

Sexualised Behaviours in Children Toolkit



Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help practitioners across the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) identify Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB) in children and young people and to support them in addressing behaviours appropriately. It includes practical tips, scenarios, and resources tailored to the needs of practitioners, parents, and carers. The toolkit also provides information and step by step guidance when on identifying, responding to, and reporting behaviours that could be sexually harmful.

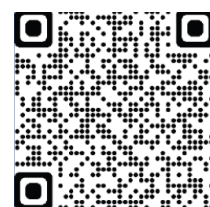
It can be understandable for practitioners to want to seek certainty when it comes to a child's safety and well-being, however, as we all know, life is complicated and human interactions are constantly evolving. This toolkit will provide some case examples and scenarios to support with the identification and responses to behaviours that could be sexually harmful, however, it should not be seen as an exhaustive "tick-list" as the context surrounding behaviours is as important to understand as the individual presenting behaviours. Reflective and adaptable practitioners who work alongside children and their families are better able to respond effectively to complex situations and this way of working has the greatest impact on children's safety and wellbeing.



Research suggests that around a third of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by other children and young people. Harmful sexual behaviour is most commonly identified in adolescent boys, but girls and younger children can also display HSB. (NSPCC, 2025) ¹

QR Codes

For further information related to sexualised behaviours in children and related topics, please scan the QR codes below.



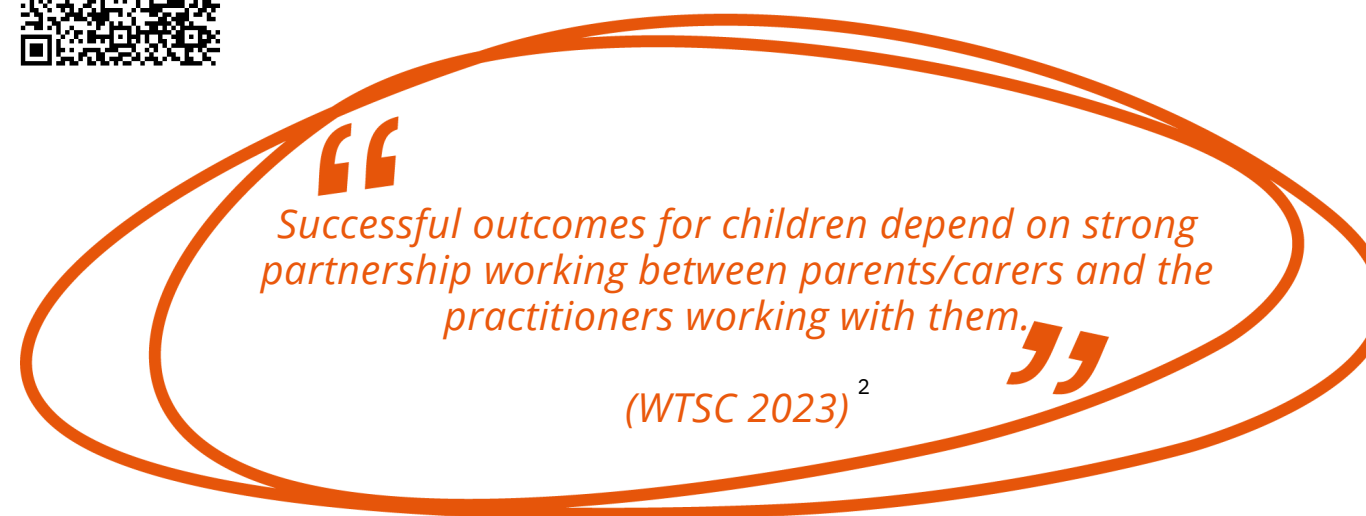
Be Aware



Referral to the Children & Families Service



NYSCP Threshold Document



How to use this Toolkit

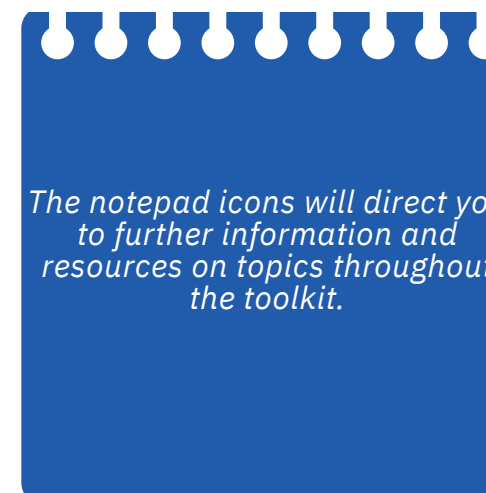
The toolkit has been designed to be interactive and is not intended to be read through start to finish, instead users can select / search for the information they need.



This icon highlights a point or key information.



This icon highlights a video produced by the NYSCP



The notepad icons will direct you to further information and resources on topics throughout the toolkit.

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Understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviour

What is Harmful Sexual Behaviour?

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) refers to sexual actions by children and young people that are **developmentally inappropriate**, outside what is safe for their stage of development, and harmful to themselves or others. Behaviour that is deemed harmful can often involve an imbalance or understanding of power differences, as well as the absence of consent. ³

The term Harmful Sexual Behaviour **does not relate to all sexual behaviour demonstrated** by a child. The Hackett continuum⁴ and other tools highlight the behaviour in the context of what we would commonly expect a child of that **age and stage** to demonstrate and can be used to identify if the behaviour is age-appropriate or healthy.

For further information on identifying behaviours and Healthy and Unhealthy behaviours by age, see [Understanding sexualised behaviour in children - NSPCC Learning](#)

For further information on understanding the Hackett Continuum in this toolkit, see [The Hackett Continuum](#)

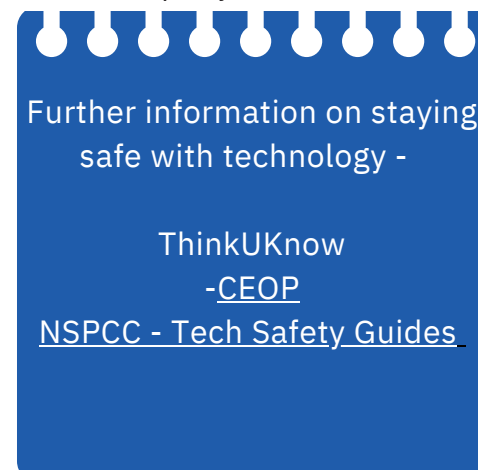
When identifying developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviours in children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), it's important to recognise that they can differ based on individual **developmental stages and specific needs**. When considering children and young people with additional needs, practitioners need to take into consideration **developmental rather than chronological age**.

What is Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour?

Harmful Sexual Behaviours include both contact (in person) and non-contact behaviours (online), which can be referred to as Technology Assisted, this includes children and young people being harmed via the internet or social media – both on and offline harmful sexual behaviours are equally serious to determine whether behaviours are sexually harmful.

Examples of Technology-Assisted HSB

- frequently and intentionally accessing age-inappropriate sexual material online
- using inappropriate, sexualised language
- sending and receiving illegal images
- sexual interactions where there are significant power differences, lack of consent, or force or threats.
- engaging in abusive or sexually violent sexual behaviour online or offline



What is not Harmful Sexual Behaviour?

Not all sexual behaviour involving young people is problematic, as it is normal and appropriate for children and young people to be curious about bodies, relationships, and sexual development, however, all behaviours will require a level of response.

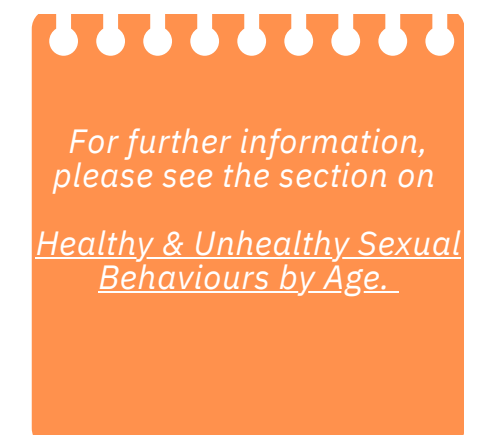
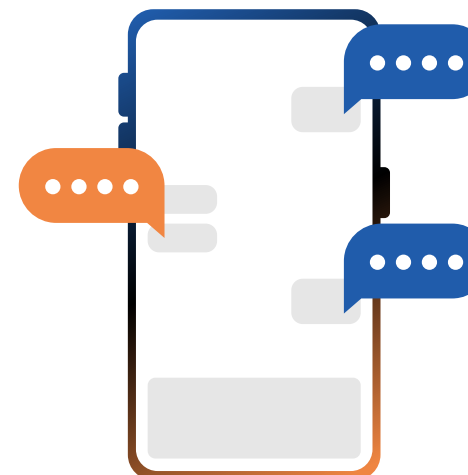
It can be challenging to differentiate between abusive behaviours and normal developmental behaviours or experimentation, as the boundaries and topics can often seem ambiguous and blurred. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the context of the situation, along with the age, developmental understanding, and power dynamics involved.

