

Best Foot Forward – Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

Author: Andrew Russell
Approved By: Bethany Russell
Date Approved: August 2026
Assigned Review Period: 1 Year
Next Review Due: August 2027

Our position: child-on-child abuse is never “banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys”. It will always be taken seriously.

1. Purpose and commitment

Best Foot Forward is committed to providing an environment in which every child feels safe, respected, listened to and able to report concerns. This policy explains what child-on-child abuse is, how we work to prevent it, how children can report it, and how staff will respond when there is a concern or allegation.

This policy is aligned with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE 2026), effective from 1 September 2026. It should be read alongside Best Foot Forward’s Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Staff Code of Conduct, Behaviour procedures, Online Safety arrangements and relevant learner risk assessments.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all children and young people receiving provision from Best Foot Forward and to all staff, tutors, mentors, contractors and volunteers working on our behalf. Child-on-child abuse can happen in any setting. It can take place:

- during Best Foot Forward sessions;
- in a student’s home;
- in school or college;
- in community settings;
- while travelling;
- outside education settings;
- between children who are or are not in the same setting; and
- online, including through social media, messaging, gaming, livestreaming and AI-enabled services.

3. What is child-on-child abuse?

Child-on-child abuse is abuse by one child or young person against another. It may involve one child, several children, or groups. It can be a single incident or a pattern of behaviour, and it can happen face-to-face or online.

KCSIE 2026 is clear that child-on-child abuse is a safeguarding issue for both the child who may have been harmed and the child alleged to have caused harm. The needs, safety, development and welfare of all children involved must therefore be considered.

Even when there are no reports, this does not mean child-on-child abuse is not happening. Children may be unable, afraid or not yet ready to tell someone.

4. Forms of child-on-child abuse

Child-on-child abuse can include, but is not limited to:

- bullying, including cyberbullying and prejudice-based or discriminatory bullying;
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between children;
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling or otherwise causing physical harm;
- physical assault or threats of harm involving a weapon;
- harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), sexual violence and sexual harassment, including behaviour linked to misogyny or misandry;
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent;
- consensual and non-consensual making or sharing of nudes and semi-nudes, including images created or altered using artificial intelligence;
- sharing unwanted explicit content, sexualised online bullying, unwanted sexual comments or messages, sexual coercion and threats;
- upskirting or other image-based abuse; and
- initiation or hazing-type violence, harassment, abuse or humiliation, including where this has an online element.

5. Bullying and discriminatory abuse

Bullying is behaviour intended to hurt, frighten, humiliate, exclude or control another person. It may be repeated or may be a serious single incident. It can occur in person or online.

- Emotional bullying – manipulation, exclusion, intimidation, humiliation or behaviour designed to undermine another child's confidence or self-worth.
- Physical bullying – hitting, kicking, pushing, biting, shaking, hair pulling or other physical harm.
- Verbal bullying – insults, threats, humiliation, sexualised comments or degrading language.

- Prejudice-based or discriminatory bullying – targeting a child because of race, religion or belief, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or another protected or perceived characteristic.
- Cyberbullying – harmful messages, posts, images, videos, impersonation, group exclusion or other abusive behaviour using technology.

Best Foot Forward will challenge behaviour that creates an unsafe culture, including sexist or misogynistic attitudes. Harmful behaviour will not be dismissed because it is described as a joke or banter.

6. Harmful sexual behaviour, sexual harassment and sexual violence

Harmful sexual behaviour exists on a continuum and can include developmentally inappropriate, problematic, abusive or violent sexual behaviour. It can occur online or face-to-face and may escalate if it is not identified and addressed early.

Sexual harassment can include unwanted sexual comments, sexual jokes, sexualised name-calling, unwanted touching, sexualised online behaviour, displaying sexual material, coercion or repeated unwanted sexual attention. Sexual violence includes sexual offences such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault.

Best Foot Forward has a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is never acceptable and must never be normalised.

Staff must take every report seriously. Responses will be proportionate and child-centred, taking account of the age, developmental stage and circumstances of the children involved, as well as any coercion, exploitation, vulnerability or power imbalance.

7. Making or sharing nudes and semi-nudes

KCSIE 2026 uses the term “making or sharing nudes and semi-nudes” for the creation, sending or posting of nude or semi-nude visual content by children under 18. This includes photographs, videos, livestreams and images created or altered using AI.

The context matters. Consensual image sharing between older children of a similar age may require a different safeguarding response from non-consensual sharing, coercion, blackmail, exploitation or adult involvement. However, staff must always report concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) so that the incident can be assessed safely.

