

# SMK GATEWAY

## Harmful and Abusive Behaviour Policy

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**SIEVEMK GATEWAY**

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## Principles

Everybody has the right to feel safe at SMK Gateway and on their way to and from the Centre. Everybody has the right to an education without being fearful that their work will be mocked, that they cannot speak freely or protect their own space, provided that in so doing they do not harm others. Everybody has the right to expect the SMK community to protect them from those who would hurt, threaten or torment them. If one has the right to be safe one also has the responsibility to help towards the safety of others. SMK Gateway recognises that the stresses placed on those that experience harmful and abusive behaviour can have a detrimental effect on making progress. This has far reaching effects on emotional health, wellbeing, attendance, educational successes and subsequent life chances.

SMK Gateway aims to work with staff, students and parents/carers to create an inclusive learning community where harmful and abusive behaviour is not tolerated. We are a **telling** Centre; harmful and abusive behaviour continues when it is not reported or when it is not acted upon. SMK Gateway will as far as practicable endeavour to proactively deal with the effects of harmful and abusive behaviour. Please see Appendix 1 for the Centre's response to homophobic behaviour.

## Definition and Response to Harmful and Abusive Behaviours

### What is harmful or abusive behaviour?

*'Harmful or abusive behaviours are conscious and wilful acts of aggression and/or manipulation by one person or people.'* It may also be defined as a group of people or an individual picking on someone as a deliberate, conscious desire to hurt, threaten, exploit or torment. It is usually recurring. It can take the form of verbal abuse, physical intimidation or interference with property, exploitation or any combination.

### Types of harmful or abusive behaviour

- **Verbal abuse** - name calling and gossiping
- **Non-verbal abuse** - hand signs or text messages, emails, messaging
- **Emotional abuse** - threatening or intimidating someone
- **Exclusion** - deliberately ignoring or isolating someone
- **Undermining** - constantly criticising or spreading rumours
- **Physical assaults** - hitting and pushing, punching or having aggressive contact
- **Online abuse** – this form of behaviour is becoming much more prevalent with the rise of social networking and use of mobile internet devices such as phones and tablets. Online abuse will be taken seriously and dealt with by the Centre in the same way as any other form of bullying. **(See appendix 2 – Cyberbullying for more details).**

### Why does harmful or abusive behaviour occur?

- People may experience abusive behaviour for a variety of reasons – and for no reason.
- It can happen anywhere and usually when there is a difference or perceived difference between the person being abused and the abuser, perhaps through being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to the Centre, or being unable to afford what is considered to be 'cool'.
- Such behaviour can take place between students, between students and staff, or between staff; by individuals or groups; face to face, indirectly or using a range of online methods.

- Prejudice-based abuse can happen when there are differences or perceived differences related to special educational needs, sexual orientation (including lesbian, gay, bisexual and being transgender), gender, race, religion and belief, gender reassignment or disability.
- There is no statutory requirement to record or report incidents of harmful or abusive behaviour except where they are racially motivated. Ofsted will specifically consider prejudice-based abuse and language related to special educational needs, sexual orientation, sex, race, religion and belief, gender reassignment or disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

### **How does SMK Gateway respond to harmful and abusive behaviour?**

The following strategies have been put in place to reinforce the zero-tolerance ethos at the Centre.

- Non-use of teaching materials or equipment which gives a bad or negative view of any group because of their ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender.
- Encouragement of students to discuss how they get on with other people and to form positive attitudes towards other people. This includes a review of what friendship really is.
- Encouragement of students to treat everyone with respect.
- At whole Centre level – through lead lessons when students are informed of the Centre’s zero-tolerance policy and the actions that will be taken to prevent harmful and abusive behaviour taking place.
- Anti-Bullying Week in November can be used as an opportunity to raise the profile of this issue.
- At classroom level – especially through Life Skills (PSHE) the focus will be on developing strong zero-tolerance messages around abusive behaviour.
- SMK Gateway recognises that there are particular times when students may be more vulnerable to harmful behaviours – lunch and break times and the beginning and end of the Centre day. Arrangements will be made to ensure that at such times there is adequate supervision available to reduce the risk of harmful incidents.
- Peer Mentors will be available for those students requiring extra support and be encouraged to organise awareness campaigns in the Centre and discourage the “bystander culture”.
- Stereotypical views are challenged and students encouraged to appreciate and view positively the differences in others whether arising from race, culture, gender, sexuality (including LGBTI+), ability or disability.