It is important to recognise indicators of problematic or harmful sexual behaviour. While all sexualised behaviours warrant a response, the response should be based on the child or young person's age, stage of development, individual experiences including experiences of trauma and vulnerability, and the context of the situation, which could help indicate if the behaviour is age-appropriate or harmful.

Examples of Behaviours which may be considered normative

- Exploration: Age-appropriate exploration and curiosity about bodies.
- Consensual Behaviour: Mutual and consensual behaviour between children of similar age and development.
- Healthy Development: Behaviours that are part of normal sexual development and learning about boundaries and is balanced by curiosity.

It can sometimes be difficult to talk to children and young people about sexual behaviours, and it may be that while some actions are normal and appropriate, they can make a parent or carer feel uncomfortable or embarrassed due to their sexual nature. It is essential to help the child learn about healthy relationships and support them to keep themselves safe. If the behaviour is typical for the child's age and stage of sexual development, it can still be an opportunity to talk to them and explain what is appropriate.



Healthy Relationships

Why are Healthy Relationships Important?

Learning about healthy relationships is essential for children's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Understanding concepts like mutual respect, consent, trust, and communication helps them build positive friendships, family bonds, and future romantic relationships. It also teaches them to set boundaries, recognise unhealthy behaviours, and advocate for themselves. Early education empowers children to address harmful behaviours such as bullying, peer pressure, and abuse and prevents them from internalising harmful stereotypes or toxic relationship dynamics. With this knowledge, children can make informed decisions, build self-esteem, and contribute to a culture of respect and kindness, ensuring they engage in healthy, supportive relationships as they grow.

Healthy relationships involve understanding consent, self-advocacy, control over our bodies, self-esteem, and conflict resolution. These values should ideally be nurtured from a young age in the home, with support from families, communities, and professionals. However, as children grow, they are influenced by factors such as brain development, peer pressure, and cultural norms, which can lead to risky behaviour and distorted views of relationships.

Misogyny and its influence further distort young people's perceptions. Media, including TV shows, movies, and social media, often glamorise unhealthy relationships. These portrayals can create harmful expectations about love and conflict resolution, making it difficult for young people to recognise toxic dynamics like emotional manipulation or possessiveness. Controlling behaviours, jealousy, and unhealthy relationship patterns can be normalised in media



Healthy & Unhealthy Sexual Behaviours by Age

The guide to typical sexual behaviours by age is not exhaustive and needs to be considered in light of context, ages, and stages of development. For example, the use of the internet and social media as a communication tool for young people needs to be considered as what can appear “normal” to young people – such as sharing images whilst common amongst some peer groups, is nevertheless illegal for those under 18 to be involved in. A common-sense approach needs to be taken when dealing with these matters with context and consent as the drivers to better understand each situation.

It is also to be considered that a child or young person's behaviours may change depending on circumstances and or life experiences which may make them more at risk or vulnerable to displaying or being subjected to harmful behaviours.

The NSPCC and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation both have guidance on the stages of Child Sexual Development which can be viewed here [NSPCC Child Sexual Development by Age](#) or [Lucy Faithfull Foundation Sexualised Behaviours by Age](#)

Please note, that this information is for guidance only, please contact the Professionals Consultation Line at the **MAST - 01609 535070**.

Contact the appropriate worker if the child(ren) are already receiving support.

In Emergencies, call 999.

For further information on encouraging healthy relationships in children – see

Suggestions to Promote Healthy Relationships

A blue rectangular box with a white scalloped top edge. Inside, there is white text. The top line reads "For further information on encouraging healthy relationships in children – see" in an italicized font. Below that, the text "Suggestions to Promote Healthy Relationships" is written in a similar italicized font and is underlined.

Healthy Relationships

Child Sexual Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of **child sexual abuse** where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate, or deceive a child into sexualised activity. This can include both contact and non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images or grooming them for abuse.

HSB in the context of CSE occurs when children are coerced or manipulated into engaging in harmful sexual activities by and with other children or young people.

Harmful Sexualised Behaviours are **interlinked** with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) where perpetrators can be children and young people, often themselves exploited, they exploit relationships due to complex reasons including trauma, fear, manipulation, and learned behaviours.

Normalisation of Abuse: Repeated exposure to sexual exploitation can lead children to normalise abusive behaviours. They may come to see these behaviours as a standard part of relationships, leading them to replicate such actions with others. In the context of CCE, children may be coerced into performing sexual acts as part of their exploitation.

Children who have been sexually exploited may imitate the abusive behaviours they have experienced. This imitation can be a way to process their trauma or to exert power in their own relationships.

Children involved in CSE are in many cases are exposed to explicit sexual content, which can distort their understanding of healthy sexual behaviour. This exposure can lead them to engage in or initiate inappropriate sexual activities.

Power Imbalance: Among peers and friendship groups, there can be significant power imbalances. These imbalances might be due to age, social status, physical strength, or emotional maturity. A child with more power can manipulate or coerce another child into harmful sexual activities. In the context of CCE, children may be coerced into performing sexual acts as part of their exploitation. These power imbalances can perpetuate harmful behaviours as children may use similar tactics on peers to regain a sense of control.

Building Trust: Just like adult perpetrators, children who groom other children often start by building a close relationship. They may offer gifts, attention, or affection to gain the trust of their peer. This process can make them feel special and valued, which can be particularly effective in the context of a romantic relationship

Manipulation and Coercion: Once trust is established, the person perpetrating HSB may begin to manipulate the other young person into engaging in sexual activities. This can involve emotional manipulation, such as making the victim feel guilty or obligated, or more direct coercion, such as threats or blackmail.

Use of Technology: The use of technology and the internet has increased the risk of online grooming and exploitation which can be hidden from adults and carers and enables constant contact and monitoring from those who are perpetrating the harm, and pressure to share explicit imagery, with little opportunity to escape demands placed on them. This can then be used to manipulate them further. This cycle can lead to the development of harmful sexualised behaviours as children navigate their trauma.

Social media and online platforms can also facilitate peer pressure and influence, leading children to engage in harmful sexual behaviours to fit in or gain approval.

Signs of Grooming:

Children and young people can be groomed by a peer or people they believe to be friends, they can be of similar age, or significantly older. It is crucial to be aware of the signs. These can include:

- Unexplained gifts or money.
- Secretive behaviours, especially regarding online activities.
- Changes in behaviour or mood.
- Advanced sexual knowledge or behaviours inappropriate for their age.

Grooming by peers is a serious issue that requires attention and intervention. Understanding the link between CSE, CCE, and harmful sexualised behaviours is vital for effective prevention and intervention.



For further information on the signs of exploitation and what to do if you suspect a child is being exploited, please see the [Be Aware](#) hub on the NYSCP website - an online knowledge hub

BeAware

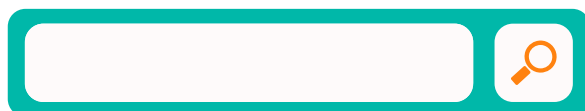
Healthy Relationships

Pornography & Misogyny

Pornography often presents skewed and violent depictions of sex and relationships and can reinforce damaging stereotypes about power, consent and in particular women and girls. If young people are exposed to pornography at an early age, before they are emotionally or cognitively ready to process it, the exposure can shape their expectations of sex, influence their attitudes toward gender and consent, and contribute to harmful misconceptions about relationships. It can also reinforce damaging gender stereotypes and promote unrealistic body image standards. Young people may confuse what they see in pornography with healthy sexual behaviour, misunderstanding boundaries. The easy access to unlimited online porn can also contribute to compulsive viewing, potentially interfering with emotional and social development due to the developing brain, making it difficult to identify or stop risky behaviour and make good decisions.

It can be a challenge to determine what are developmentally 'normal' as opposed to 'problematic' online behaviours. For example, a UK survey found that 48% of 11–16-year-olds had viewed pornography – and among those who had done so, 34% reported seeing it once a week or more. (Centre for CSA – Key Messages)

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation Toolkit of HSB Prevention has excellent resources on Pornography and how to discuss it with children. [HSB Toolkit Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#)



What does the law say about consent?