Staff must not

- view, copy, print, forward, share, store or save the imagery themselves;
- ask a child to send, download or show the imagery;
- investigate the incident independently;

Bethany Russell 07394 950803
beth@bestfootforward.org.uk

Andrew Russell 07538 719783
andrew@bestfootforward.org.uk

Website: www.bestfootforward.org.uk
Contact: admin@bestfootforward.org.uk

- ask children to delete imagery before the DSL has considered the appropriate response; or
- blame or shame any child involved.

If a member of staff accidentally sees an image, they must report this to the DSL immediately and follow the DSL's instructions.

8. Serious violence, weapons and exploitation

KCSIE 2026 identifies serious violence as an ongoing safeguarding concern. It may involve physical assault, carrying or threatening with weapons, peer conflict or bullying, and may be linked to child criminal exploitation (CCE), child sexual exploitation (CSE), gangs or other forms of exploitation.

Children in Alternative Provision or with disrupted education can face additional vulnerability. Best Foot Forward staff must therefore remain professionally curious about sudden changes in friendships, attendance, behaviour, money, possessions, travel patterns, injuries, fear, missing episodes, drug involvement or association with older individuals or groups.

Where there is an immediate risk involving serious violence or a weapon, staff must prioritise safety and call 999 where necessary. The DSL must be informed as soon as it is safe to do so.

9. Signs that a child may be experiencing child-on-child abuse

There is no single sign. Staff should be alert to changes including:

- avoiding school, sessions, locations or particular people;
- unexplained or repeated injuries;
- becoming withdrawn, anxious, fearful or unusually angry;
- changes in sleep, eating, concentration or attendance;
- sudden changes in friendships or peer groups;
- being frightened of receiving messages or using a device;
- loss of confidence or self-esteem;
- sexualised behaviour that is not appropriate to age or development;
- missing episodes or unexplained travel;
- unexplained money, gifts or possessions;
- talk of threats, blackmail, debts, weapons or pressure from peers; and
- a child saying or indicating that something is wrong, even if they do not describe it as abuse.

10. Reporting a concern

Children can report concerns to any trusted adult at Best Foot Forward. They do not need proof and they do not need to be certain that what happened meets a particular definition.

If something feels wrong, unsafe, frightening, humiliating, pressured or unwanted: tell us. We will listen and take it seriously.

A child can speak to:

- their tutor or mentor;
- Bethany Russell, Designated Safeguarding Lead;
- Andrew Russell, Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead; or
- another trusted adult at Best Foot Forward.

11. How staff must respond to a report or disclosure

When a child reports child-on-child abuse, staff must:

1. Listen carefully and remain calm.
2. Take the child seriously and avoid judgement.
3. Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling someone.
4. Do not promise confidentiality. Explain that information will be shared only with people who need to help keep children safe.
5. Do not conduct an investigation or ask leading, repeated or unnecessary questions.
6. Consider immediate safety and whether urgent medical or police assistance is required.
7. Report the concern promptly to the DSL or Deputy DSL.
8. Record the concern factually and promptly on CPOMS in line with Best Foot Forward procedures.
9. Preserve the child's own words wherever possible and record decisions, actions and relevant timings.
10. Continue to provide appropriate support while the concern is being managed.

If a child is in immediate danger or there is a risk of serious harm, staff should call 999. Staff do not need to wait for DSL permission to obtain emergency help.

12. How Best Foot Forward will manage concerns

The DSL or Deputy DSL will consider each concern on a case-by-case basis. The response will be guided by the best interests of the child and may include:

- immediate safety planning;
- support for the child who may have been harmed;
- support and safeguarding assessment for the child alleged to have caused harm;
- consideration of other children who may be affected;
- discussion with the commissioning school or local authority where appropriate;
- referral to children's social care;
- contact with police;

- medical or specialist support;
- changes to sessions, locations, staffing, travel or contact arrangements;
- risk assessment and safety planning; and
- ongoing monitoring and review.

All concerns, discussions, decisions and reasons for decisions will be recorded appropriately. Where statutory agencies are involved, the DSL will work with those agencies to determine next steps, including how and when parents/carers and the alleged perpetrator are informed.

13. Supporting the child who has been harmed

A child who reports abuse will be treated with dignity and respect. Best Foot Forward will seek to ensure that the child:

- is not blamed for what happened;
- is listened to and kept informed in an age-appropriate way;
- has access to a trusted adult;
- is supported to continue education safely;
- is protected from retaliation, intimidation or further contact where necessary;
- has their wishes considered alongside the need to keep them and others safe; and
- is referred for specialist support where appropriate.

