

STCG Child-on-Child Abuse & Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Procedures

1. Introduction

1.1 South Thames Colleges Group, recognises that children can abuse other children (referred to as child-on-child abuse) and that it can take many forms. It can happen both inside and outside of school/college and online. Incidents of child-on-child abuse including sexual abuse and sexual harassment are not tolerated under any circumstances and will not be passed off as 'banter or growing up'. A victim of child-on-child abuse will always be taken seriously, supported and kept safe.

1.2 The Group is committed to the prevention, early identification and appropriate management of child-on-child abuse. This is underpinned by the principle of a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment – it is never accepted. In cases where child-on-child abuse is identified, the Groups child protection procedures will be implemented, taking a contextual approach to support all our learners who have been affected by the situation.

1.3 The Group recognises that child-on-child abuse can manifest itself in many ways such as:

- bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudiced based and discriminatory bullying);
- abuse in intimate personal relationships between teenagers
- physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages physical abuse)
- sexual violence,¹ such as rape, assault by penetration and sexual assault; (this may include an online element which facilitates, threatens and/or encourages sexual violence)
- sexual harassment,² such as sexual comments, remarks, jokes and online sexual harassment, which may be stand-alone or part of a broader pattern of abuse
- causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party
- online sexual harassment including consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi nudes' images and or videos (also known as sexting or youth produced sexual imagery), sexualised online bullying, unwanted sexual comments and messages, sexual exploitation, coercion and threats and coercing others into sharing images of themselves or performing acts they're not comfortable with
- upskirting, which typically involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without their permission, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm; and
- initiation/hazing type violence and rituals (this could include activities involving harassment, abuse or humiliation used as a way of initiating a person into a group and may also include an online element).

¹ For further information about sexual violence see [KSCiE 2023 PART 5](#)

² For further information about sexual harassment see [KSCiE 2023 PART 5](#)

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1.4 This procedure focuses primarily on child-on-child abuse in the context of sexual harassment and sexual violence and should be viewed alongside other Group policies and procedures including:

- Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Student Code of Conduct
- Attendance Behaviour and Commitment to Study Procedures (ABC)
- Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Policy
- E-safety Policy
- Policy for Low Level Safeguarding Concerns
- Procedure for Dealing with Allegations against members of staff

1.5 It is compliant with the statutory guidance on child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment abuse as set out in Part 5 *Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2023)* and should be read in conjunction with the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, and any relevant Practice Guidance issued by it.

2. Aims

2.1 These procedures will:

- Set out the Group strategies for preventing, identifying and managing child- on-child abuse
- Take a contextual approach to safeguarding all students who are involved
- Acknowledge that children who have allegedly abused their peers or displayed harmful sexual behaviour are themselves vulnerable and may have been abused by peers, parents or adults in the community

3. Context

3.1. Understanding Child-on-child abuse

- Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex or a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. The impact of this behaviour on children can be very distressing and have an impact on academic achievement and emotional health and wellbeing.
- Sexual harassment and sexual violence may occur online and offline (face to face physically and verbally).
- All behaviour takes place on a spectrum. Understanding where a child's behaviour falls on a spectrum is essential to being able to respond appropriately to it.
- The Group recognises the importance of distinguishing between problematic and abusive sexual behaviour (Harmful Sexual Behaviour HSB). The Group adopts the NSPCC definition of Harmful Sexual Behaviour SB as: "Sexual behaviours expressed by children, that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child or adult." We will also use Simon Hackett's continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual Behaviours (*Appendix 1*) and the Brook Traffic Lights (*Appendix 2*)

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3.2 Vulnerable groups

The Group recognise that all children can be at risk however, we acknowledge that some groups are more vulnerable to abuse and may face additional barriers to telling someone because of their vulnerability.

This can include:

- experience of abuse within their family
- living with domestic violence
- young people in care
- children who go missing
- children with additional needs (SEN and/or disabilities)
- children who identify or are perceived as LGBT and/or have other protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

Girls are more frequently identified as being abused by their peers and girls are more likely to experience unwanted sexual touching in college, this is not confined to girls. Boys are less likely to report intimate relationship abuse and may display other behaviour such as antisocial behaviour.