The age of consent (the legal age when people can engage in sexual activity) is **16 years old**. This is the same **regardless of the person's gender identity, sexual identity, and whether the sexual activity is between people of the same or different gender.**

The young person must be able to understand and give **informed consent**.

The law exists to protect children from abuse or exploitation, rather than to prosecute under-16s who participate in **mutually consenting sexual activity**. However, underage sexual activity should always be seen as a potential indicator of child sexual exploitation.

Children under the age of 13 years old are not capable of giving consent to sexual activity in UK law. (Sexual Offences Act 2003).

For more information of the impact of pornography on young people and the brain, please see

[Reward Foundation](#)

The PSHE association has a free briefing on the overview of key research into the potential impact and harms of pornography and a teacher briefing to support incorporating it into the PSHE curriculum -

[PSHE Association. Addressing pornography through PSHE - KS1-5](#)

SEND and HSB

Children and Young People with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Children and young people with learning disabilities are more at risk of both experiencing sexual abuse and engaging in problematic sexual behaviour and are overrepresented in the population of young people displaying problematic and abusive sexualised behaviours. A UK study found that 38% of individuals referred to specialist services for harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) had a learning disability (Hackett et al, 2013).

There are concerns that some children with SEND may:

- Have a limited understanding of what sexual behaviours are inappropriate.
- Receive less sex and relationship education compared to their peers.
- Have fewer opportunities to form healthy sexual relationships.
- Struggle with general social skills, cues, and boundaries, which can lead to inappropriate behaviour or make them targets for exploitation.
- Be more likely to form relationships with younger children.
- Be trickier to detect that they are being abused - as they may have limited speech, struggle to communicate and find it difficult to identify their emotions.

For information on healthy relationships, and SEND support, please see [Resources](#)



For resources about relationships and sex education for people with a learning disability, videos, supporting guides, including information for carers and support workers - see [Mencap Relationships & Sex Resources](#)

For information about in relation to Early Years and SEND - see [Dingley's Promise](#)

The Hackett Continuum

The Hackett Continuum is a framework developed to categorise and understand the range of sexual behaviours exhibited by children and young people. It spans from developmentally typical behaviours to those that are problematic or harmful. This continuum helps distinguish between normal (developmentally typical) sexual exploration and behaviours that may indicate underlying issues or pose risks to others.

The model considers factors such as the frequency of the behaviour, the presence of coercion or manipulation, the impact on the child's development, and the power dynamics involved. By using this continuum, we can better assess and respond to sexual behaviours in a way that supports the child's wellbeing, learning, and safety. (Hackett, 2010)

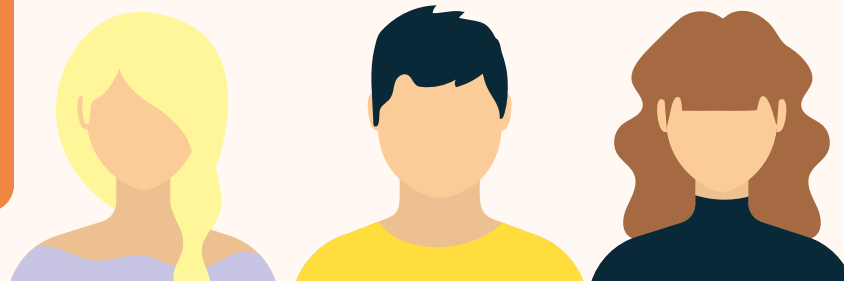


[Hackett Continuum - NSPCC Website.](#)

Practitioners who work with children and young people may use the Hackett Continuum to ensure a shared understanding of what constitutes developmentally typical and harmful sexual behaviour.

The Continuum is used by North Yorkshire Children & Families Service. For each tool, the "Red, Amber, Green" categories can assess the severity of sexual behaviours and determine the appropriate response.

For information to determine if behaviours may be problematic or harmful, please see [Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour](#)



Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour

How Should I Respond?

It is essential that we respond in an appropriate and consistent way to sexualised behaviours, both considered age appropriate and harmful, if they are either witnessed or shared.

The response to a child exhibiting sexualised behaviours should be tailored to their age, developmental stage, and the specific behaviours observed. Always prioritise the child's needs in your approach.

- **Any** sexualised behaviour identified requires a response.
- **Both** the child exhibiting the behaviour and those affected by it need appropriate responses.
- Responses may include discussions, referrals, and necessary actions (including monitoring and safety planning) to protect and educate all involved.

Points to Remember when dealing with Children who are showing sexualised behaviours.

- Remain **calm**.
- **Act** straight away to make sure that;
 - Everyone is **safe**. **Remember that Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.**
 - **Behaviours stop**, and do not worsen or escalate.

Never promise to keep things a secret and explain that you have a responsibility to tell people who can help. Escalate worries to a safeguarding lead.

In an emergency, call 999

- **Gather** as much information as possible to better understand the incident(s) and help establish if a child is displaying or has experienced healthy, problematic, or harmful sexual behaviour.
- Take time to **listen** and **reassure**, taking time to slow down and show that you **understand**.
- Avoid asking **leading** questions and reflect what has been said.
- Use straightforward language that is age appropriate. Consider the language used – does the child know the word "penis", or do they say something else, **checking understanding** is key.
- In all cases, responses need to be **free from judgment** using neutral non-blaming language.
- **Record** the information including the date and time using **facts** and capturing what the child has said accurately and specifically, avoiding generalised terms such as 'inappropriate touch'.
- Consider longer term risk or **safety planning**.
- Consider the appropriate **long-term approach** such as positive reinforcement for healthy behaviour, or support for concerning and harmful behaviour.
- Act based on the type of behaviour **following your organisation's procedures** – contact your safeguarding lead.
- Ensure ongoing **monitoring**.

Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour

How Should I Respond? (cont...)

Remember that children and young people may not immediately share information, or that it may be shared over time, or that the young person is acting differently and that this leads to them sharing their worries. Younger children might show their worries through play or drawing.

All sexualised behaviours warrant a response, the response should be based on the child or young person's age, stage of development, individual experiences including experiences of trauma and vulnerability, and the context of the situation, which could help indicate if the behaviour is age-appropriate or harmful.

See the sections on Green, Amber, and Red Behaviours for Actions following your response.

Keep in mind that children who appear to have exhibited harmful sexual behaviour should be seen as children first, with their care and support needs addressed just like any other child. It is crucial to avoid stigmatising children due to their behaviour. Harmful Sexual Behaviour should be treated as a safeguarding issue for both the child who is harmed and the child whose behaviour is considered harmful.

The NSPCC has a range of videos to help support talking to children. Recording incidents and having difficult conversations.

[Let children know you're listening. | NSPCC Learning](#)
[NSPCC - Recording Incidents](#)
[NSPCC - Having difficult conversations](#)

Considerations to determine if behaviours may be problematic or harmful.

It is important to recognise indicators of problematic or harmful sexual behaviour. While all sexualised behaviours warrant a response, the response should be based on the child or young person's age, stage of development, individual experiences including experiences of trauma and vulnerability, and the context of the situation, which could help indicate if the behaviour is age-appropriate or harmful. It may also help to consider the following alongside the information gathered.

Points to Remember.

- Was the behaviour in line with the children's development?
- Is the behaviour unusual for the child or young person?
- Does the behaviour appear to go beyond curiosity?
- Did all involved freely give their consent? Are they able to consent?
- Did the behaviour upset others?
- Was there an imbalance of power and or knowledge?
- Was there force or aggression involved?
- Where did/do the incidents happen – in a private or public space?
- Is the first-time behaviour? Has support been given already?



Remember it is normal for children to explore and experiment with their sexuality as they develop. However, if a child's behaviour seems unusual or out of character, it is key to our understanding and next actions to ensure that we consider the reasons behind it.

This could be a **sign of harm** and may require further investigation or support to better **comprehend** the child's experiences as well as past and current influences.

“Green” Behaviours

These are natural and expected behaviours. The Hackett Continuum refers to these as “Developmentally Typical” behaviours. They provide an opportunity to talk, teach, and explain what is appropriate. Behaviour can be addressed by directly working with those involved and providing them with information, advice, and clear explanations of boundaries. This guidance should cover important topics such as privacy and consent, healthy relationships, and bodily autonomy.



[Hackett Continuum - NSPCC Website.](#)

As children grow up they develop sexually. What is 'normal' sexual behaviour for a 15-year-old may be problematic or harmful for an eight-year-old. Consider the child's development as well as their chronological age.