The language used by staff should avoid defining a child solely by an incident. Depending on the circumstances, terms such as “child who has been harmed” and “child alleged to have caused harm” may be more appropriate than labels.

14. Supporting the child alleged to have caused harm

Child-on-child abuse is also a safeguarding issue for a child alleged to have caused harm. Behaviour must be addressed, boundaries must be clear and children must be protected, while recognising that a child displaying abusive or harmful behaviour may themselves have experienced trauma, abuse, exploitation or other unmet needs.

Support does not remove accountability. Best Foot Forward will work with relevant agencies and commissioners to ensure that responses are proportionate, developmentally appropriate and focused on safety, prevention and reducing future harm.

15. Prevention

Best Foot Forward will work to reduce the risk of child-on-child abuse by creating a culture in which children know that concerns will be heard and harmful behaviour will be challenged early.

Preventive work may include:

- clear expectations about respect, consent and boundaries;
- challenging sexism, misogyny, misandry, prejudice and discriminatory behaviour;
- teaching online safety and healthy relationships;

- helping children recognise coercion, exploitation and unsafe behaviour;
- supporting emotional regulation and conflict-resolution skills;
- providing trusted adults and mentoring;
- responding to lower-level harmful behaviour before it escalates;
- using learner-specific and activity risk assessments; and
- sharing relevant safeguarding information with commissioners and other agencies where necessary to keep children safe.

16. Children with additional vulnerabilities

Best Foot Forward recognises that some children may face additional barriers to recognising or reporting abuse, including children with SEND, communication needs, disrupted education, social isolation, previous trauma or experience of exploitation.

Staff must not assume that behaviour, distress or injury is simply related to a child's disability, diagnosis or additional need. Appropriate communication support and reasonable adjustments should be used to help children understand their rights and report concerns.

17. Recording and information sharing

Safeguarding concerns must be recorded promptly and factually using Best Foot Forward's approved systems. Records should distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and professional opinion, and should record relevant actions and decision-making.

Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis in line with safeguarding responsibilities and data-protection requirements. The safety and welfare of children will guide decisions about information sharing.

18. Staff training and expectations

Staff will receive safeguarding training and updates appropriate to their role. From 1 September 2026, staff working directly with children are expected to understand the relevant requirements of KCSIE 2026 Part One and Best Foot Forward safeguarding procedures.

Training and supervision will reinforce that:

- child-on-child abuse can happen anywhere and online;
- a lack of reports does not mean abuse is not taking place;
- sexual harassment and sexual violence must never be normalised;
- misogyny and other harmful attitudes should be challenged early;
- serious violence and exploitation require safeguarding responses;
- AI-generated nudes and semi-nudes fall within safeguarding concerns; and
- staff must report concerns promptly rather than attempting to investigate them themselves.

19. Safeguarding contacts

Role	Name	Contact
Designated Safeguarding Lead	Bethany Russell	07394 950803 beth@bestfootforward.org.uk
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Andrew Russell	07538 719783 andrew@bestfootforward.org.uk
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead	Kathleen Sweeney	07851 685318 Kathie.sweeney@bestfootforward.org.uk
External Safeguarding Advisor	Chris Tapley	07827 441659 conserva.ltd@gmail.com
Safeguarding recording	CPOMS	Record promptly in line with current procedure

Immediate danger or risk of serious harm: call 999.

20. What children should remember

You have the right to feel safe. Abuse is never your responsibility. You can tell any trusted adult at Best Foot Forward, even if you are unsure what has happened or whether it "counts" as abuse.

- Be respectful of other people's boundaries.
- Do not pressure anyone into sexual, physical or online behaviour.
- Do not share someone else's private or sexual images.
- Do not join in with bullying, humiliation or harmful group behaviour.
- Tell a trusted adult if you see or experience something that worries you.
- If you think someone is in immediate danger, get help straight away.

21. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where there is a significant safeguarding incident, relevant learning, changes to Best Foot Forward practice, or changes to legislation or statutory guidance.

The DSL will monitor themes and patterns in child-on-child abuse concerns and use this information to inform safeguarding practice, staff training, learner risk assessment and prevention work.

22. Reference framework

- Department for Education, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (effective 1 September 2026).
- Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- UK Council for Internet Safety, Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people (updated March 2024).
- Best Foot Forward Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Best Foot Forward Staff Code of Conduct.
- Best Foot Forward Lone Working Policy and Lone Working Risk Assessment.
- Best Foot Forward Behaviour and Online Safety arrangements.

23. Approval

Policy owner	Andrew John Russell
Approved by	Bethany Russell
Signature	
Date	12/08/2026
Next review	12/08/2027