

“Nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable in their own body”

Understanding young people’s perspectives about peer-on-peer sexual harassment and harm.

What are the enablers to seeking help?



A joint project between Kirklees Safeguarding Children Partnership and Our Voice: Kirklees Children and Young People’s Participation Team

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Why did we work in partnership with young people on this project?

[Everyone's Invited](#) is a viral campaign, where survivors of sexual harassment and harm can anonymously write their story: 'testimony', on a website. It was founded by Soma Sara in March 2020, when she reflected on her experiences within a university setting. Within a month there were over 4000 testimonies uploaded. The site now documents 50,000 accounts.

The Government responded with an [OFSTED](#) review. This looked at young people's experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and harm within school settings. The review focussed on these specific questions:

- How does the current system of safeguarding in schools and colleges listen to the voices of children when reporting sexual abuse whether occurring within or outside school?
- What prevents children from reporting sexual abuse?
- Do victims receive timely and appropriate support from the right place?
- Have inspections by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and Ofsted been robust enough in relation to the issues raised?

The review found:

- That sexual harassment/abuse incidents are so commonplace, there is a lack of reporting.
- Online sexual abuse and harassment is more prevalent than adults would believe.
- Sexual violence occurs most frequently in unsupervised areas out of school. However, some non-consensual touch occurs on school corridors.
- Stigma, fear, non-belief, victim blaming, and Safeguarding Processes prevent girls reporting.
- Relationship Sexual Health Education (RSHE) doesn't cover peer on peer sexual harassment and harm holistically. Therefore, children and young people are seeking support and understanding via their peers and the internet.
- Adults in education provisions underestimate the prevalence of sexual harassment/abuse and violence within the provision, especially online occurrences.

A key recommendation of the review was that Multi-Agency Partners should engage directly with children and young people to ensure the way they respond is effective and tailored to need. This project aimed to address this.

How did we engage with children and young people?

This project was workshop based and mirrored the approach used by OFSTED. Four ‘third person’ scenarios were formulated, based on the review findings. These aimed to prompt discussion around peer-on-peer sexual harassment and harm. Thorough consideration was given to how we could manage the sensitivities with the young people who volunteered. These included clear discussions around confidentiality, ensuring conversations remained in the third person, high staff ratios and reaffirming what children and young people should do, if they were worried about any of the topics discussed. The project team had ongoing communication with the provisions designated safeguarding lead.

Participation in the project was voluntary. The young people were made aware of the workshop via their teachers/ provision staff and were invited to take part. Parents and carers were all made aware of the workshop via a letter. Parents and carers could withdraw consent for their young person to take part. Staff were asked to ensure those who volunteered understood the workshop’s contents and were not currently involved in safeguarding concerns or proceedings. All young people were given the scenarios prior to the workshop beginning and offered the opportunity to leave at any point.

Scenario 1. A young person is walking to their next lesson. They walk past a group of boy/girls/young people, shouting “show us your...”

Scenario 2. A young person’s phone beeps. They have received an unwanted a picture message of another student’s genitals (private parts) ...

Scenario 3. ‘A student has noticed another student ‘watching’ them for a few days. The other student has started to send multiple requests on social media which are all ignored and when they are in school, they keep trying to hug and touch them. One day the other person follows them home...

*This scenario was not used with the year 6 groups.

Scenario 4. A young person is stood in the school yard at break, when another young person runs up to them and ‘de-kegs’ them (pulls their trousers down) ...

Several communication approaches were used within the workshops. Young people could speak, write, or draw on paper tablecloths. In some sessions young people were able to participate using a computer or phones, using slido®

All conversations were written up verbatim as the sessions occurred. The key messages were then thematically analysed into this summary report. All information has been anonymised.

A little bit about monitoring and inclusion...

We believe first and foremost, that to participate in the development and review of Children and Young People's Services, you just need to be a child or young person. Therefore, we don't ask children and young people for any personal details. We offer our opportunities to all who want to volunteer their time and value each contribution. We also believe strongly in the quality and richness gained from listening and understanding key messages and personal experience over numbers.

Some children and young people were willing to share some information about themselves. This has been summarised below:

A total of 248 children and young people participated in this engagement

60 Year 6 children from North Kirklees

147 KS3 and KS4 young people from 4 provisions in North and 4 provisions in South Kirklees

25 Children and young people stated they have SEN/SEND support

3 young people discussed being in care or care leavers.

100 young people define themselves as belonging to our LGBTQ+ Community.

We visited 5 post 16 provisions, 10 secondary provisions (including an alternate provision), 1 primary school and 1 community provision

61 young people shared that they identify as part of our BAME (black and ethnic minority community)

187 young people stated that they were white British or European.

These figures only include young people who volunteered this information and consented to us to sharing it. There could be other experiences, or protected characteristics within the children and young people's lives that they didn't choose to share.

We ask broad questions and listen; we respond to what the young people say. We don't pose research questions, or statistically sample. Therefore, we do not consider this summary to be representative of all Kirklees children and young people. However, it is a very valuable collection of lived experience, thoughts, wishes and feelings.

We also understand that the informality of the approach can enable some young people to participate. We are confident some young people who have spoken up as part of this work, may have been previously unheard. We say THANK YOU to all the young people who participated.



The strictest parents make the sneakiest kids...

Female 15

If this happened to me or a girl in my community, we can't tell anyone. Straight away, adults would say 'What did you do for a boy to send you this'. We receive this stuff and just have to keep quiet. There isn't anyone we can tell...

Female 15

Why is everything 'straight, white and cis'? If you are unwilling to give your child the knowledge they need to grow up and make safe decisions-let go. You aren't actually being a parent

Young Person 19

I wouldn't tell anyone... It just brings me more sh*t.

Female 16

I really don't think anything's changed. People just got used to it. No one actually thinks 'Oh my God, I've just been sexually harassed'

Young Person 16

'Boys will be boys' is a complete get out of jail free card...

Young Person 15

When guys cat calls it's seen as creepy. But when girls do it, it's seen as cute...

Female 16

People see my disability first and think its fair game to ask personal and sexualised questions. It's not my duty to educate you on things you don't actually need to ask...

Female 20

My Dad doesn't like me seeing boys, because he says he was a teenage boy, and he doesn't trust them

Female 15

Same gender sexual harassment? Yeah, that's just brushed off...

Young Person 13

Tell someone if I was receiving nudes? Nah... I'd be made to stay home and get my phone taken away...

Why would I do that?

Female 15

Men are told to be masculine, and sh*t aren't they. You know, sweep in and protect women...

I really hate that. Don't want anyone saving me...

What? That's not what you want? Honestly thought that's what girls liked.

Male & Female 19

Girls are delicate, aren't they? They go and talk to each other in toilets...

Male 14

It's got to be better educating people and preventing this stuff happening in the first place, than punishing people after.

Male 14

The Headlines: What did we hear?

	Verbal Sexual Harassment	Non-Consensual Touch	Online Sexual Harassment
Do we see it as an issue?	Yes, predominantly for young people who define themselves as female or LGBTQ+. It occurs everywhere, not just in educational provisions.	Yes. We are quite clear around physical boundaries. Rarely non-consensual touch can occur in communal areas (when busy), but this is not seen to be frequent or commonplace.	Yes. Nudes are problematic and frequent for young women and young people from our LGBTQ+ community. We feel these are sent by a mixture of adults and peers.
Do we know what to do about it?	Yes, but it occurs so frequently, we rarely challenge it.	Yes, and feel confident that if we seek help, someone will do something about it. Shame and discomfort may prevent us reporting these incidents.	Yes, but generally will report direct to the platform and not to anyone else. If our nudes are 'leaked', adults may become aware even if we have not sought help.
Do we feel safe to act?	Sometimes. We often realise the impact on reflection and not always at the time of an incident. We avoid challenging to prevent escalation. We also feel verbal harassment is so common its 'pointless' trying to change it.	Yes. We feel adults view non-consensual touch as serious and will take action to address it. We also think our peers understand it is not ok.	Yes We can report and block perpetrators but are unlikely to tell anyone else. To some degree we are de-sensitised to receiving nudes and pornography as it occurs so frequently in the 13+ age groups. Adults are only involved if our nudes are 'leaked'.

Protected characteristics matter: Our gender, sexuality, and cultural beliefs need to be considered. They will affect the likelihood of us experiencing peer-on-peer harassment and harm. They also impact on our help seeking behaviours.

Enablers to seeking help: We need to be clear on who can help and be confident that they will 'do something'. It's essential to know what might happen if we seek help and that the trusted adult responds in a measured and proportionate manner^{*}. This bit is REALLY Important.

Barriers to seeking help: The fear of disbelief and feelings of shame and embarrassment are huge worries for us. Concerns around escalation and the possible interventions/ outcomes can prevent us asking for help. If we are a LGBTQ+ young person, we may be 'outed' against our will. If we define ourselves as female, we are likely to be sanctioned, rather than the perpetrator.

What do the headlines tell us we should do?

When we combine the messages from all the young people who volunteered their time, here are their suggestions on how to really make a difference, when it comes to addressing peer on peer sexual harassment and harm.

In the short term:

- Switch to a focus on perpetrators, the harm that's caused and why this is a problem. Stop placing the onus on 'avoiding being a victim'.
- Work closely with us to create a meaningful RSHE curriculum. We understand technology and the changing landscapes of current culture far better than adults! We need to navigate contextual concepts of risk and danger and we can tell you what these are. We are quite skilled at managing some things already and lots of the support on offer seems to focus on what we already know, rather than what we feel we need to know.
- Develop our understanding of allyship. There is strength in numbers, together we can challenge oppression, develop affiliation, and create empathy. All things that we feel reduce the likelihood of harm.

In the mid-term:

- Develop training and resources that provisions can use to restoratively address peer on peer sexual harassment/harm. They should help the adults around us work with us to understand the impact of a person's behaviour towards another. We feel this would help people understand why peer on peer sexual harassment is harmful, rather than just saying "it's wrong". This is quite specialised in our opinion and needs 'the right training, people and approach'. It should be inclusive, and consider intersectionality (gender, ethnicity, faith, ability, and sexuality).
- Talk about the things that matter to us, in context. Create safe spaces to explore challenging and conflicting issues. This takes bravery and we accept it is a journey into the 'unknown'. Why don't we do this already? We feel adults around us might need training, support or even reflection time to develop these skills and enhance their knowledge.

In the Long term:

- Addressing peer on peer sexual harassment and harm is not just the role of schools/provisions. We feel we need to be talking about respect, consent, and boundaries from our early years. Parents, carers, and other key adults in our lives may need support with this. Modelling expected behaviours is so important, we need to see this 'in action'. We all felt the need to be able to discuss feelings, bodies, and relationships without feeling worried or shame: so, adults need to reflect on how they manage their feelings about these topics and their reactions to these conversations too.
- We need to be brave to challenge processes that 'inhibit-not enable'. Some of our safeguarding procedures are currently viewed as not proportionate, we feel they prevent us reporting. We need to explore alternate options and systems change.

Verbal Sexual Harassment: Looking at this more closely.

What young people said...	What does this tell us?	How could we respond?
“We don’t always understand where ‘banter’ stops, and the offence begins”	Are we making space to have important conversations about boundaries and respect?	Help us understand how to have conversations which seek to understand one another. Let’s safely explore how to connect and how to foster intimacy and develop trust. Let’s also understand the impact of harassment on others.
“You can sanction them, but it doesn’t change who they are or how they carry on behaving”	We see our provisions sanctioning people for sexual harassment. Although it’s good there’s a response, we think these actions are limited in effect. They focus on punishment, but not understanding. The perpetrator doesn’t really understand the harm they cause and so we feel this approach is limited in preventing further peer on peer harassment and harm.	Consider using restorative approaches where a person understands the impact of their words and learn to repair the harm they have caused. Look at having more meaningful conversations around the subject when something topical has happened or we can apply the concept. This means being flexible and confident in creating a learning experience! Something which we know is difficult in the constraints of curriculum. It takes strong and confident adults to do this including our parents or carers. They may need help to learn to talk about and understand these issues.
“It happens all the time outside of school. Older people shout from cars. I mean they know we are kids because we are wearing school uniform”	We are clear on the places in our local area, which are unsafe. We also don’t really understand the reporting mechanisms for ‘out of provision’ incidents.	Work with us to expand adult knowledge of contextual/place-based safeguarding. Create a feedback mechanism with neighbourhood policing teams and community partners to help address the sexual harassment that is occurring in our local areas. Ensure all adults work together to ensure our safety.
“People do it to shame you, you know you might not be conventionally attractive, and they start saying ‘hey you’re sexy, can I have your number’. then they all just laugh...”	We might overlook some forms of sexual harassment that are less obvious, but equally as damaging. This kind of harm is more commonly reported by those of us who are LGBTQ+. This happens more often in quieter areas of our provision.	Allyship helps! Someone standing with helps us, reduces loneliness and makes us feel safer. It manages the worries of ‘disbelief’ if we do seek help too, as there are witnesses to what has happened. Ensure there are safe accessible changing spaces/toilets and facilities for young all young people. For those of us who are trans, these incidents can occur in these spaces and places more often.

It's almost like you should be grateful for it. You know it's like you are 'wanted'. You don't report it because you don't want the odd one out.

Female 14

Lad hierarchy means everyone can get away with whatever they want, because mates cover for one another

Female 15

I tend to feel embarrassment and blame myself-was I just over-reacting?

Female 13

Cat-calling? it depends on how often it happens. Three or more times and I'd tell someone.

Young Person 16

Grooming or validating someone?

There is a thin line between excessive compliments and it being too much. It's difficult to see that line.

Female 14

It's not just verbal, is it? It's being able to use your size or physical presence to intimidate others

Young Person 18

I don't think half of the time the person doing it really wants to pursue you-they just want to make you feel embarrassed

Male 15

Banter? Where does banter stop, and offence begin? It's really hard to know. I'd say it's when it's happening all the time and it just becomes too personal. you know?

Male 16

It's bad enough being humiliated in the first place, but then you have the embarrassment of having to tell someone about it

Male 13

You know, people are so closed minded, but open mouthed...

Young Person 14

Happens literally everywhere...

Female 16

It's typically men in the street, in public.

Female 16

It's not just shouting out. It's asking really personal questions...

Young Person 16

Non-Consensual Touch: Looking at stalking type behaviours and physical harassment more closely.

What young people said...	What does this tell us?	How could we respond?
“Girls are often told to change how they act, where they walk, how they dress, when in reality it’s boys that need to change”	Are we encouraging protective behaviours or ‘victim blaming?’ It’s a very blurry line. Although knowing how to be as safe as possible is useful, it’s down to people not harming others, rather than us having to ‘protect ourselves’.	Flip the narrative. Let’s start actively talking about not harassing or harming others, rather than placing all the focus on protective behaviours. We accept protective behaviours matter and can help keep us safe, but let’s address the real problem, instead of just ‘managing it’.
“We romanticise ‘winning over behaviour’ and its bull sh*t. The narrative is manipulated to make it seem you’re desirable, attractive and adored, when really you are just being harassed”	The media and influences around us are contradictory! What is shown to be popular or romantic can be quite harmful and leave us feeling unhappy and conflicted. It gives us mixed, confusing messages about what makes a good relationship.	Develop our critical thinking. Help us understand how we formulate safe, caring, and loving relationships, of all kinds. To do this we need focussed, co-produced and meaningful relationship, sex and health education. Which allows us safe space to process some of this. Adults around us need to use real world examples of positive relationships and show us how to critically analyse some of the messages we are receiving through the media. Let’s talk about what really matters, rather than shying away from the challenging stuff.
“This happens a lot. People watching you and following you. People really need support to handle rejection”	People aren’t always able to handle ‘no’. They think it’s ok to keep being persistent when they’ve clearly been told to stop.	Having conversations about resilience following rejection? Ensure that reports of harassment are taken seriously, and the person perpetrating is aware that their actions are causing upset/harm.
“Boys pulling each other’s trousers down, well that’s a laugh. You just wouldn’t do it to a girl though...”	Gender stereotypes still prevail, and we need to constantly address this. Those of us who were assigned male at birth, are more likely to see ‘de-kegging’ and non-consensual touch as a joke, especially if it is between our peers.	We could set the same standards and expectations for all. Personal space is personal space, regardless of gender. If we explore boundaries and consent, we are likely to view this differently.

It's more likely to happen in really busy areas because you can pass it off as brushing past someone, or you know, an accident

Young person 13

Consent has never been touched on. I don't think we have ever covered it in our sex education sessions or PSHE.

Male 14

Experiencing sexual harassment or harm is usually the opener to a conversation about it.

That's not really the best place to start. Perhaps knowing about it, before it happens would be more helpful?

Young person 18

You know, wanting my own personal space-it isn't an assault against you

Female 17

I can flirt but not want to be touched

Young Person 15

We really need to start talking about how you handle rejection. It's almost like if you keep going at it, they will eventually get it.

Young Person 17

Unwanted touch is the most serious. It's the most invasive...

Male 15

How do you prove it? I've been through CCTV before, written statements, even SLT has been involved but it's one person's word against another

Female 15

It isn't always easy to read the signals when there is a vibe. If you don't want me to touch you, you need to be telling me...

Male 16

If it was my mate I'd intervene. I'd say 'listen mate, you shouldn't be trying to hug them/hold their hand...

Male 15

I know not telling would probably mean it would get worse. But telling might make it worse too.

Male 11

This could be really hard to manage. It might not just be someone your own age you know, it might be someone in your family. Who would you tell then?

Female 14

Online Sexual Harassment: More detailed discussions around online harassment and 'nudes'

What young people said...	What does this tell us?	How could we respond?
"Nudes are just part of a mature and loving relationship"	<p>Not everyone is clear on expectations, boundaries, or consent in relationships.</p> <p>We don't really know how to initiate conversations with a partner around what we want from a relationship, how to say what we like and don't like and how to say no. Some of us believe that once in a relationship 'consent is inferred'.</p>	<p>We really need help with communication. How do we talk about the things that matter and keep us safe in a relationship? We feel the focus is heavily based on what a negative relationship looks like (domestic abuse). We don't really understand how to develop a positive, strong, and communicative partnership. Adult reactions to these conversations matter. If we ask and are met with an angry or disproportionate response, we aren't likely to ask again. We've been brave and responsible asking, please work through these questions with us.</p>
"Nudes, it happens daily. You just report, block and delete"	<p>The frequency and prevalence of nudes appears huge. Those of us aged 12+ manage this by reporting directly to the platform, but we rarely tell anyone else.</p>	<p>A campaign for Social Media platforms to be transparent with the data they receive-and share this with Safeguarding Children Partnerships. This would start to show the real scale of the issue. Some of us still don't fully understand security settings on apps, while others are very knowledgeable-we could do with some peer led training to share our skills and safety tips.</p>
"It was revenge porn. It got leaked all over school; so, the adults found out that way"	<p>Adults often become aware of online sexual harassment and harm at the point of an incident or crisis. We are aware we shouldn't circulate images, but we do. This is mainly without thought.</p>	<p>Let's unpick why we are sending nudes in the first place? Is it because we think we should? If so, we need to look at 'expectations' in a relationship. Is it because we don't feel confident to say no? Then we need to bolster strength and resilience. We need to work together to really change this.</p>
"When we talk about online abuse and grooming, it's always creepy old men they use as examples; you know...In reality it isn't"	<p>Adults might focus on hetero-normative/stereotypical perpetrators, when helping us learn about online grooming and harassment. This can prevent us from seeing the true nature and scale of the problem. If we do receive nudes from peers, it often comes with a message encouraging us to send them back.</p>	<p>We feel adults have set the parameters on what they think is sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour without really speaking to us. This means our understandings can be based on non-contextual examples. It also means we speak heavily about the fear of abduction/ kidnap and 'worse case scenarios' in discussions, but can overlook regularly occurring risks.</p>

The speed of change in how platforms work and how people can misuse them, is faster than the changes in law.

It's difficult online to tell between manipulation and good intent

Yeah, I do feel sorry when someone's nudes get leaked. But you know, people still click and share them. It's like they are all sheep, and they just follow the herd...

It's ALWAYS on snapchat® and Insta®. Usually sent anonymous. Block them and they just make another account.

Female 15

Grooming people or validating people?
There is a thin line between excessive compliments and it being too much. It's difficult to see that online.

I reckon people our age just send nudes for the laugh

Male 16

Sexual assault and rape prosecutions are so low, why would anyone put themselves through all that, in trying to stop this?

Young Person 17

Yes, you know the law and you know circulating those images is illegal; but it's a laugh in the minute, isn't it? Everyone does it and no one does anything about it. It's just like it's someone else's turn next week.

Female 15

So, wait. I can wear a bikini on a beach and it's ok if that photo ends up on insta. But once I'm not on the beach and I send a picture in a bikini to someone, it's child porn? Doesn't make sense mate.

Female 15

If you are popular and get good grades, there's more likely to be something done about it. If you are like me, you just get told to carry on, in a few days someone else will be the talk of the school

You can tell from the picture if it's a man's or a boy's nude...

Female 16

Understanding the experiences of young people with protected characteristics

“Gender stereotypes are everything...they mean you are treated differently”

Those of us who identify as female have a greater awareness of these scenarios occurring in the ‘real world’. We reported being more likely to receive ‘nudes’ or know people that have. A common belief discussed was that *“boys send nudes to get one back”*. Some of us described requests being relentless; in order to ‘make us give in’. Being verbally harassed in the street and in school or college is common.

Those of us who identify as male think young men rarely receive nude images, if at all. Our discussions frequently mirrored the OFSTED review, where young men underestimated the prevalence of the issue, particularly for young women. In male only workshops ‘banter’ and male on male harassment was a common theme. When mixed gender workshops occurred, our eyes were opened to what others experience and we were offered insight to challenges which we might not have previously considered.

For those of us that are LGBTQ+ and particularly, gay young men, nudes are commonplace. We sometimes feel trapped and so can’t do anything about it. If we share the details with adults, it might expose or highlight feelings around our identity and sexuality, which we haven’t yet worked through, or are ready to share with others yet. This isolates us and can place us at enhanced risk.

“I get told gay people don’t exist and I shouldn’t be here. In school something is done about it. But if I’m outside of those gates, it’s like there isn’t anything I can do...”

Although we might not all be ready to seek help from adults, we are aware that there are processes and procedures in school to address ‘hate crime’. In the community and outside of the school gates, reporting is much more challenging. There are usually less people about and so we fear being doubted. Some of us do not have close relationships with our parents or carers and this means we might struggle finding someone to tell. When we have reported community incidents to adults in provision, we can sometimes be told we need to report this to our parents, or the Police. This leaves us stuck.

We feel representation of LGBTQ+ relationships and understanding of our experiences are poor in most provisions. Language, images, and examples all tend to be ‘cis-hetero*’ (*Cisgender, meaning a person’s gender is the same as sex assigned at birth. Heteronormative, where a heterosexual is proposed as normal or preferred). Discussions around same gender sexual harassment are limited and the processes to report issues aren’t nuanced or adjusted to the difficulties we face. Representation matters. By ensuring we are included and valued, some of the oppression we face is reduced. We become less isolated, and this can reduce the likelihood of incidents and make us feel safer.

“Really we need some help on how to change this. My parents would be more likely to listen to Faith Leaders or people from within the community”

We really do understand there are complexities when thinking about sex, relationship, and health education in the context of our religious beliefs.

We feel conflicted at times about this and so we understand why the adults around us might find this really challenging.

We speak about not being able to confide in anyone if we are experiencing harassment and harm. The main reason for this is because we feel we will be blamed: that we are somehow responsible for the harassment. Rather than the focus being placed on the perpetrator, we are made to feel shame. It gives us the message that adults don't trust us. This is hurtful when we do follow expectations and are behaving responsibly.

Some of us discuss already having lots of rules and boundaries in place about who we can spend time with or where we can go. We have seen this increase, for our peers who have reported harassment or sexual harm. They might have had to stay home more or are no longer allowed a mobile phone.

So that we don't end up being sanctioned for the behaviour of others, we just don't tell anyone. This means that we may be at greater risk because we can't communicate worries, challenges, or difficulties because of adult responses and the 'fear of what might happen'.

We feel an anonymous platform or reporting system would help with these challenges. When we spoke with the project officers about this, we understand this is real a worry to adults, because they fear 'how can we help, if we don't know who we are helping?'

We understand this but feel just being able to speak out, might then give us confidence or an alternate way of seeking help. Without this, we feel the risks remain and we are unlikely to seek any help, if at all.

We also spoke in length that our parents and carers might view support and guidance around peer-on-peer sexual harassment and harm with suspicion if it doesn't come from trusted people within the community. Reaching out though faith leaders and community organisations might help us all work together on resolving our inability to report. It would also increase our closeness with our parents, carers, and families.

What enables us to seek help?

“What do you do, if you literally have no one who you can tell?”

As part of this workshop, we were asked think about who our ‘trusted adult’ would be, should we have needed help and support. The people we discussed really varied. They included parents, teachers, older siblings, close family, teachers, or other professionals. Many of us would not tell an adult. We would only seek help from our peers, if at all.

This means it’s important we are all clear on how to help someone experiencing peer-on-peer harassment and harm. We all need to understand processes, interventions, and possible support agencies. This would enable us to be consistent and confident on how to assist each other and signpost those in need of help.

“I mean it’s awkward talking about sex with adults, you know when they sit across the table from you...”

Shame, embarrassment and not being able to talk openly about bodies, sex and relationships means it’s hard to tell you if something isn’t right. Talking factually and from an early age about bodies might help us to change this. This means we have chance to develop the language and skills before harm might occur and we feel this is important. The conversations will become normal to us and prevent us feeling awkward. It also creates opportunities for adults to become practiced and more comfortable in talking about issues they may find difficult or embarrassing. When adults aren’t comfortable, we see and feel this, and it makes things really hard to discuss.

Being confident about consent and what makes a good relationship also makes it easier to say “no” or challenge things that make us feel uncomfortable. Discussing consent when we are reaching the end of high school is too late for us. By key stage 4 peer pressure is strong, and we might not have had time to embed the skill of being assertive and declining requests.

“I wouldn’t report because it’s not as easy as following a flow chart. It’s different for each person and it’s my life we are talking about”

We feel we are quite good at managing some risks. We manage some of the issues in the scenarios daily. We also feel peer on peer harassment and harm won’t change quickly or easily.

We really want you to work with us on understanding how we are already managing the challenges we face. Do we just need some reassurance or a little guidance? Is a referral to social care and informing our parents/carers the only option? We need you to trust us to know when we need extra help. We feel when we do tell an adult, sometimes things escalate too quickly. We also feel the safeguarding processes which are meant to help aren’t always proportionate.

Please consider the current processes to report are very challenging for some of us with protected characteristics. We really need to explore how we could improve this. In some cases, seeking help increases our risk of harm, primarily because our parents or carers are informed almost immediately. Our networks may not always respond in a helpful or supportive manner.

We know there are designated teachers for children who are looked after or those who experience Special Educational Needs and or Disability (SENDCO's). We feel having a connected LGBTQ+ teacher would really help with reporting and support. This person could be a true ally, well trained and be able to respond in the most helpful way.

We haven't looked in detail at what changes we'd suggest to Safeguarding processes, as part of this project. This is because we know changing policy is very difficult. We see this as a possible area of development and further work.

“I was asked what I was wearing when I reported. Why is that even a question?”

How people respond really matters.

The language used, can unintentionally make us feel we are responsible or that should have behaved differently. This is because we often see the focus on our actions and increasing our protective behaviours, rather than really addressing reducing peer on peer harassment and harm. We need to work together on changing attitudes, highlighting impact, and using meaningful and effective interventions to increase people's understanding of harm.

Do boys really not experience any of this, or are they just not saying?

We found discussing peer on peer harassment and harm in mixed gender groups insightful.

We understood things from each other's perspectives, and it encouraged us to explore issues and ideas. Some of the things we spoke up about, we'd not really thought about before. This seems to be because we had an open and safe space to talk, with time to work through the issues.

This made us think how representation of individual experiences is important. By working with people who do not share our experiences, we were introduced to relationship challenges, difficulties or issues, which we might not usually consider. It allowed safe space to discuss and de-mystify some issues and created confidence to communicate. This might help those of us, who wouldn't usually speak out, share more in future.

How this engagement could support service review, design, and delivery

This engagement set out to understand:

1. Do young people see peer on peer sexual harassment and or harm as issues?
2. Do they know what to do about it, if they want to seek help?
3. Do they feel safe to act?

Young people said:

Yes! Verbal harassment and online harassment are particularly problematic. Non-consensual touch is still perceived as problematic but does not happen as often.

Here are our suggestions summarised, which might help us all work together on positive change.

Educate

- Develop our knowledge of peer-on-peer harassment and harm. What is it? How can we challenge it? How does allyship work? Who can help? How do we make sure everyone feels confident to manage it? This includes children, young people, parents/carers, community organisations and professionals too.

Make Space

- Create safe, open, and honest spaces to work through the issue of peer-on-peer harassment and harm. Take advantage of informal and contextual learning opportunities as they occur. This means being flexible. To be able to do this, we all need to feel skilled and confident to communicate, despite the sensitivities of the issue.

Include

- One size doesn't fit all when addressing peer on peer sexual harassment and harm. The issues and risks vary dependent on gender, sexuality, faith, ethnicity, age, ability and geographic location. This all needs further exploration as any interventions or procedures that do not consider this, will be limited in their impact.
- Representation and inclusion enhance understanding. We need to be aware of what is problematic for each other and the only way we can truly do this is by making sure we consider the experiences of all.

Co-Produce

- Young people are knowledgeable and willing to help make the change! Let's work together to improve outcomes and ensure that interventions are really focussed to addressing the issues that affect us. More questions might emerge from this engagement. Let's look at how we can continue the conversation.

Need information, guidance, or support?

As we completed this project, we have found some useful information and resources.

The 'pathway' for reporting peer-on-peer sexual harassment and harm is the same as any other safeguarding concern. You can seek information, support, and guidance on any incidents by contacting Kirklees Duty and Advice Team. You can call 01484 414960 (Professionals) or 01484 456848 (Children, families, or members of the public).

The Kirklees Safeguarding Children Partnership have a brief guide to reporting worries, incidents and concerns [here](#).

Information about harmful sexual behaviour can be seen here: [Harmful Sexual Behaviour \(HSB\) - KSCP \(kirkleessafeguardingchildren.co.uk\)](#)

Some useful sites, which we have 'Youth Proofed' and feel are worth exploring:

- A NSPCC podcast, about HSB in schools can be found [here](#).
- A Stonewall guide to developing an inclusive LGBTQ+ RSHE curriculum [here](#).
- The None in Three, Danielle, computer game. A free resource created by the University of Huddersfield, which is available [here](#).
- 'Stop it Now' information and resources from the Lucy Faithful Foundation, [here](#).
- Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) information and resources, available [here](#).
- Information about projects and services who support young people who are LGBTQ+ and have faith, are available from Stonewall [here](#).

The Listening and Responding to Inform Change (LARTIC) network, is in development, with the aim of bringing services and service users together to create systems and service changes. You can find out more by contacting amy.wadeson@kirklees.gov.uk (Safeguarding Children Partnership Project Officer) or looking [here](#).

This was the first stage of this project. We want to follow up in 12-18 months to check in with young people, see what changes there have been, and report back with further insight and ideas. If you'd like to register your interest to be involved in the next series of workshops, please email ourvoice@kirklees.gov.uk

I think non-consensual touch happens all the time to boys and they just see it as a joke. My boyfriend always talks about the play fighting and pushing each other around in the changing rooms

Young Person 15

Sex education shouldn't be sugar coated. You need to know the reality of a situation to be able to make proper decisions.

Female 17

I'm not really sure why we always split the girls from the boys when we talk about bodies? When I was 11, they took us into a different classroom to talk about periods? I didn't understand why. The boys all just took the mick out of us. I felt ashamed of my period. How ridiculous is that? It's something we should all understand.

Female 18

It's the same people that do it and get away with it. It's almost like 'well at least they aren't doing something worse'.

Female 14

I don't think people understand the harm they cause. One teacher read him an impact statement. He stopped right away...

Female 14

I once saw some guys really going at this girl, shouting horrible stuff at her and she looked so upset. They were in a car, must have been about 18. I didn't know what to do as I was scared, they might hurt me if I got involved.

I never thought it might have helped to just go and stand with her...

Male 16

I don't think we all have had the same support or have had the same understanding about RSHE. Some of us did some of it on teams during the pandemic and some of us didn't at all...

Male 13

It's almost seen as cool. Send nudes, sh*g someone, go tell your mates

Female 16

Our Challenge to Adults and Decision Makers

We really value people listening to us, but we don't always find out what happens after we have participated.

If you change ANYTHING as a result of reading this, please let us know.

You can email ourvoice@kirklees.gov.uk and the team will make sure any feedback gets back to us.

It could be that this has made you think differently about an issue, that you have changed how you do something (you or your agency) or that you have ideas to run by us. Really anything!

By feeding back, we are reassured you have listened. We feel valued and understand how we have made a difference. This is REALLY IMPORTANT because it means we are more likely to help again when you need us.

Thanks!

The Our Voice webpage is here: [Our Voice](#)
You can also follow us, on our Socials: [Facebook](#) [Insta](#) or email ourvoice@kirklees.gov.uk