What does support look like?

If a child or young person is showing or has experienced what is “normal” behaviours it may be that this does not indicate a critical concern. Listen to what children and young people have to say and respond calmly and non-judgementally adopting a child-focused approach.

Help support parents to reinforce positive messages to their children, and how to keep them safe. Please see the Resources sections for more information, signposting and advice.

- Use sexualised behaviours as an opportunity to talk about related topics including healthy relationships, consent, bodily autonomy, and safe people/getting help.
- Offer a safe space for them to talk about this and signpost to alternative support.

If in a school setting you can ask your [Early Help Consultant for support](#). Please see information [under NYC Locality Contact Details](#).



The NSPCC and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation both have guidance on the stages of Child Sexual Development which can be viewed [here](#)

[NSPCC Child Sexual Development by Age](#)

[Lucy Faithfull Foundation Sexualised Behaviours by Age](#)

Please note that these are not diagnostic tools

Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour

The NYSCP has created **scenario videos** to view - These are not to be used as a diagnostic or tick list tool, but for the purpose of discussion.

[HSB Scenario 1 The Boys](#)



Remember that in each situation the context needs to be considered, be curious, and if you are unsure, contact your organisation's safeguarding lead.



If **parents are unaware of worries**, professionals **need to ensure** that they are **kept informed (where appropriate)** and supported to encourage bodily autonomy in their child(ren), staying safe and that they are supported, and confident in understanding and dealing with sexualised behaviours.

Further Resources:

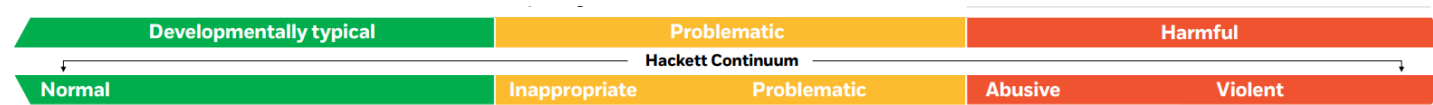
NSPCC - Watch: What are developmentally typical (green) behaviours?

For younger children -

NSPCC PANTS

"Amber" Behaviours

These behaviours can be of concern and **potentially be outside safe and healthy behaviours** if they persist. They require a response from a protective adult, extra support, and close monitoring.



Hackett Continuum - NSPCC Website

The response and outcome will be dependent on the context of the situation. As children grow up, they develop sexually. What is 'normal' sexual behaviour for a 15-year-old may be problematic or harmful for an eight-year-old. Consider the child's developmental ability as well as their chronological age.

Concerns about problematic and complex harmful sexual behaviour and the welfare and safety of the child(ren) should be acted upon.

The conversations had with the children involved may determine the support they receive due to context.

Problematic sexual behaviours **might** also indicate that a **child has experienced trauma or abuse**, so it is important to respond appropriately to keep the child safe.

Remember that Harmful sexual behaviour should be treated as a safeguarding issue for **both** the child who is harmed and the child whose behaviour is considered harmful.

If in a school setting you can ask your Early Help Consultant for support. Please see information under NYC Locality Contact Details.

If you are a professional, follow your organisational child protection procedures, including sharing concerns with your nominated child protection lead. Your organisation should have policies and procedures for responding to incidents of problematic, harmful, or abusive sexual behaviour. Seek help in terms of the best support, who is the most appropriate person placed to do this and ensure that there is an ongoing dialogue with the child(ren) and families if it is safe to do so.

Professionals can also contact the North Yorkshire Children & Families **Professionals Consultation Line** for advice / next steps if the children involved are **not already receiving support** from Children & Families.

The Professional's Consultation Line is available between **10 am and 4 pm**. You will be directed to the Emergency Duty Team outside of these hours.

01609 535070.

Where consent has not been obtained, and professionals feel that after speaking with their safeguarding lead/manager a referral is still warranted, they should submit a referral detailing their actions and inform the parent and carer of their actions.

Consent is **not required** should you believe informing the parents or carers would **place a child at significant risk of harm**.

It is important that where it does not pose a risk to the child(ren) involved consent is discussed with families and sought before it is decided that a referral is the most appropriate response. Without consent, the services available to the family may be limited.

Ensure that if other professionals are involved you know who they are and what their roles and responsibilities are, gaining a complete overview of the situation. It is always safer not to assume that someone else is doing something

The **threshold document** can also be viewed to better understand whether it is appropriate for a referral to be submitted to the Multi-Agency Screening Team (MAST) for additional support.

The NYSCP has created scenario videos to view - These are not to be used as a diagnostic or tick list tool, but for the purpose of discussion.



[HSB Scenario 2 Ivan](#)

[See Responding to Worries Around Potential HSB on how to deal with potential behaviours in the first instance.](#)

The NSPCC and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation both have guidance on the stages of Child Sexual Development which can be viewed [here](#)

[NSPCC Child Sexual Development by Age](#)

[Lucy Faithfull Foundation Sexualised Behaviours by Age](#)

Please note that these are not diagnostic tools

Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour

What does support look like?

The context of the situation and the understanding and background of the child is key when determining the next steps. If a referral is made, a MAST screening will consider this and other factors (including child's voice) and decide next steps with a clear rationale. This may include a variety of outcomes depending on circumstances. The child's (ren's) wishes and feelings will be at the centre of any support on offer. Help offered may depend on a variety of circumstances including but not limited to the severity of the behaviour, as well as who is best placed to offer any help needed.

Support may include;

- Assessments to identify if there is a need for more specialist assessment and /or intervention.
- Specific interventions either from a single or multi-agency perspective, with the child's (ren's) wishes and feelings at the centre of any support on offer (Early Help (Children & Families Worker), Children's Social Care, and / or support in the community and with other agencies such as school or police.)
- Ensuring that children know safe adults to speak to, support in relation to safe touch, and healthy relationships.
- Ensuring that safety planning is in place.

Further Resources:

[NSPCC - Watch: What are problematic \(amber\) behaviours?](#)

[The NSPCC Helpline can help both parents/carers or professionals, and can support with next steps, and to help determine a response.](#)

0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

“Red” Behaviours

These behaviours are **outside of healthy and safe behaviours**. They signal a need for **immediate protection** and support for all involved.



[Hackett Continuum - NSPCC Website](#)

Where there are significant immediate concerns about the safety of a child, you should contact the police on 999.

You should call 101 to report crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response.

Abusive and violent behaviours **typically require a safeguarding response** due to concerns of **significant harm**.

Report to the **police** as appropriate (for example, if an allegation of rape, sexual assault, or sexual offence is made). This should happen alongside making a [referral to the Multi-Agency Screening Team \(MAST\)](#).

Ensure that if other professionals are involved, you know who they are and what their roles and responsibilities are, gaining a complete overview of the situation. It is always safer not to assume that someone else is doing something.

[If in a school setting you can ask your Early Help Consultant for support if you are unclear on whether there are safeguarding concerns and/or to discuss the next steps. Please see the information under NYC Locality Contact Details.](#)

Professionals can also contact the North Yorkshire Children & Families **Professionals Consultation Line** for advice / next steps if the young people involved are **not already receiving support** from Children & Families.

The Professional's Consultation Line is available between **10 am and 4 pm**. You will be directed to the Emergency Duty Team outside of these hours.
01609 535070.

If you are a professional, follow your organisational child protection procedures, including sharing concerns with your nominated child protection lead. Your organisation should have policies and procedures for responding to incidents of problematic, harmful, or abusive sexual behaviour. Seek help in terms of the best support, who is best placed to do this, and ensure that there is an ongoing dialogue with the child(ren) and families if it is safe to do so.



Should parents not be aware, professionals need to ensure that they are kept informed (where appropriate) and supported to encourage bodily autonomy in their child(ren), staying safe and that they are supported, and confident in understanding and dealing with sexualised behaviours.

It is important that where it **does not pose** a risk to the child(ren) involved **consent** is discussed with families and **sought** before it is decided that a referral is the most appropriate response. Without consent, the services available to the family may be limited.

Where consent has not been obtained, and professionals feel that after speaking with their safeguarding lead/manager a referral is still warranted, they should submit a referral detailing their actions and inform the parent and carer of their actions.

Consent is **not required** should you believe informing the parents or carers would place a child at significant risk of harm.

The NSPCC and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation both have guidance on the stages of Child Sexual Development which can be viewed [here](#)

[NSPCC Child Sexual Development by Age](#)

[Lucy Faithfull Foundation Sexualised Behaviours by Age](#)

Please note that these are not diagnostic tools

Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Remember that Harmful Sexual Behaviour should be treated as a safeguarding issue for both the child who is harmed and the child whose behaviour is considered harmful. Problematic sexual behaviours might also indicate that a child has experienced trauma or abuse, so it is important to respond appropriately to keep the child safe.

The NYSCP has created scenario videos to view - These are not to be used as a diagnostic or tick list tool, but for the purpose of discussion.

[HSB Scenario 3 Alex and Morgan](#)



What does support look like?

The context of the situation and the understanding and background of the child is key when determining the next steps. A MAST screening will consider this and other factors (including child's voice) and decide next steps with a rationale for this. This may include a variety of outcomes which could include a strategy meeting or an assessment from Children and Families (Family Assessment & Support Team or Early Help Teams) depending on circumstances.

Support may include;

- A strategy meeting (a multi-agency meeting) to define next steps.
- An assessment to identify if there is a need for more specialist support and /or intervention.
- Specific interventions either from a single or multi-agency perspective, with the child's (ren's) wishes and feelings at the centre of any support on offer, Early Help (Children & Families Worker), Children's Social Care, Police, or the Youth Justice Service (YJS). Help offered may depend on a variety of circumstances including, but not limited to the severity of the behaviour, and can be explored by those involved alongside the family.
- Ensuring that children know safe adults to speak to, support in relation to safe touch, and healthy relationships.
- Ensuring that safety planning is in place.
- Assessments to identify if there is a need for more specialist assessment and /or intervention.
- Specific interventions either from a single or multi-agency perspective, with the child's (ren's) wishes and feelings at the centre of any support on offer (Early Help (Children & Families Worker), Children's Social Care, and / or support in the community and with other agencies such as school or police.)
- Ensuring that children know safe adults to speak to, support in relation to safe touch, and healthy relationships.
- Ensuring that safety planning is in place.

See [Responding to Worries Around Potential HSB on how deal with potential behaviours in the first instance.](#)

Further Resources:

NSPCC - Watch: What are Red Behaviours?

The NSPCC Helpline can help both parents/carers or professionals, and can support with next steps, and to help determine a response.

0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk



For more information about the referral process in North Yorkshire, and what to do if you are worried about a child.

<https://safeguardingchildren.co.uk/about-us/worried-about-a-child/>

AIM 3 Assessments and Support

An example of help for behaviours that are violent or abusive is support because of an AIM3 assessment.

The AIM3 assessment (Assessment, Intervention, Moving On) is a structured tool designed for professionals working with children who it is alleged or confirmed have displayed harmful sexual behaviours. It provides a framework for evaluating these behaviours, understanding why they happened, and allows practitioners to develop tailored intervention plans to prevent their reoccurrence. Professionals require AIM3 training.

The assessment seeks to get to know the child and understand their life, family, and experiences to better identify why the harmful sexual behaviours have occurred, and so they can receive the most appropriate help.

AIM practitioners are trained professionals who work alongside others in the child's life such as parents and carers, teachers, social workers, and police. Work is completed after relationships are formed or by someone with a relationship with the young person to address shame and the situation's complexity. The worker will use the information gathered to identify areas of concern and strengths, discuss next steps and support to ensure safety and enable positive change.

If there is a police investigation, support can be given before any outcome of this, as risk is determined in terms of future similar behaviours and identifying ways to manage those risks.



Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Other Support

Help is not isolated to AIM3 assessment, and the outcome of meeting with professionals and families may determine that other help is of benefit. This may include Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services involvement. Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (FCAMHS) are specialised mental health services that focus on assessing and treating young people who display harmful behaviours, including sexually harmful behaviours, and who may have complex mental health needs. These services are designed to support risk management and treatment approaches for children and young people, especially those who may pose a risk to themselves or others or are involved in or at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

The service is provided by a team of professionals from various disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, social work, and nursing. This multi-disciplinary approach ensures comprehensive assessment and intervention. FCAMHS will work alongside existing workers such as police or social workers.

Further Resources:

To sign up for AIM resources and learning, <https://aimproject.org.uk/>

Several organisations support those involved in HSB, including;

NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

- **IDAS North Yorkshire** - IDAS offer support to anyone who has experienced sexual violence, regardless of the situation - What is an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Adviser) - Sexual Violence Help and Advice
- **The Lucy faithful Foundation** – The Inform Young People Programme is an educational programme for young people in trouble with the police, their school or college for inappropriate use of technology and the internet - Inform young people - Stop It Now –
- **The NSPCC** run several programs such as;
 - NCATS (National Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service)
 - Change for Good
- **Barnardo's** offers therapeutic support and projects such as the Beacon Project
- **Forensic CAMHS**

Help is available for those who have been sexually harmed. Bridge House is a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in North Yorkshire providing a dedicated service for men, women, and children who have been raped or sexually assaulted recently or in the past.

- Contact Bridge House - Home - Bridge House (bridgehousesarc.org) or by calling 0330 223 0362. This service is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Yorsexual Health offers information about sexual health and contraception services in York and North Yorkshire, which is confidential, free and friendly and are available to everyone.

- Yorsexual Health Website

See NYES for available training including Safeguarding



For a Barnardo's Training Video on Child Sexual Abuse and harmful Sexual Behaviour, please see the NYSCP website or click [here](#)



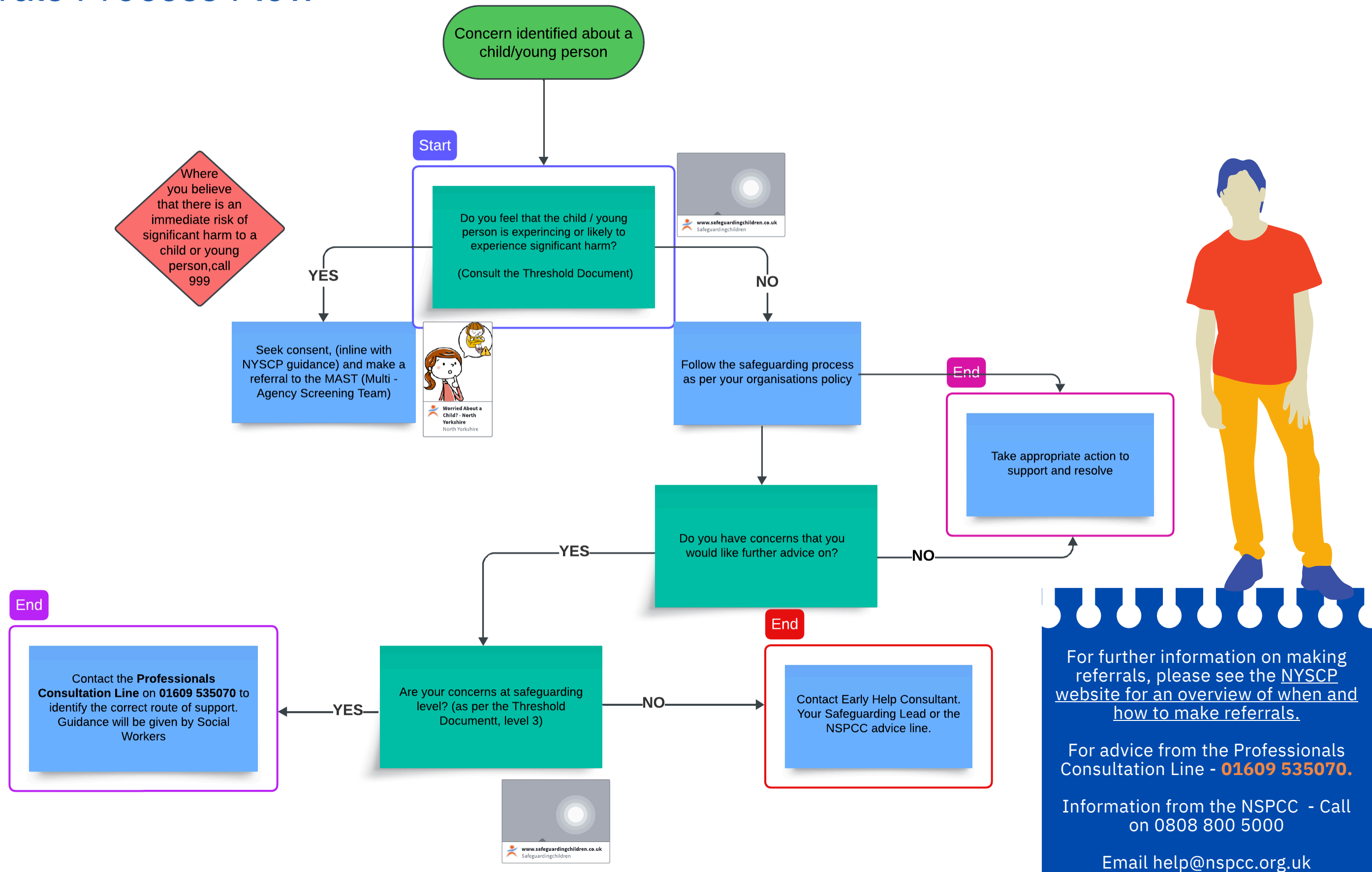
For NYSCP scenario videos relating to HSB, identifying it, and how to access support, please see

1) Scenario 1 - The Boys.

2) Scenario 2 - Ivan.

3) Scenario 3 - Alex and Morgan.

Referrals Process Flow



Shared Language

It is important that when discussing abuse or harmful sexual behaviours there is a common language adopted by all those working with children and young people that is established and understood. Different agencies often use varying terminology, which can be confusing. In extreme cases, this can lead to misunderstandings about risk levels and a failure to take necessary actions to protect a child. It is important to use language that is appropriate, non-judgmental, and sensitive to the needs and experiences of the individuals involved.

The language we use shapes our thoughts. Recent serious case reviews have identified this as a critical factor that contributed to systemic failures in protection. Using language that suggests a child, young person, or group of young people are complicit in or responsible for the harm they experience can negatively impact how we assess their needs and provide support.

The NSPCC has guidance on this topic - [NSPCC - Why Language Matters](#), however, lists some key points to note:

Follow the individual's preferences: People experience and relate to their experiences differently, so it's important to use the language they prefer.

Avoid Blame and Stigma: Children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour should not be blamed or labelled in a way that could stigmatise them. Terms like "promiscuous" or "lifestyle choices" are inappropriate and should be avoided.

Avoid labelling with 'victim': The term 'victim' can influence how safeguarding professionals perceive children and how children see themselves.

Instead of 'victims,' refer to "*children who have experienced/are experiencing abuse.*" This emphasises that abuse is something they have gone through, not their identity.

Focus on Behaviour, Not Identity: Describe the specific behaviour rather than labelling the child or young person. For example, instead of saying "*He is a sexual offender,*" say "*He displayed sexually harmful behaviour.*"

Use Developmentally Appropriate Language: Ensure that the language used is suitable for the age and understanding of the child or young person. This includes avoiding complex terminology that they might not understand.

Challenge popular notions of victimhood: Children and young people experiencing abuse may not fit the stereotypical image of a 'victim,' which can lead to missed opportunities for safeguarding.

Professional and Neutral Language: Use professional and neutral language in all documentation and communication. Avoid terms that could be perceived as judgmental or accusatory.

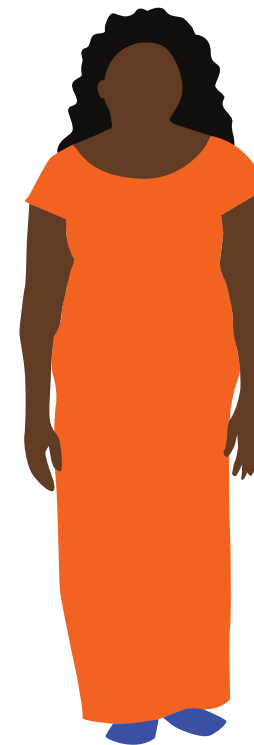
Consider Adultification: Challenge preconceived notions about children that can lead them to being treated and considered as an adult.

Be Confident to Question: Challenge and question victim-blaming language and challenge each other respectfully.

Remember: Children/parents/carers can access their records or they may be used in legal proceedings.

Social GRRRAACCEESSS: Consider your own social GRACES and experiences when supporting children.

Our GRACES influence our personal and social identity and can influence judgement of others or situations based on our own experiences and belief systems. ⁶



Avoid Jargon:
Be Clear.
Use factual language

"Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind".
Brene Brown, 2018) ⁵



[The Children's Society Child Exploitation Language Guide | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)
[Waltham Forest Council - Victim Blaming Language - YouTube](#)

Guidance for Education Settings

Schools and other education settings including nurseries and wraparound care, play a vital role in identifying harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), providing appropriate responses, and educating and reinforcing messages to children about healthy and respectful relationships at various developmental stages. UK schools are required to teach children and young people about healthy relationships.

[Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education - GOV.UK.](#)

[Promoting healthy relationships in schools | NSPCC Learning.](#)

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE Part 5) details how educational settings should address child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment, including the procedures for handling reports of such incidents acting on the assumption that all children and young people could be affected by child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment. [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK.](#) Schools should assume that sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence are happening in the community, and potentially in the school, even when there are no specific reports, and put in place a whole-school approach to address them.

It is advised that schools have clear policies on acceptable behaviours and that they create a **culture** where **HSB is not accepted**, as well as promoting **positive ideas about healthy relationships**, self-esteem and gender. It is natural for children and young people to explore sexuality, with research showing that the most effective prevention education adopts a **'whole school'** approach to promoting healthy relationships, is sustained over time, and actively involves young people in its development and delivery. It is vital that this involves all staff who will have contact with and/or observe children - including lunchtime staff, coaches, caretakers etc... ensure that they know how to respond and escalate worries.

The [Beyond Referrals](#) website shares tools for education partners to support the prevention of HSB and help understand its prevalence in schools, as well as providing practical interventions when it occurs. It gives practical templates and advice on how to engage pupils, staff and parents in the HSB conversation and have a culture of awareness. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has a section on its website dedicated to supporting schools in relation to HSB - [Help for schools - Lucy Faithfull Foundation.](#)

Please consider that **all** sexualised behaviours warrant a response.

All staff must recognise the importance of documenting every incident of sexual behaviour regardless of how minor it may seem. As stated in KCSiE, [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK](#) 'Schools and Colleges should be aware of the importance of making clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment, that it is never acceptable, and it will not be tolerated. It should never be passed off as **"banter," "just having a laugh", "a part of growing up" or "boys being boys"**. Failure to do so can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviour, an unsafe environment and, in worst-case scenarios, **a culture that normalises abuse**, leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.



When there has been a report of sexual violence, the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy) should make an immediate risk and needs assessment. Where there has been a report of sexual harassment, the need for a risk assessment should be considered on a case-by-case basis. The risk and needs assessment for a report of sexual violence should consider KCSiE Para 487 - 491.



Considerations for Creating a Culture of Zero Tolerance on HSB

- Is your policy on sexualised behaviours, sexual violence and sexual harassment known by all staff, students, and parents, and the consequences of violating it? Schools should have effective behaviour policies in place regarding harmful sexual behaviour. The policies should include details of appropriate sanctions that should be applied consistently and that reflect and are consistent with the messages that are taught across the curriculum.
- Have pupils been involved in the design and implementation of the policy, are there student-led initiatives, student voice and peer mentoring programs based on lived experiences and any concerns they may have?
- Are there adequate reporting mechanisms in place?
- Do you have a specific category for recording safeguarding concerns to enable the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and deputies to track data on sexual behaviour and respond appropriately?
- Can you provide evidence of actions taken after multiple incidents of 'low level' inappropriate sexual language or behaviour?
- Are you confident that all staff have a clear understanding of what problematic and harmful sexual behaviour looks like for children in your setting, and that this can be impacted by Special Educational Needs (SEN) that may impact the developmental age of a child?
- Are all staff confident in challenging worrying sexual behaviour immediately? Do they feel skilled enough to challenge calmly and explain why the behaviour is concerning?
- Do you have robust systems in place to enable children to report concerns to a trusted adult?
- Is there access to support services for students affected?
- Do parents and carers know how to report concerns appropriately to your education setting?
- Do you have a robust and relevant Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) policy that ensures children are regularly taught about healthy sexual behaviours?

Considerations for Dealing with Specific Incidents of Sexualised Behaviours in Education

- Is it an isolated incident or part of a pattern? Check safeguarding records.
- Does this incident indicate a culture that needs to be addressed, in a certain year group?
- Who has been impacted by the incident? Who initiated the behaviour and who was affected (consider bystanders too)?
- What level of risk or concern does the sexual behaviour pose? If the incident happened in the setting, what measures have been taken to reduce any associated risks? Is there a need for safety planning?
- Is the school/setting placement at risk for the instigator of the harmful sexual behaviour (e.g., exclusions or managed move)?

Guidance for Education Settings



Considerations for Dealing with Specific Incidents of Sexualised Behaviours in Education - continued...

- Are all involved in the incident safe when they return to the education placement? How much does the wider school community know? Will there be impacts on the wider community?
- How is the setting going to ensure that all children involved in the incident still have appropriate and full access to their school place pending any police investigation or social worker enquiry?

Support

Outlined is information for education establishments detailing some of the support available to deal with worries about sexualised behaviours and get help and advice. Please note that this is not exhaustive. Please see [Additional Resources](#) for further information and websites that have practical tools to help educational establishments

Supporting those impacted by Harmful Sexual Behaviours in a Learning Environment

As stated in KCSiE, 'The needs and wishes of the victim should be paramount (along with protecting the child) in any response. It is important they feel in as much control of the process as is reasonably possible. KCSiE Para 538-539.

When safeguarding and supporting children and young people who have displayed harmful Sexual Behaviour, KCSiE also states, 'The school or college will have a difficult balancing act to consider. On one hand, they need to safeguard the victim (and the wider pupil/student body) and on the other hand provide the alleged perpetrator(s) with an education, safeguarding support as appropriate and implement any disciplinary sanctions. Taking disciplinary action and still providing appropriate support are not mutually exclusive actions. They can, and should, occur at the same time if necessary.' KCSiE Para 548-550.

Early Help Consultants

Each locality (East, West and Central areas) in North Yorkshire Council (NYC) has Early Help Consultants (EHC's). Their role is to offer support, advice, and guidance to their allocated schools in each area, to offer support to schools and other partners enabling the co-ordinated delivery of Early Help support to children and their families.

Early Help Consultants are the main point of contact for schools and will work alongside you to support the delivery of early interventions specific to the needs of children and families. They are knowledgeable on local themes and trends and help available throughout the Early Help continuum from local community-based groups and organisations to more targeted support. Providing information advice and guidance on Early Help Assessment and pulling together multi-agency meetings to develop a clear plan for the child and their family. Advising when it is appropriate to request additional support from Early Help.

Early Help is the term used to describe North Yorkshire's multi-agency approach to providing early guidance and support to families at any stage of a child's life when a problem or difficulty first arises.

Professionals Consultation Line

The Professional's Consultation Line number is available between 10 am and 4 pm on **01609 535070**. Outside of these hours, you will be directed to the Emergency Duty Team. The line is run by MAST Social Workers who can advise on safeguarding concerns in relation to children and families who are not working with the Children and families' service. If this is the case, please contact the allocated Social Worker or Children and Families Worker.

North Yorkshire Police – School Liaison Officers (SLO's)

The School Liaison Team's focus is to prevent the criminalisation of young people and provide early intervention and support. Officers are PSHE CPD accredited and work closely with schools, education, youth groups, partner agencies and local policing teams.

School Liaison Officers (SLO's) can deliver 1:1 sessions to pupils, group workshops, and wider assemblies, and cover a range of topics around the PSHE Curriculum.

For more information about the SLOs and how to contact your local officer and the support they offer, please see the Padlet - [North Yorkshire Police - Support for DSL's - North Yorkshire County](#)

Healthy Child Team – (HCT) - The Emotional Health and Resilience Team

The Healthy Child Team as part of the 0 – 19 years Health Child Program supports children and young people aged 6-19. The Children's Wellbeing Practitioners support those experiencing mild to moderate mental health difficulties and their families in the self-management of presenting difficulties, including supporting self-esteem, difficulties with relationships, anxiety, and low mood. The service is by referral.

For more information about the HCT and support they offer for both school and non-school aged children, please see [Growing Healthy 0-19 North Yorkshire | HDFT Children's Health Service](#)

Mental Health Support Teams (Wellbeing in Mind, TEWV)

The WIMT work within educational settings to develop and help embed a whole school approach to wellbeing. Additionally, they provide advice, consultation and signposting to staff encouraging them to support their pupils and enabling to engage in education. The team also provide interventions to children and young people either during one-to-one work or in groups.

For more information on the WIMT, please see [The Go To Website](#).

[Click here for information on Safety Planning in Education Settings from the CSA Centre and a template](#)

Guidance for Education Settings



Further Information and Learning - The NYC School Improvement Team

NYC School Improvement team offer a range of support and training to support schools implement an effective Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum.

- Termly free [PSHE network meetings](#) for primary, secondary and special schools
- Specific [training on delivering an effective RSE curriculum](#) alongside bespoke support and training for individual schools needs.
- [Range of resources](#) to support schools in implementing an effective RSE policy and curriculum.

Please get in touch with the School Improvement Team, Senior Health and Wellbeing Advisor for further information - schoolimprovementservice@northyorks.gov.uk

Further Information and Learning

NSPCC Learning delivers several courses and has resources aimed at schools, on a variety of topics including;

- Delivering RSE for secondary schools - [Sex and relationships \(RSE\) training course for teachers and school leaders \(NSPCC Learning\)](#).
- Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships—Promoting healthy relationships in schools | NSPCC Learning has useful resources grouped by age and information relating to children and young people with additional needs.

They also have further courses covering the information and skills you need to recognise, report and record sexualised behaviour concerns, as well as curriculum and lesson plan information.

Further information for schools on [teaching about consent from KS 1 – 5](#) from the PSHE association.

Support for Online Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Childnet has produced resources designed to support professionals in addressing online sexual harassment among young people This guide provides practical tools and information and includes a range of resources, focuses specifically on peer-to-peer online sexual harassment and offers scenario-based teaching resources to address this issue, and answers some frequently asked questions (FAQs) for schools in their response to online harms. See [Childnet Guidance Online HSB](#)

The NSPCC has guidance on what to do if a young person loses control of a nude image of themselves online, which includes how to report the image themselves - [Supporting young people to report nude images: Report Remove | NSPCC Learning](#)

Guidance for Community Groups

Community groups play a crucial role in keeping children safe by creating environments rooted in trust, support, and proactive engagement. Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and communities, and local places and spaces hold a vital role in keeping children and young people safe in North Yorkshire.

Groups implement initiatives to educate children and parents about safety and can often be a safe space where children have trusted adults from outside of the family network that they can speak to.

Community groups help uphold positive messages and reinforce appropriate behaviours with many children and young people seeing their coaches, leaders and teachers as role models and people of influence.

VSCE groups should have robust safeguarding policies in place to protect children from harm. These policies should include procedures for responding to child protection concerns and making referrals to local authority children’s social care or the police if necessary.

Support Resources

Outlined is information for community and voluntary groups detailing some of the support available to deal with worries about sexualised behaviours and get help and advice. Please note that this is not exhaustive.

Please see *Additional Resources* for further information and websites that have practical tools to help, including safety plans and information on their work with schools, including prevention information.

For further information and resources about safeguarding in the VSCE sector, a checklist and guide have been produced to help organisations identify what safeguarding arrangements should be in place. [NYSCP VCS Checklist](#).



The NWG has created a video showing how to help recognise signs of abuse or worrying behaviours and to respond accordingly.

[CSE Faith Support - STOP CE Video](#)

The NSPCC also has information on for voluntary & Community Groups - [NSPCC Voluntary and Community Groups](#) and runs a professional helpline for those such as individual tutors working in a family home, a volunteer at a club, or the child protection lead for a large organisation. The helpline is there for guidance and support and works in conjunction with your organisations safeguarding policies. Trained professionals can support with concerns and give expert advice on what to do next.

The NSPCC Helpline service is currently available 10am–8pm Monday to Friday. (“NSPCC Helpline - NSPCC Learning”) Call on 0808 800 5000

Email help@nspcc.org.uk

How To Have Difficult Conversations With Parents and Carers

The following is designed to help practitioners who work with children and their families navigate difficult conversations with parents and carers, particularly when addressing behaviours that are sexualised and/or deemed sexually inappropriate.

It is important to encourage communication and feedback with parents and carers to help build and maintain a foundation of trust, which can be crucial when navigating difficult and sensitive conversations. Sharing regular updates about their child's activities and progress helps build relationships, and gives families insight into their child's life away from the family home. This will look different depending on the age and stage of each child as will the methods of communication.



When a child has displayed inappropriate sexual behaviour, the first step is to inform their parents/carers, unless there is a concern that doing so would place the young person at further risk of harm. Any decision not to inform parents or carers would generally be made in conjunction with other agencies, such as the Children and Families Service and/or the police.