To further support our students, Parents/Carers and staff, we run a number of strategies to encourage the reporting of harmful or abusive incidents or perceived incidents, “Tell, Text, Mail”; Tell Someone, Text someone, Email someone. These strategies are intended to encourage those that are experiencing abusive behaviour, or those that think that they are witnessing something harmful, to come forward and let us know in order that the appropriate action can be taken.

### **Tell Someone**

The Centre has a designated box that students can leave messages in if they are concerned about incidents; they are experiencing harmful and abusive behaviour themselves, or they are worried about friends. This is a locked box that is checked daily so issues can quickly be resolved.

Students are also encouraged to complete a Witness Report Sheet, if they have seen something taking place that concerns them, in the Centre, on the way to and from the Centre or perhaps a form of online abuse taking place in the evenings or at the weekends. The Witness Report sheet is available from personal tutors or any other teacher. Students can place the Witness report sheet in the designated box, or hand it to their tutor or any other teacher. Students are also able to speak to any member of staff about a concern.

## Text Someone

The Centre has a designated text number for students, Parents/Carers and other family members to text should they need to tell someone about a harmful or abusive situation. Messages are checked regularly and will always receive a confirmation text with the issues being addressed as soon as possible. **The text someone number is: 07778 323319.**

## Email Someone

There is an email address for students, Parents/Carers and other family members to use, if they have a particular concern about any issue. All emails will be acknowledged with the problem investigated as appropriate as quickly as possible. **The email address is: [info@sievemk.org.uk](mailto:info@sievemk.org.uk)**

## Action to be taken when harmful or abusive behaviour is reported or suspected

If abuse is suspected we talk to the suspected victim, the suspected perpetrator and any witnesses.

In the first instance statements will be taken from relevant students and information recorded. The information will then be passed to the appropriate tutor for action OR if the incident is deemed serious it will be dealt with straight away by the Headteacher.

Help, support and counselling will be given as is appropriate to both the victim and the perpetrator: We also support the victims in the other ways:

- By offering them an immediate opportunity to talk about the experience with their tutor, or another member of staff if they choose.
- Informing the victims' Parents/Carers/Guardians.
- By offering continuing support when they feel they need it.
- Arrange for them to be escorted to and from lessons.

## Consequences

We discipline, yet try to help people who have experienced or enacted harmful or abusive behaviour in the following ways:

- By talking about what happened, to discover why they became involved.
- Informing the relevant Parents/Carers/Guardians.
- By continuing to work with the students in order to get rid of prejudicial attitudes as far as possible.
- By taking one or more of the disciplinary steps described below to prevent further incidents.

For those who display harmful or abusive behaviour one or more of the seven disciplinary steps described below may be implemented.

Alternative strategies are also used to help all of those involved. These include individual and group counselling, home Centre agreements as well as positive approaches to improve behaviour.

## Disciplinary steps

- They will be warned officially to stop offending.
- Parents/Carers/guardians will be informed.
- They may be internally isolated.
- They may be isolated at break and/or lunch times.
- We may arrange for them to be escorted to and from the Centre premises.
- If they do not stop such behaviour they may be externally excluded for a short fixed period.

If they then carry on, they will be recommended for external exclusion for a longer fixed period or an indefinite period. If they will not end such behaviour, they may face permanent exclusion.

We also feel it is significant to note that the majority of incidents reported have 'roots' outside of the Centre, and this can therefore make resolution more time consuming.

## What to do if you are a:

### Student

Silence and secrecy encourage harmful or abusive behaviour and exploitation; therefore, you must tell an adult if you are a victim, and you should expect that adult to try to do something effective to stop the harassment as soon as practically possible, either that day or the next morning. You can tell someone in a variety of ways; face to face, text, email or writing it down.

You should tell the tutor, adult in the Centre or your Parents/Carers - or all of them if you wish. If the abusive behaviour continues you should tell the teacher and your Parents/Carers again. If you report that you are a victim of such behaviour you can expect help and support. If you witness the harmful behaviour or abuse towards others, you should help by reporting the incident to an adult.

### Teacher or member of Centre staff

In a similar vein to our safeguarding policy, members of staff should watch for early signs of distress in students which **might** be the first signs of worries about harmful or abusive behaviour that has not yet been disclosed: - decline in work standard; frequent minor illness/erratic attendance or repeated absence; reluctance to mix with other students; tiredness.

- All allegations will be taken seriously and those involved will be interviewed and accounts taken.
- Staff will determine the relevant sanction and action to be taken to resolve conflict or modify the behaviour of the perpetrator.

### Parent/Carer

Look for unusual behaviour in your children. For example, they may suddenly not wish to attend the Centre, feel ill regularly or not complete work to their normal standard.

### Possible signs

Students who are experiencing harmful or abusive behaviour may show changes, such as becoming shy and nervous, or feigning illness. They may also show a reluctance to go out at break and lunchtime or into an unsupervised area. These students may also be reluctant to walk home when others do. They may show changes in their work patterns, may lack concentration or may even truant from the Centre.

- Always take an active role in your child's education. Enquire how their day has gone, who they have spent their time with, how lunchtime was spent, *etc.*
- If you feel your child may be a victim of any inappropriate behaviour, inform the Centre IMMEDIATELY. Your complaint will be taken seriously, and appropriate action will follow.
- It is important that you advise your child not to fight back. It can make matters worse.
- Tell your child that there is nothing wrong with them. They need to understand that it is not their fault that they are being unfairly targeted.
- Contact the following agencies for support and advice:

Childline: call 0800 111 open 24hrs a day

Kidscape: offer advice and guidance, visit [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

Family lives: is a free, confidential, 24-hour help line for Parents/Carers concerned with a wide range of issues. Call 0808 800 222 or visit [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

The Mix: <https://www.themix.org.uk/> , 0808 808 4994 Free confidential advice for under 25s

## Working Together

Parents/Carers/Guardians must help us to ensure we have a culture of tolerance and respect at the Centre by promoting this at home. Parents/Carers need to contact SMK Gateway as soon as they think their child may have experienced harmful or abusive behaviour. Parents/Carers of the victims and the perpetrator will be informed by of the actions taken by the Centre once the behaviour has been identified.

Most commonly abuse stops immediately if it is dealt with. Students, teachers and Parents/Carers working together can greatly reduce harmful and abusive behaviour in educational establishments. Additional help is available through the Police Liaison Officer.

## Appendix 1: Homophobia factsheet

Homophobia (prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender peoples) : A factsheet for Centre Staff to use within the Centre community

### What is homophobia?

Homophobia can be considered to be behaviour or language that makes a child or young person feel unwelcome or marginalised because of a perceived or actual sexual orientation. You do not have to be a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) person to experience homophobia.

The main factors that influence whether or not a person is a target of homophobia are:

- People perceive you to have a particular sexual orientation, because you fit lesbian, gay or bisexual stereotypes. These stereotypes are based on a societal bias involving traditional gender roles or traits, which are inaccurate, for example softly spoken boys, and girls with short hair
- You defend the civil rights of sexual minorities
- You have LGBTI friends, parents or family
- You are perceived as being different to your peers or those in your local community
- Or none of the above. The child displaying the homophobic behaviour knows such attacks will damage you.