4. Responding reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment

4.1 Incidences of child-on-child abuse will follow the Attendance Behaviour and Commitment to Study Procedures (ABC) where appropriate. Reports of sexual violence and harassment will be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (or deputy), as appropriate to advise using their professional judgement and supported by other agencies such as social care or the police as required. In summary there are four ways to respond to an allegation:

1. Following the Attendance Behaviour and Commitment to Study Procedures (ABC)
2. Referral to Early help
3. Referral to local authority children's social care
4. Referral to the police

4.1 The immediate response to a reported incident

- The Group takes all reported incidents seriously and will reassure the victim that they will be supported and kept safe.
- Staff will not promise confidentiality as the concern will need to be shared further (for example, with the relevant safeguarding officer, Designated Safeguarding Lead or local authority children's social care). Staff will only share the report with those who are necessary to progress the case and care will be taken to protect the anonymity of any children involved in any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment.
- A written report using the individual college Safeguarding Reporting Form will be made as soon after the disclosure as possible, recording the facts as presented by the student. These may be used as part of a statutory assessment if the case is escalated later.
- Where the report includes an online element, the College will follow advice on searching, screening and confiscation. The staff will not view illegal images of a child unless

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unavoidable and only if another member of staff (preferably the DSL or deputy) is present. Illegal images will not be forwarded

- The DSL (or Deputy) will be informed as soon as possible.

4.2 Risk Assessment

When there has been a report of sexual violence, the Safeguarding Officer for the relevant college i.e. the college where the alleged victim is a student (in consultation with the Deputy or Designated Safeguarding Lead) will make an immediate risk and needs' assessment. Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The risk and needs' assessment should consider:

- the victim, especially their protection and support
- whether there may have been other victims
- the alleged perpetrator; and
- all the other children (and, if appropriate, adult students and staff) at the college, especially any actions that are appropriate to protect them.

Risk assessments will be recorded in the safeguarding files and be kept under review. The relevant Safeguarding Officer (in consultation with the Deputy or Designated Safeguarding Lead) will ensure they are engaging with local authority children's social care

4.4 Action following a report of sexual violence and/or sexual harassment

Following an incident, the following will be considered:

- the wishes of the victim in terms of how they want to proceed. This is especially important in the context of sexual violence and sexual harassment;
- the nature of the alleged incident(s), including: whether a crime may have been committed and/or harmful sexual behaviour has been displayed
- the ages of the children involved
- the developmental stages of the children involved
- any power imbalance between the children. For example, is the alleged perpetrator significantly older, more mature or more confident? Does the victim have a disability or learning difficulty?
- if the alleged incident is a one-off or a sustained pattern of abuse
- are there ongoing risks to the victim, other children, adult students or college staff?
- other related issues and wider context, including links to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation

4.4 Follow-up Actions

Children sharing a classroom:

While the Group establishes the facts of the case and starts the process of liaising with children's social care and the police:

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- In alleged cases of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault, the alleged perpetrator will be suspended pending a disciplinary investigation as per the Attendance Behaviour and Commitment to Study Procedures (ABC) and removed from any classes they share with the victim.
- In cases of sexual harassment, we will consider how best to keep the victim and alleged perpetrator a reasonable distance apart on college premises and on transport to and from the College.
- Support will be provided by the relevant college for both the alleged perpetrator and victim

These actions are in the best interests of both children and should not be perceived to be a judgment on the guilt of the alleged perpetrator.

4.6 Options to manage the report

1. Manage internally

In some cases of sexual harassment, for example, one-off incidents, where the children concerned are not in need of early help or statutory intervention it may be appropriate to handle the incident internally, perhaps through utilising the ABC/ Student Disciplinary policies and by providing pastoral support from the Pastoral Tutor working with the Student Support Team.

This decision will be made based on the principle that sexual violence and sexual harassment is never acceptable and will not be tolerated. All decisions, and discussions around making these decisions will be recorded and stored by the relevant Safeguarding Officer and recorded in the safeguarding files.

a. Early Help

In line with 1 above, the group may decide that the children involved do not require statutory interventions but may benefit from early help. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life. Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help can be particularly useful to address nonviolent harmful sexual behaviour and may prevent escalation of sexual violence.

b. Referrals to local authority children's social care

Where a child has been harmed, is at risk of harm, or is in immediate danger, we will make a referral to the MASH / SPA following locally agreed protocols.

Where statutory assessments are appropriate, the relevant safeguarding officer will work alongside and cooperating with, the relevant lead social worker (in consultation with the DSL or Deputy). Collaborative working will help ensure the best possible package of coordinated support is implemented for the victim and where appropriate, the alleged perpetrator and any other children that require support.

