supervise behaviour? OFSTED found evidence of pupils of all ages sending and receiving inappropriate material on their phones, children having their photo taken without consent and shared, children being put under pressure to send photos of themselves to others. Parents must have trusting relationships with their children about phone use but one built on vigilance and safeguarding.

The Law about CONSENT

Reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment are likely to be complex and require difficult professional decisions to be made, often quickly and under pressure. Some situations are clear:

- A child under the age of 13 can never consent to any form of sexual activity
- The age of consent in the UK is 16
- Sexual intercourse without consent is rape
- Rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault are defined in law
- Creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under 18s is illegal (often referred to as sexting). This includes children making and sharing sexual images and videos of themselves.

If you have any concerns about the safety and/or welfare of a child or young person telephone Walsall MASH on 0300 555 2866 (option 2).

Please do not contact school out of hours via answer phone or email as this will not be picked up immediately. You can discuss your concerns in person or over the phone with a DSL at St Francis during school hours.

How to prevent and protect from Sexual Harassment in School

Much of OFSTED's data comes from Secondary School settings but as a Primary School, we have to be very proactive in creating an environment that teaches boys and girls how to behave respectfully towards each other, and how to respect personal/physical boundaries set. We must make sure all of our young people (boys and girls) are prepared for the wider world of secondary school and employment. We should not frighten children but should develop age appropriate awareness and understanding of the dignity of the person and how to respect self, thereby giving skills to respect others. If children understand their own bodies, the terminology to use, why other words are not appropriate, they will speak more knowledgeably and respectfully to each other.

- Pupils who are the victim of any level of inappropriate sexual behaviour must tell (and adults must make it safe for them to do so)
- Challenge your child if they are using stereotypical or sexist language and educate why it is wrong—the sooner we remove the normalisation of this language, the better
- Talk openly (in an age appropriate way) about anatomy and the similarities and differences between people. We are all made in the image and likeness of God and so our form, no matter what form that takes, is always perfect to God (there is no superior gender)
- Teach your child (and model) what healthy relationships look like—this is lifelong learning that will shape how your child views their future interactions with people and what they see as acceptable
- Teach your child about consent
- Make sure your child knows that they can say “No” when the behaviour of another person crosses an acceptable boundary
- Teach your child to tell someone they trust about what has happened to them—we action and record all incidents

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at St Francis

We teach our children to respect themselves and others. We teach them how to stay safe in all that they do.

St Francis follow the Ten:Ten scheme of work and use resources created specifically for children. Parents can access these lesson and resources using the following details:

<https://www.tentenresources.co.uk/parent-portal/>

Username: st-francis-ws4

Password: love-animals

We encourage children to talk to their parents about the content of their lessons in school and to discuss any content that concerns them with a trusted adult.

Useful Websites:

NSPCC: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/>

Online Safety: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

<https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/6-10/>

KCSIE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

PREVENT: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty>