

## **Sexual violence and sexual harassment.**

As parents and carers we all need to be aware that children can abuse other children and for some children, the frequency that harmful sexual behaviours occur to them, makes them feel that this is quite normal. In 2021 OFSTED completed their "Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges" and reported that children and young people stated that the following things happened "a lot or sometimes" to them or their peers:

- Sexist name calling
- Unwanted touching
- Any form of sexual assault
- Pressure to do sexual things that they didn't want to do
- Being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they didn't want to see

### **So what do these terms mean?**

**Harmful sexual behaviour** – is problematic, abusive and violent behaviour by a child or young person that is developmentally inappropriate and may cause developmental damage. This can occur on line or off line, face to face.

**Sexual violence** is rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault or causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent.

**Sexual assault** is intentional sexual touching **without consent** eg. can be a single act of kissing someone without consent, touching someone's bottom etc.

**Consent**- this is having the capacity and freedom to choose and can be withdrawn at any time during sexual activity and each time activity happens. If someone is coerced, pressured or threatened into saying yes to such activity this is NOT consent. Sexual intercourse without consent is rape and the age of consent is 16. **NO child** under the age of **13** can give consent to any sexual activity.

**Sexual harassment** is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that can occur on line and off line. This can include sexual comments, making sexual remarks about clothes and appearance and calling sexual names, making sexual jokes or taunting and displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature. Physical behaviour can also be seen to fall into this category where someone may deliberately brush against someone or touch their clothing.

**Online sexual harassment** can include non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi nude images or videos, sharing or unwanted explicit content, upskirting, sexualised online bullying, unwanted sexual comments or messages, sexual exploitation, coercion and threats.

**Upskirting** is the taking a picture of someone under their clothing without consent.

### **What to look out for?**

Children and young people may be reluctant to report sexual violence or harassment as sometimes they make the mistake that it is something that happens and it is normal. This mistake is a message that parents/ carers and all professionals who work with children must endeavour to eradicate. Sometimes a young person may blame themselves for what has happened to them and feel ashamed or scared to report it. It is therefore important that we work together to look for signs that may indicate support and intervention is needed:

- They may appear angry, upset, stressed, worried, scared and confused
- Have difficulty sleeping and have night terrors

- Find it difficult to concentrate or sit still
- Talk about flashbacks or block out certain events, episodes, days
- Become withdrawn and difficult to talk to
- Claim that nobody understands them

### **What can you do?**

Know your child- if you see a change which you can't explain take them out of the home environment for a walk, some food anywhere where you can talk and they can't escape to their room and close up. Give them the chance to open up, identify what you see - the change that is clear to you, and let them speak. If they don't open up, then accept that they may not be ready or you may not be the person they can speak to about this as you are too close to them. Offer advice as to who else they can speak to – a sibling, a relative, a friend or someone at school. Reassure them that talking is what is needed and people will not judge. Signpost them to the school website - Speak out button or online services.

It is important that we work together to educate our young people about healthy relationships. It is not easy being a parent in a time where online activity and social media dominate young people's lives, but we can and must strive to ensure that they stay safe and see mutual respect to be the basis of every relationship. If you are concerned please talk to us and we can help. Sexual violence and sexual harassment has no part in our school, community or society as a whole.