

Child-on-child abuse

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Tips for parents and carers

How to prevent child-on-child abuse from happening and what to do if it does.

What is child-on-child/peer-on-peer abuse?

Child-on-child abuse is when one child or young person causes harm to another, either in person or online. **KCSIE** ([Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)) references different forms of child-on-child abuse:

- Bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying)
- Abuse in intimate personal relationships between children

- Physical abuse
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment
- Consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images
- Causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent
- Upskirting (taking a photo under someone's clothing without their permission)
- Initiation/hazing type violence and rituals.

How to protect your child

Below are tips for what parents and carers can do to help prevent child-on-child abuse happening, whether purposeful or by accident.

Tip 1: Have age-appropriate conversations



Make sure your child or teen understands what child-on-child abuse is by having regular conversations.

Explain to them what inappropriate behaviour looks like as appropriate to their age and empower them to report anything that makes them uncomfortable, even if it's done by a close friend. It's important they don't brush abusive behaviour off as harmless banter.

Improve your knowledge about the different online issues children may face and how they might be targeted here.

Helpful resources

- Conversation guide
- Advice by age

Parent story

Mum of 3, Emma, experienced child-on-child abuse firsthand when her 12-year-old daughter was made to view distressing violent images.

The 12-year-old's AirDrop had not been turned off and one day on the school bus, she received the image straight to her phone.

Talking to your child about their personal safety and setting up privacy controls can help prevent this type of child-on-child abuse from happening.

Tip 2: Set up privacy and security controls

Most apps, platforms and devices have privacy and security settings users can use to keep themselves safe online.

With your child or teen, set up these controls. Explain how they work and what impact they could have on their safety. Setting them up together can help them develop their understanding and take ownership of their safety. Get the whole family involved in digital boundaries and online safety with a family agreement.



Tip 3: Teach digital resilience and responsibility

Just like learning to cross the road safely or getting a road license, accessing everything the online world has to offer needs a certain amount of knowledge, responsibility and resilience.

When they get their first device, help your child learn how to use the internet properly. This could include how to communicate with others and where to get help when they need it.

Go along with them on their journey as they pass milestones like getting a new device or joining social media platforms to help them have positive interactions with others.



Creating a responsible digital citizen

- To help children learn to use the internet and their devices appropriately, try some of the following:
- keep track of how they interact online, asking them to show you what they are doing and reducing the frequency as they become responsible
- limit where they can have their devices, giving them less limits as they grow older
- create joint accounts that you can access until they are old enough and can demonstrate proper understanding of safety online.

How to deal with child-on-child abuse

1. Watch out for the signs

Signs that a child might be a victim of child-on-child abuse could include:

- changes in their normal behaviour
- knowledge of things inappropriate for their age
- substance abuse
- problems with sleep
- school avoidance
- unexplained injuries
- self-harm



Behaviours associated with a child who may be abusive towards another child include:

- aggression
- impulsivity
- short-temperedness
- lack of empathy
- easily frustrated
- less likely to take responsibility for their actions
- a need to control or assert dominance

2. Acknowledge their feelings

Make space for what they might be feeling as a result of child-on-child abuse. Listen to how they feel – sad, angry, scared – and let them know that it's okay to feel those things as long as you support them as they heal.

However, children and young people who have been abused tend to blame themselves, and it's vital that you challenge these feelings of guilt. Their abuse didn't happen to them because they did something wrong. It is not their fault; they did not deserve the abuse. Help them externalise these thoughts instead of placing the blame on themselves.

3. Reach out to your child's school

If you are aware of child-on-child abuse that the school is not, it is critical that you inform them so they can put their own safeguards in place to protect your child. Ask them about their policies and their process for dealing with the issue; ask them for clear guidance on what you can do as their guardian.



What to do if your child targets another child

It can be hard to accept if your child is abusing another child -- whether that's bullying or sending nudes. But here are some tips to support them in learning from their mistakes:

- 1. Hold them accountable:** work with their school to sort out consequences and help educate them on appropriate behaviour.
- 2. Have calm conversations:** it is easy to get angry but speaking to them calmly to understand why they took the actions they did can help them understand their mistakes.
- 3. Educate them:** in many cases, they may not realise

Other ways children and young people can get support:



A [national reporting centre](#) (run by the UK Safer Internet Centre) designed to assist everyone over 13 in reporting harmful content online.



[Internet Watch Foundation](#) (UK Hotline) for reporting illegal content online like child sexual abuse images.



[Report Remove Tool](#) – this helps children under 18 to remove nude or semi-nude images that have been shared.



[The Mix](#) is an online support service for under-25s to call or message if they need to talk.



Created with the support of Internet Ambassador, **Dr Linda Papadopoulos**, and online safety expert, **Karl Hopwood**.

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