



BENSHAM MANOR School

Allegations Against A Child

Last reviewed: July 2017



Introduction

Most people are aware of the risk of sexual abuse that some adults present to our children. There is a growing understanding that the vast majority of children who are sexually abused, are abused by someone they know, and often trust. Unfortunately, very few adults recognise that children and adolescents also can present a risk to other children. In fact, over a third of all sexual abuse of children is committed by someone under the age of 18.

It is not always easy to tell the difference between natural sexual curiosity and potentially abusive behaviours. Children, particularly younger children, may engage in inappropriate interactions without understanding the hurtful impact it has on others. For this reason, it may be more helpful to talk about a child's sexually "harmful" behaviour rather than sexually "abusive" behaviour.

What is Sexually Harmful Behaviour?

Sexually harmful behaviour by children and young people may range from experimentation that has gone too far to serious sexual assault.

Keep in mind:

- Children as young as 4 or 5 may unknowingly engage in sexually harmful behaviour, although more often those who sexually harm children are adolescents.
- Usually, but not always, the child or young person causing harm is older than the victim.
- Often the child being harmed is uncomfortable or confused about what is happening, but may feel that he or she is willingly involved or to blame for being in the situation.
- Many times, one or both children do not understand that the behaviour is harmful.

How do we recognise the signs of sexually harmful behaviour?

- Minimising, justifying or denying the impact of inappropriate behaviours on others
- Preferring to spend time with younger children rather than peers
- Insisting on physical contact with a child even when that child resists
- Responding sexually to typical gestures of friendliness or affection
- Reluctance to be alone with a particular child
- Engaging in sexually harassing behaviour online or in person
- Turning to younger or less powerful children to explore natural sexual curiosity
- Inability to control inappropriate sexual behaviours after being told to stop
- Taking younger children to "secret" places to play.

Behaviours to look out for if you think a child may be being sexually abused.

(these signs may also be caused by other factors and changes in a child's life)

- Nightmares, sleep problems, extreme fears without an obvious explanation
- Sudden and unexplained personality changes
- An older child behaving like a younger child
- Develops fear of particular places or resists being alone with a particular child
- Shows resistance to routine bathing, toileting or removing clothes even in appropriate situation (e.g getting changed for PE)
- Refuses to talk about a secret he/she has with an older child
- Stomach aches or illness with no identifiable means
- Leaves clues that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Uses new or adult words for body parts; engage in adult like sexual activities with toys, objects or other children

- Develops a special relationship with an older friend that may include unexplained money, gifts or privileges
- Self-harm including cutting, burning, running away, sexual promiscuity
- Drug and alcohol use
- Develops physical symptoms e.g soreness, pain bruises etc.

What we can do at Bensham Manor to prevent sexually harmful behaviour between children

- Set and respect physical boundaries. As adults we are responsible for modelling the boundaries we want children to honour. E.g being aware of personal space
- Encourage children to respect themselves and others
- Teach children when it is OK to say “no”. e.g. when they do not want to play, or be hugged etc
- Help them understand what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour
- Encourage them to always speak up if someone acts in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable
- Teach children that they must listen to and accept others’ limits as well
- Be alert to the warning signs that a child may be acting in ways that make you feel uncomfortable. Let the DSL know.
- Those that abuse others usually rely on secrecy. Listen carefully to children and let them know they should not worry about telling you anything.
- Continually remind children the dangers associated with using the Internet.
- Regularly remind children of trusted adults they can talk to

What to do if you suspect a child is being abused or if a child makes a disclosure

- Any concerns should be recorded on the “Expression of Concern” form and signed and dated. It should be passed to the DSL immediately.
- If a child makes a disclosure, listen to what the child is saying without interrupting and without asking leading questions
- Respect the child’s right to privacy but do not promise confidentiality
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling
- Explain to the child that in order to keep him/her safe from harm the information must be passed on
- Report what has been disclosed to the DSL
- Record, as soon as it is practicable, what was said using the child’s actual words