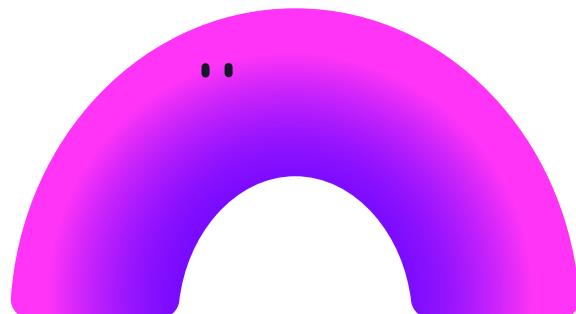
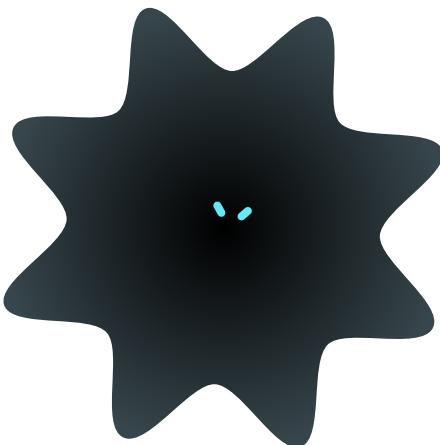


5. Recommendations for policy and practice pertaining to preventing and responding to harmful sexual behaviour through police-school partnerships

The following framework is built on the assumption schools are places of education, where young people are prepared with the information and skills that they need to navigate the world around them. Schools are microcosms of society and, as places of learning, there opportunities for schools to be places where negative behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that exist in society can be challenged. Young people will inevitably make mistakes and get things wrong and will need safe adults to help guide and correct their mistakes. This does not mean that young people should not be held responsible for their actions but should have space to correct their actions and make amends, rather than being drawn into overly punitive or undue criminalisation, which may be counterproductive and do more harm than good.

These recommendations take a relationship-based approach, designed to promote ethical behaviours and to help young people attain sexual citizenship. The approach involves acknowledging that young people have the right to honest information and the space to help them manage their relationships both online and offline. Equally, it acknowledges that young people will engage in behaviours which, while part of typical development, might make adults uncomfortable and may, sometimes, require a safeguarding response, such as the sharing of intimate images or viewing of pornography. Yet in order for safe adults to help young people navigate new and evolving contexts of sexual development and life, taking a negative, shame or abstinence approach is counterproductive; instead, it is our role to acknowledge both the opportunities and challenges of being online for young people and the diversity of their experiences of and perspectives on the contemporary nature of HSB. This is a harm-reduction approach based around empowering young people to foster critical thinking and have ethical relationships based on kindness and mutual respect.



1. Assess



Read through the recommendations and consider how these fit with your existing policies and practice

We recognise that change takes time and often comes from making small incremental changes.

Identify and understand pupils' needs

Efforts to prevent and respond to HSB among young people unfolds within their wider peer and social contexts. Both those who report and those who have instigated the behaviours may be ostracised by peers or accused of overreacting or lying. When young people make a complaint, their main concern is that the unwanted behaviour stops.

Embed HSB into existing policies

Rather than treating HSB as a separate phenomenon instead, recognise how it is part of wider school culture and should be addressed as integral to how we treat each other in an ethical manner.

Relevant policies include Behaviour, e-safety and bullying.

Consider a move towards a Relationship policy in replacement of a Behaviour policy to emphasise a focus from a punitive, deficit model, to a rights-based approach based on ethical relationships.

2. Communicate



Relationship-based practice

Police should operate informally within the areas young people inhabit – including in school – with the aim of building relationships between police and young people.

Identify and tackle any mis/distrust between police and cohorts of young people (e.g., among those who have had negative experience with the police and/or received negative messaging from others).

Establish and clarify the roles of the police at different times. Uniformed police presence in schools may hinder relationship-based practice if it is experienced as intimidating among young people but may impart a message of credibility. When engaging in relationship-building, it is better to avoid a 'suited and booted' attire and instead dress casually to reduce the emphasis on risk, harm and punishment.

Clear structures and systems in place for ongoing dialogue between schools, police and other services to share details of incidents and emerging issues

Given that schools, parents, police and other partners may sometimes identify issues, report HSB or otherwise share information bilaterally, there should be a system of safeguarding alerts between schools, police and other partners whereby bilateral communication can be acted upon.

Schools and police should develop ways of sharing details of emerging concerns and 'lower-level' incidents in ways that enable safeguarding and joint understandings of the issues (and, in turn, effective practice over the long-term) without undue burden or, importantly, criminalisation of young people or other punitive action.

3. Respond



Transparent and accessible reporting mechanisms

Ensure transparency about the realities of the justice process when engaging with those reporting HSB, those alleged to be involved in HSB and, as applicable, the wider peer collective whereby any fall-out from an allegation may unfold to deleterious effect.

Young people should be told about the support that will be in place as they undergo a potentially challenging and uncertain legal process, including when incidents are reported and proactively via preventative education.

Acknowledgment and amelioration of the risks of 'double punishment'

These risks arise from long delays in investigations and outcomes and the informal and non-CJS related punishments and consequences that can affect those alleged to be involved in HSB (e.g., exclusion from school).

4. Prevent



Police involvement in education as partners with schools and other professionals

Police have a role to play in delivering holistic education to young people, including about the law and legal process, but education on topics (like nude image sharing, consent) should not be entirely outsourced to police.

Where education on the law is provided, link legal definitions to applied situations to explore the extent to which and how the law may guide behaviour and what is left unanswered or ambiguous.

In turn, address how motivations for conduct in relationships transcend the law and the role of values, beliefs and attitudes in shaping individual, interpersonal and social conduct.

Focus as much on creating dialogue and fostering critical thinking through educational interventions as well as knowledge transfer.

Avoid the use of isolated assemblies for addressing emerging issues or specific incidents. They may be alienating and, at best, not impactful or, at worst, may exacerbate tensions among pupils.

Harm reduction

Promote ethical behaviours and communications based on kindness and mutual respect rather than fear of legal consequences or other punishment.

Address the nuances of consent and privacy, including in online domains.

Inform young people about the disinclination toward criminalising their sexual behaviours (including online) with the aim of raising awareness about abuse and encouraging those experiencing or witnessing abuse to report it.

Challenge victim blaming, stigma and bullying among young people, including as connect to online sexual behaviours whereby these consequences can be used pedagogically to deter the behaviours entirely rather than to address abuse specifically with counterproductive effects in terms of normalising these consequences.

Go beyond individualistic approaches to risks and needs and address the role of peer culture in shaping young people's sexual conduct and the recognition of and response to abuse.

Resist reifying binary gender norms and masculinity/power and femininity/victimisation and instead identify how gender norms and other factors shape expectations and conduct for sex and relationships in diverse and fluid ways.

5. Training and CPD



Practitioners and professionals should develop and implement gender- and sexuality-sensitive relationship-based practice based on a clear understanding of the causes and contexts of HSB.

Practitioners and professionals should be well-versed in the realities of the law and legal process and the scope for (and limitations of) the law in being able to fully address the issues at play.

The contents of this report and the training/CPD exercise in section 5 will help develop knowledge and skills in the above regard.