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c. Reporting to the Police and criminal investigations

Where a report of rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault is made, this will be reported to the police. Any report to the police will generally be made through the MASH/SPA as above. The safeguarding officer for the relevant college will follow local processes for referrals.

Where a report has been made to the police, the college will consult the police and agree what information can be disclosed to staff and others, the alleged perpetrator and their parents or carers. They will also discuss the best way to protect the victim and their anonymity.

Where there is a criminal investigation, we will work closely with the relevant agencies to support all children involved (especially potential witnesses). Where required, advice from the police will be sought in order to help us.

Whilst protecting children and/or taking any disciplinary measures against the alleged perpetrator, we will work closely with the police (and other agencies as required), to ensure any actions the Group takes do not jeopardise the police investigation.

4.6 The end of the criminal process

Once a criminal process has concluded, the Group will take appropriate action depending on the outcome of the process and in accordance with relevant Group policies:

- If a child is convicted or receives a caution for a sexual offence, the relevant college will update its risk assessment, ensure relevant protections are in place for all children. We will consider any suitable action following our behaviour policy.
- Where a criminal investigation into a rape or assault by penetration leads to a conviction or caution, we will take suitable action, if we have not already done so. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, the rape or assault by penetration is likely to constitute a serious breach of the Group's Student Code of Conduct and lead to the view that allowing the perpetrator to remain in college would seriously harm the education or welfare of the victim (and potentially other students).
- Where a criminal investigation into sexual assault leads to a conviction or caution, we may, if we have not already done so, consider any suitable sanctions as set out in the Student Disciplinary Policy and Criminal Convictions Policy including consideration of permanent exclusion.
- If the perpetrator remains in college, we will be very clear as to our expectations regarding the perpetrator now they have been convicted or cautioned. This could include expectations regarding their behaviour and any restrictions we think are reasonable and proportionate about the perpetrator's timetable.

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- Where cases are classified as “no further action” (NFA’d) by the police or Crown Prosecution Service, or where there is a not guilty verdict, we will continue to offer support to the victim and the alleged perpetrator for as long as is necessary. A not guilty verdict or a decision not to progress with their case will likely be traumatic for the victim. The fact that an allegation cannot be substantiated does not necessarily mean that it was unfounded. We will continue to support all parties in this instance. This includes risk assessing on a case-by-case basis. If the College feels that there remains a risk which it cannot mitigate, then they reserve the right to consider not allowing the alleged perpetrator to remain in College.
- Where the alleged perpetrator is going to remain at the College, the principle would be to continue keeping the victim and perpetrator in separate classes and continue to consider the most appropriate way to manage potential contact on college premises and transport.
- The College will where necessary include referral/ liaison with wider community and local/national organisations to provide further specialist advice and guidance: involvement from the Police or referrals to Early Help, Specialist Children’s Services, or CAMHS.

4.8 Unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious reports

4.9 If a report is determined to be unsubstantiated, unfounded, false or malicious, the designated safeguarding lead (or deputy) will consider whether the child and/or the person has made the allegation needs help or may have been abused by someone else and this is a cry for help. In these circumstances a referral to local authority children’s social care may be made.

4.10 If a report is found to be deliberately invented or malicious, the Group will decide whether disciplinary action is appropriate.

4.11 Ongoing Support for Children Affected by Sexual-Harassment and sexual Violence

4.12 Support for victims of sexual assault is available from a variety of agencies.

4.13 The College will support the victim of sexual assault to remain in college, but if they are unable to do so the College will support the victim to continue their education elsewhere. This decision will be made only at the request of the child and their family. If the victim chooses to move the College will work to ensure that the new College or training provider are aware of any ongoing support they may need. The College will support this move.

Where there is a criminal investigation and the alleged perpetrator remains in, the College will be removed from any shared classes with the victim and we will also consider how best to keep them a reasonable distance apart on the College premises or on college transport. This is in the best interest of the children concerned and should not be perceived to be a judgement of guilt before any legal proceedings.