### How is Homophobia displayed?

Like all forms of harmful or abusive behaviour, homophobia can occur in different ways. Some of the more common types of behaviour may include:

- Verbal abuse (being teased or called mean names, or having derogatory/inflammatory terms used to describe you, or hate language used against you)
- Being compared to LGBTI celebrities / caricatures / characters that portray particular stereotypes (for example, being compared to Lilly Savage)
- 'Being outed' (the threat of being exposed to your friends and family by them being told that you are gay, lesbian or bisexual even if you are not)
- Indirect abuse / social exclusion (being ignored or left out, for example gestures such as 'backs against the wall')
- Physical abuse (being hit, pushed or kicked)
- Sexual harassment (inappropriate sexual gestures, for example, being groped with comments such as 'You know you like it!')
- Online abuse (being teased, called names and/or threatened via email, text and on Social Networking Sites)

### What are the possible effects of homophobia?

All forms of harmful and abusive behaviour can affect a child or young person's emotional and social wellbeing as well as their physical health. This could lead to withdrawing from social interactions in class or other Centre activities previously enjoyed, academic underachievement, truancy, Centre refusal or leaving education earlier than might have happened otherwise. How severe the effects on a particular child or young person are, can depend entirely on the individual and their coping mechanisms and no two people will respond in the same way.

LGBTI people can face negative attitudes and prejudices in their local communities and research has proven that as a result of this, young LGBTI people are particularly prone to poor mental health. This



can lead some LGBTI young people to internalise these feelings (internalised homophobia). This might mean:

- Denial of their sexual orientation to themselves or others or attempts to change their sexual orientation
- Low self-esteem and/or negative body image
- A dislike towards other open or obvious LGBTI young people
- Shame, depression, defensiveness, anger or bitterness
- Self-ridicule to gain social/peer acceptance
- Risk-taking behaviours including substance misuse
- Self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts

### **What must we do as a Centre?**

Institutions are required to have measures in place to tackle all forms of child-on-child abuse, including homophobia (Equality Act 2010).

Some methods we proactively tackling homophobia in the Centre community include:

- Centre policies on equal opportunities for both staff and students
- Daily reinforcement of the use of positive language and the challenging of inappropriate comments made by staff and students through policy and overall Centre ethos *etc.*
- Awareness raising opportunities for staff and students, including positive imagery/posters and workshops/training delivered through specialist agencies
- Accessible and diverse support strategies in place to tackle homophobia, including signposting leaflets for helplines, counselling *etc.*, for staff and students
- Accurate record keeping and tracking where appropriate.

### **What can a member of staff do to help?**

There are two things as a member of the Centre staff you can do to prevent all forms of harmful and abusive behaviour - prevent and respond.

1: To try to prevent homophobic incidents from occurring in the Centre, you can support and implement the Centre's policy and procedures. If these could be improved to specifically tackle homophobia you could champion this to the Senior Management Team.

2: To respond to an alleged homophobic incident you should follow the procedures as described elsewhere in this policy.

Things to be aware of:

Many young people may not want to tell you they are LGBTI or that they are perceived to be, through fear that your reaction may also be negative. So be sensitive to their circumstances.

Ensure confidentiality – particularly of the victim's sexual orientation. A student's disclosure of their sexual orientation is not a child protection issue, and should not be revealed to anyone, including their parents (especially as the young person may fear their reaction).

Inform them of your legal obligations to report any form of abuse, and what information will be passed on and for what purpose. This may relate to how the young person is being treated (if a crime or serious assault has been committed), or the young person may be self-harming or contemplating suicide. Remember their welfare is paramount, even if they are concerned about other people knowing what has happened.

Encourage the victim to report the homophobic incident. While homophobia should be appropriately dealt with by most Centre policies, there may be a need to report the incident to the Police.

Harassment of any kind on the basis of sexual orientation is a hate crime. The young person can

report this themselves (in person, over the phone or anonymously online). Explain to them the procedure for this, and the importance of doing it.

Above all, be compassionate and supportive to the victim. Where and when possible, provide them with information and other materials to allow them to explore their identity. Many LGBTI have little or no access to appropriate literature in the Centre environment. A positive view of your own identity is necessary for positive mental health and well-being.

