**West Sussex – Practice Guidance**

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years’ experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

**Countering Bullying and Peer Abuse**

* WSCC children’s homes do not tolerate any forms of bullying.
* All children living in residential care have a right to learn and grow free from intimidation and fear.
* All staff and children have a responsibility to contribute, in whatever way they can, to the protection and maintenance of a harmonious and nurturing environment that promotes positive relationships and tolerance of others.
* We will make every effort to eradicate these behaviours for the wellbeing of children living in the Home.
* The needs of the victim of bullying are paramount and will be prioritised in any incident of bullying.
* Children who are being bullied will be listened to and incidents will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

**What is bullying?**

* Bullying is any act of aggression, causing embarrassment, pain or discomfort to someone. It can take a number of forms; physical, verbal, making gestures, extortion and exclusion. It is an abuse of power. It can be planned and organised, or it may unintentional. It may be perpetrated by individuals or by groups of individuals.
* Bullying can take the following forms:
* Physical violence such as hitting, pushing or spitting at another person.
* Misusing technology (internet or mobiles) to hurt or humiliate another person. This includes the malicious use of social media websites and other related activity
* Interfering with another person’s property by stealing, hiding or damaging it
* Using offensive names when addressing another person
* Teasing or spreading rumours about another person or his/her family
* Belittling another person’s abilities and achievements
* Writing offensive notes or graffiti about another person
* Excluding another person from a group activity
* Ridiculing another person’s ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, appearance, way of speaking or personal mannerisms or any other protected characteristic under equality legislation (see link below)
* Bullying can take place directly or indirectly and others can be drawn into this behaviour unwillingly.

**Responsibilities of staff**

* Staff will support children experiencing bullying in the following ways:
* Nurture each child’s self-esteem, self-respect and respect for others
* Demonstrate and role model high standards of personal conduct and social behaviour
* Avoid and challenge any sarcastic comments, derogatory nicknames and humiliating behaviour towards a child
* Discuss bullying within keyworker meetings and children’s meetings so that every child understands the damaging impact of bullying, both for the victim and the perpetrator
* Reinforce the importance of informing staff if they experience or witness any child being bullied
* Staff will advise children not to retaliate violently to any forms of bullying
* Be alert to signs of distress and other possible indications of bullying and keep a written record of any reported instances of bullying
* Listen to children who have been bullied, take what they say seriously and act to support and protect them, ensuring the victim feels safe
* Report suspected cases of bullying to the Registered Manager or delegated senior member of staff, making sure all staff members on shift are aware of any incidents
* Also discuss within supervision, where necessary follow safeguarding policy
* Follow up any complaints about bullying made by visitors and professionals attending the Home (including parent/carers, social workers, Independent visitors, Advocates) and report back promptly and fully on the action which has been taken
* Deal with observed instances of bullying promptly and effectively, in accordance with agreed procedures.
* Staff will support children to:
* Refrain from becoming involved in any kind of bullying, even at the risk of becoming unpopular
* Learn and apply appropriate use of social media resources
* Report any witnessed or suspected instances of bullying to a member of staff, to dispel any climate of secrecy and help to prevent further instance
* Respect and value the diversity and differences of their peer group
* Attend regular meetings where issues and incidents of bullying will be discussed and managed
* Participate in social skills activities including developing assertive and friendly behaviours where appropriate
* Support others in the home that they suspect may be bullied.

**Responsibilities of Parents and Those with Parental Responsibility**

* We ask parent/carers and those with parental responsibility or who advocate for the child to support them by:
* Being alert for signs of distress during visits, phone calls and on social media
* Advising the child to report any bullying to the team of staff
* Advise the child not to retaliate violently to any forms of bullying
* Being sympathetic and supportive towards the child and reassuring them that appropriate action will be taken
* Informing staff of any suspected bullying, even if their child is not involved
* Co-operating with the home if their child is accused of bullying.

**Preventative Measures**

* The following measures are in place in our children’s homes to try to prevent or limit the impact of bullying behaviour:

* Staff will promote positive behaviour in line with our behaviour management policy
* A consistent message that bullying will not be tolerated
* They will be engaging and including children in all activities and make time for key work sessions where concerns can be discussed
* Each child will have access to the Independent Visitor with whom they can share any concerns that they feel they do not want to discuss with staff. They can also speak to the Regulation 44 Visitor
* Staff are aware of signs of bullying and will use their skills to identify any concerns
* Sanctions will be put in place if the need arises to help manage bullying behaviours
* Risk assessments will be kept up to date
* Staff are trained in supporting children to employ a restorative approach
* The Children’s Guide for the home will clearly outline the expectations and consequences around bullying behaviour

**Procedure for dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour**

* Children will be actively encouraged to confide in staff who will listen non-judgementally.
* All incidents of bullying will be reported to the Registered Manager or delegated senior member of staff who will ensure all incidents are thoroughly investigated.
* All incidents of bullying will be recorded on the child’s daily records and discussed with staff.
* The child will be informed and supported to know what is happening at each stage of the process.
* Dependent on their age and understanding, the child will be actively involved in how the incident is responded to, and how they can best be supported to reach a satisfactory outcome.
* Social workers and parents/carers will be informed and invited to attend a meeting if necessary.
* The bullying behaviours or threats will be managed in line with the Behaviour Management Policy and sanctions may be put in place if needed.
* A restorative approach will be used to support the perpetrator to identify their behaviours.
* Both the perpetrator and the victim of bullying have the right to make a complaint and these will be dealt with in line with the Complaints Policy. A full response will be provided once the matter has been investigated.
* Both parties have the right to support from an Advocate.

**Reference Points;**

Safeguarding Policy

Behaviour Policy

Individual Behaviour Plans

Internet Safety