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5. Physical Abuse and Serious Violence

- 5.1 While a clear focus of these child-on-child abuse procedures is around sexual harassment and sexual violence, physical assaults, initiation violence/rituals from student to student can also be abusive.
- 5.2 Some students may also be at risk from or are involved with serious violent crime. All staff should be aware of indicators, which may signal that learners are at risk from, or are involved with serious violent crime. These may include:

- increased absence from college,
- a change in friendships or relationships with older individuals or groups,
- a significant decline in performance,
- signs of self-harm or a significant change in wellbeing,
- or signs of assault or unexplained injuries.

Unexplained gifts or new possessions could also indicate that children have been approached by, or are involved with, individuals associated with criminal networks or gangs.

- 5.3 Child-on-child physical abuse and serious violence will not be tolerated and if it is believed that a crime has been committed, will be reported to the police.
- 5.4 The Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure will be applied in these cases, with recognition that any police investigation take priority.
- 5.5 When dealing with other alleged behaviour which involves reports of, for example, emotional and/or physical abuse, staff can draw on aspects of Hackett's continuum (Appendix 1) to assess where the alleged behaviour falls on a spectrum and to decide how to respond. This could include, for example, whether it:
- is socially acceptable
 - involves a single incident or has occurred over a period of time
 - is socially acceptable within the peer group
 - is problematic and concerning
 - involves any overt elements of victimisation or discrimination e.g. related to race, gender, sexual orientation, physical, emotional, or intellectual vulnerability
 - involves an element of coercion or pre-planning
 - involves a power imbalance between the child/children allegedly responsible for the behaviour
 - involves a misuse of power

6. Online Behaviour

- 6.1 Many forms of child-on-child abuse have an element of online behaviour which can take the form of abusive, harassing and misogynistic messages, the non-consensual

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sharing if indecent images, especially around chat groups, and the sharing of abusive images and pornography, to those who do not want to receive such content.

- 6.2 All staff should be aware that technology is a significant element for many safeguarding and wellbeing issues – notably child-on-child abuse.
- 6.3 Given the high frequency sharing of nude and semi-nude images – students who engage in consensual image sharing of nudes and semi-nude images and videos – especially between older students need to understand that it is illegal and could be reported to the Police as well as being regarded as a disciplinary matter as set out in the Student Code of Conduct and the Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

7. Prevention

- 7.1 STCG, actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by educating all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers, students and parents /carers about this issue. This will include training all Governors, Senior Leadership Team, staff and volunteers on the nature, prevalence and effect of child-on-child abuse, and how to prevent, identify and respond to it.

This includes:

- Contextual Safeguarding
- The identification and classification of specific behaviours and
- The importance of taking seriously all forms of peer-on-peer abuse (no matter how low level they may appear) and ensuring that no form of child-on-child abuse is ever dismissed.

8. Working with students

- 8.1 In order to prevent and protect students from child-on-child abuse, the Group will:

- Inform students about the nature and prevalence of child on child abuse via tutorials and the wider curriculum
- Provide numerous opportunities for students to be heard and understood on this matter
- Ensure students know what to do if they witness or experience such abuse, the effect that it can have on those who experience it and the possible reasons for it, including vulnerability of those who inflict such abuse.
- Ensure students understand the zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of child-on-child abuse and its implications
- Support both alleged perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment and abuse as outlined above
- Create culture in which our students feel able to share their concerns openly, in a non-judgmental environment, and have them listened to

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9. Multi-agency working

- 9.1 The Group actively engages with its local partners in relation to child-on-child abuse, and works closely with, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnerships, Safeguarding Hub (SPA/MASH), children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies, and other Colleges.
- 9.2 The relationships the Group has built with these partners are essential to ensuring that the Group is able to prevent, identify early and appropriately handle cases of peer-on-peer abuse.

They help the College to:

- (a) To develop a good awareness and understanding of the different referral pathways that operate in its local area, as well as the preventative and support services which exist
- (b) ensure that our students can access the range of services and support they need quickly
- (c) support and help inform our local community's response to child-on-child abuse
- (d) increase our awareness and understanding of any concerning trends and emerging risks in our local area to enable us to take preventative action to minimise the risk of these being experienced by our students.

- 9.3 The College actively refers concerns/allegations of child-on-child abuse where necessary to the relevant MASH, children's social care, and/or other relevant agencies. Children resident out of county but attending STCG will be reported to their home MASH or equivalent Social Care. In cases involving children who are subject to risk, harm and abuse and who have CLA status, the children's social worker will be informed and a coordinated approach to address any incidents or concerns will be required.