### **Support for LGBTI students and staff supporting LGBTI students**

- <http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/> Mermaids work to reduce isolation and loneliness for parents and young people dealing with gender issues and empower families and young people with the tools they need to negotiate the education and health services.
- <http://www.gires.org.uk/> GIRES' purpose is to improve the lives of trans and gender non-conforming people, including those who are non-binary and non-gender.
- <https://www.theproudtrust.org/>

## Appendix 2 Online abuse factsheet

### Online Abuse

Online abuse can be defined as “the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else”. More specifically, it can be defined as:

- Actions that use information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm another or others.
- Use of communication technologies for the intention of harming another person
- Use of internet service and mobile technologies such as web pages and discussion groups as well as instant messaging, SMS text messaging or apps such as Snapchat with the intention of harming another person.

It can be an extension of face-to-face harmful or abusive behaviour, with technology providing the abuser with another route to harass their target. However, it differs in several significant ways from other kinds of abuse: the invasion of home and personal space; the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages; the size of the audience; perceived anonymity; the profile of the perpetrator and their target.

Online abuse takes different forms including: threats and intimidation; harassment or “cyberstalking” (e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages); vilification or defamation; exclusion or peer rejection; various forms of exploitation; impersonation; unauthorised publication of private information or images; spreading rumours or “gossip”; manipulation; posting threatening, abusive, defamatory or humiliating material on websites, including blogs, personal websites or social networking sites; the use of mobile phone cameras to cause distress, fear or humiliation.

Some online abuse is clearly deliberate and aggressive, but it is important to recognise that some incidents of perceived abuse are known to be unintentional and the result of simply not thinking about the consequences. What may be sent as a joke may not be received as one, and indeed the distance that technology allows in communication means the sender may not see the impact of the message on the receiver. There is also less opportunity for either party to resolve any misunderstanding or to feel empathy.

It is important that students are made aware of the effects of their actions. In online abuse, bystanders can easily become perpetrators, e.g. by passing on or showing to others images designed to humiliate, or by taking part in online polls or discussion groups. They may not recognise themselves as participating in harmful behaviour, but their involvement compounds the misery for the person targeted. It is important that students are aware that their actions have severe and distressing consequences, and that participating in such activity will not be tolerated.

It is important to state that online abuse can very easily fall into criminal behaviour under the Communications Act 2003, Section 127 which states that electronic communications which are grossly offensive or indecent, obscene or menacing, or false, used again for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another could be deemed to be criminal behaviour. Section 127 can be used as an alternative offence to such crimes for example as hate crime (including race, religion, disability, homophobic, sexual orientation, and transphobic crime), hacking offences, online abuse, cyber stalking, amongst others.

If the behaviour involves the use of taking or distributing indecent images of young people under the age of 18 then this is also a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Outside of the immediate support young people may require in these instances, the Centre will have no choice but to involve the police to investigate these situations.

## **Sexting**

Sexting describes sending sexual messages, photos, or videos to someone else. Like with all sexual behaviour, it happens on a continuum – from consensual to abusive. With sexting there may also be additional legal implications relating to the illegal distribution of images (sending or receiving sexual images of anyone under 18 years is against the law). This has contributed to a culture of 'victim-blaming' where children are told not to send images rather than exploring the dynamics and behaviour behind the sending of images and listening to children's experiences. This may also mean that children are less likely to tell someone if a sexting incident has caused distress, or they have been subject to online abuse because of sexting. It is therefore vital that staff create an environment where pupils feel safe to share concerns in the knowledge that staff will consider the individual children involved, the circumstances and the most appropriate response.

## **Key features**

There are features of online abuse that differ from other forms of abusive behaviour which need to be recognised and taken into account when determining how to respond effectively. The key differences are:

- Impact – the scale and scope of online abuse can be greater than other forms of abusive behaviour.
- Targets and perpetrators – the people involved may have a different profile to traditional 'bullies' and their targets.
- Location – the any time and any place nature of online abuse.
- Anonymity – the person being targeted will not always know who is attacking them.
- Motivation – some students may not be aware that what they are doing is harmful or abusive.
- Evidence – unlike other forms of abuse, the target of the behaviour will have evidence of its occurrence.