Appendix 1

Simon Hackett (2010) has proposed a continuum model to demonstrate the range of sexual behaviours presented by children and young people, from those that are normal, to those that are highly deviant:

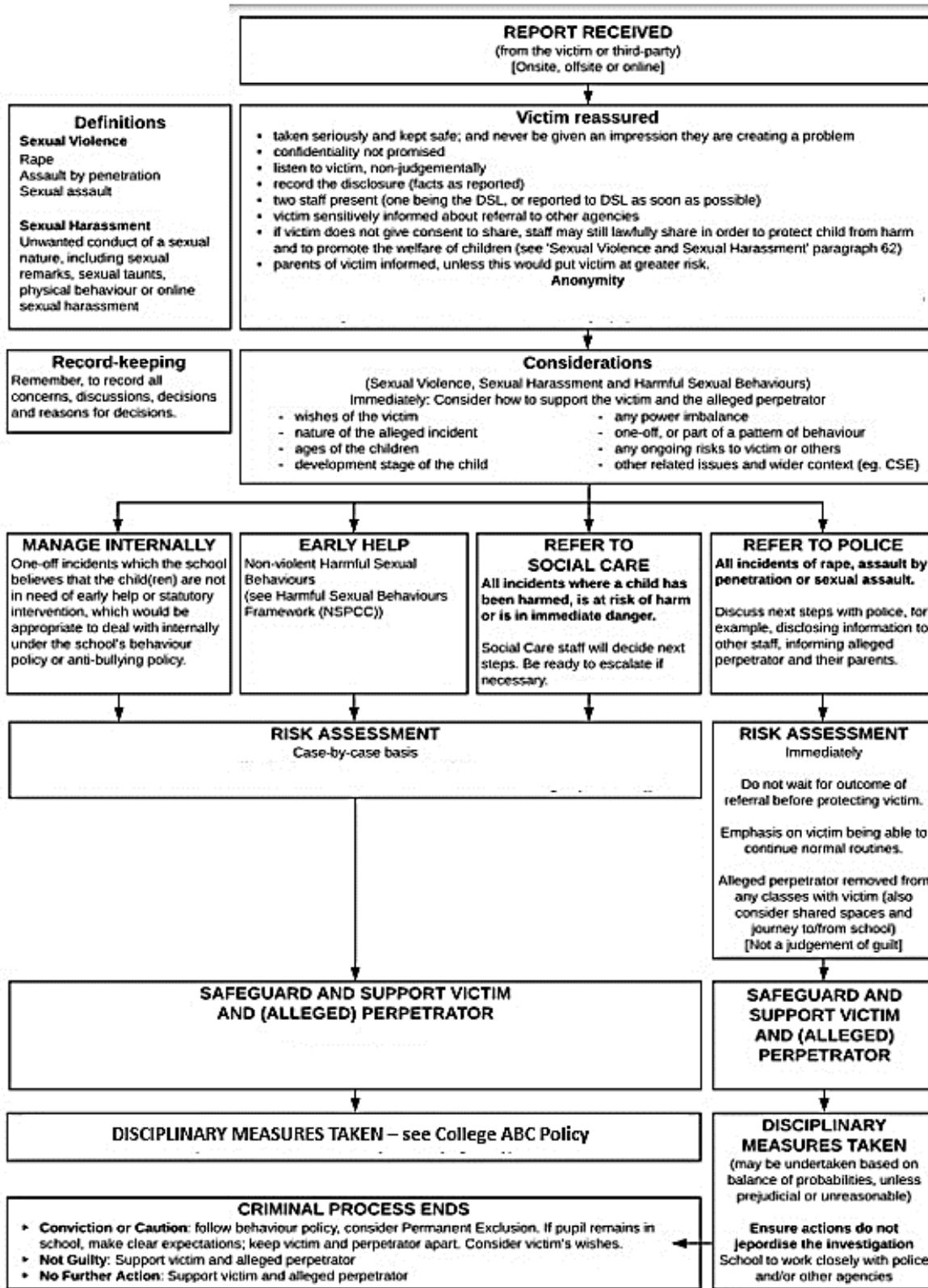
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/publications/harmful-sexual-behaviourframework.pdf>

Appendix 2

Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool – Book

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APPENDIX 2 – CHILD-ON-CHILD ABUSE & SEXUAL VIOLENCE/HARASSMENT FLOWCHART



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