Please see [Responding to Worries Around Potential Harmful Sexual Behaviour](#)

Principles

- **Plan:** Take time to fully understand the circumstances and plan the conversation. Familiarise yourself with the family dynamic and relationships around the child, and consider if support is needed, such as professional interpreters or accessible materials. Ascertain if the family is receiving support from the Children and Families Service, or other partners, and make contact with them.
- **Build on Positives:** Focus on the strengths of the family and how these can be built on, and identify who else might support them following the conversation.
- **Statutory Duty:** Explain that your primary duty is to safeguard the child's welfare. This may include a requirement to report concerns to the Children and Families Service. Ensure child protection/behaviour policies are clear and accessible.
- **Be Clear:** Be open, honest, and clear, avoiding acronyms and jargon. Follow up on agreements made.
- **Be Curious:** Be professionally curious, consider different perspectives, and maintain an analytical and reflective approach free from judgment.



For more information on Professional Curiosity, please see the [NYSCP Website - NYSCP](#).

- **Support:** Be ready to signpost to other support agencies with an understanding of the types of support they can offer the child and/or wider family network.

Remember that Harmful Sexual Behaviour should be treated as a safeguarding issue for **both** the child who is harmed and the child whose behaviour is considered harmful.

Planning & Preparation

- **Risk Assessment:** If unsure about speaking to parents/carers, seek advice from Children and Families. Inform parents/carers unless it places the young person at further risk of harm. Contact the police if you believe that a crime has been committed, and/or there are immediate safety concerns.
- **Safety:** If the parents/carers pose a risk to your safety, make a full risk assessment and do not meet alone. Ensure these risks are communicated with other professionals working with the family.
- **Preparation:** Consider barriers to sharing and receiving information, such as learning difficulties or language. Ensure accessibility and plan how to broach concerns and respond to different reactions.
- **Timing and Privacy:** Choose a time and place that ensures privacy, and where parents/carers feel comfortable. Consider if it is appropriate for the child to share the information with parents/carers alongside you.
- **Support:** Offer parents/carers an opportunity to have their own support.
- **Strengths:** Help the family identify their strengths, and consider their networks of support, and how these can be built on for positive change.
- **Experiences:** Consider the family's experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and how they could impact the situation. Be aware of the family's background, ethnicity, religion, experience of education, sex, age, and dealings with professionals.

The Conversation

Young people and their parents can sometimes deny problematic sexual behaviour, preferring to ignore it rather than confront the issue. Denial can be a normal and functional defence mechanism for parents, as it offers protection against a difficult reality. Understanding this can help practitioners approach the situation with empathy and patience. Family dynamics, culture, and beliefs can influence how both children and adults respond, which requires consideration when discussing support. Interventions can be an opportunity to understand how the child came to be in a position where they behaved in a way that could be considered harmful.

- **Environment:** Ensure children cannot overhear the conversation. Position yourself in the room so that everyone feels safe, comfortable, and secure.
- **Communication Style:** Be straightforward and calm, use 'active listening'. This means being fully present with no distractions. Notice non-verbal cues, ask open-ended questions, paraphrase, and reflect back to the parent/carer what they have said to you. Speak to understand, not just respond, and ensure the parent/carer feels heard. Avoid arguing, interrupting, passing judgment, or jumping to conclusions. Use terms like "concerning behaviour" or "inappropriate actions" instead of accusatory words.

Evidence suggests that young people 'take on' and internalise labels, and therefore to describe a young person only as a 'sex offender' or 'young abuser' may impact their motivation and responsiveness in both assessment and treatment, leaving them feeling they cannot change. For further information about the use of language see [Shared Language](#)

How To Have Difficult Conversations With Parents and Carers

- **Confidentiality:** Ensure confidentiality when speaking with parents/carers.
- **Clarity:** Give clear explanations, use facts, and be clear on the next steps and with who the information will be shared with.
- **Handling Anger:** Remain calm and composed. Use de-escalation techniques such as lowering your voice, acknowledging feelings, and offering to continue the conversation at another time if necessary.
- **Be Patient:** Give time to process the information and ask questions. Acknowledge and validate the family's feelings. Check their understanding.
- **Follow-up:** Arrange a follow-up meeting to discuss progress, additional support needed, and how this will be done.

Examples of questions you may want to consider:

The questions below are designed to be conversation starters.

- “It’s important that we have a conversation about [child’s name]; and...”
- “[Child’s name]’s behaviour has changed dramatically over the past few weeks. Have you any idea what could have caused this?”
- “It’s important that we talk about [specific concern].”
- “Can you describe any changes in [child’s name]’s behaviour at home recently?”
- “Has [child’s name] mentioned anything to you about feeling uncomfortable or scared?”
- “Are there any new stressors or changes in your family’s routine that might be affecting [child’s name]?”
- “How can we work together to support [child’s name] moving forward?”
- “Can you tell me more about what happened from your perspective?”
- “Do you have any concerns or questions about the steps we’re taking?”
- “I’m sure you may have lots of questions after... so....”



For support on how to manage safeguarding worries, and to discuss next steps, please contact the NYC Professionals Consultation line on **01609 535070**

Next Steps

- **Follow Procedures:** Record details of the meeting. Check your safeguarding procedures and seek guidance. Honour and action agreements made with the family.
- **Supervision:** Seek guidance and support before and after the conversation to reflect on what happened and discuss the next steps.
- **Escalation:** If still concerned about a decision or practice, escalate your concerns using the appropriate procedures.

Additional Resources

<https://www.pacey.org.uk/information-hub/> - Support for Early Years Providers

[Managing allegations of abuse made against a child | NSPCC Learning](#)

[Sexting: sharing nudes and semi-nudes | NSPCC Learning](#)

[NICE guidelines on children's attachment.](#)

[Supporting Young people with Harmful Sexual Behaviour Online \(Childnet International\).](#)

[Dingley's Promise- Information and training courses from Early Years SEND specialists for North Yorkshire Early Years settings around difficult conversations](#)

Note – Should parents not be aware, professionals need to ensure that they are kept informed (where appropriate), to keep their children safe and supported.

It is important that where it **does not** pose a risk to the child(ren) involved **consent** is discussed with families and sought **before** it is decided that a referral is the most appropriate response. Without consent, the services available to the family may be limited.

Where consent has not been obtained, and professionals feel that after speaking with their safeguarding lead/manager a referral is still warranted, it may be appropriate to discuss the concerns via the Professionals Consultation Line.

Consent is not required should you believe informing the parents or carers would place a child at significant risk of harm.



Guidance for Parents

Parents, carers, and families need to help children stay safe, and in terms of sexual harm, children and young people are most vulnerable to sexual abuse within their own families and communities. However, it is important to note that not all sexual abuse is perpetrated by adults.

It may be uncomfortable to acknowledge that children can harm other children, and it is difficult for parents to tell the difference between what is considered developmentally “normal”. It can be that younger children can be involved in behaviours that they do not know are harmful or wrong.

Healthy relationships and resilience are the cornerstone of helping keep children and young people safe from abuse and harm. They act as the “golden thread” that weaves through every aspect of a child’s life, providing a solid foundation of trust, respect, and open communication. Seeing healthy behaviour role-modelled helps build esteem and resilience and sets respectful and caring examples for children to adopt and follow. See [NSPCC Child Sexual Development by Age](#) for further information on sexual development by age.

Suggestions to Promote Healthy Relationships

Start Early: Begin discussing a variety of topics, including healthy relationships and safety, with children from an early age. Help them to understand that their body belongs to them and support them with this.

Ensuring body autonomy for children is crucial for their development, self-esteem, and safety. Body autonomy refers to the right of individuals, including children, to have control over their own bodies and to make decisions about their physical selves. This can be taught from birth by -

Body Awareness: Helping children learn about their bodies and the correct names for body parts. This knowledge empowers them and can also be crucial in preventing and reporting abuse. Ensuring that from your child’s early years, you can talk openly and factually about their body and their right to feel safe. Just as they have arms and legs, they have a penis or vulva and anus. Children can’t tell you if they’ve received an inappropriate touch if they don’t have the words to describe it.

Teaching Consent: Educating children about the concept of consent from an early age. They should understand that they have the right to say “no” to unwanted physical contact and that their “no” should be respected. Examples of this include not having to give hugs or kisses even to close family members. Show the child that you listen to them.

Reassure: Reassure children that most touches are okay, and most people are good. However, if someone touches their private parts in a secretive way, or if they experience a touch that scares or confuses them, they should SAY “NO,” GET AWAY, and TELL SOMEONE. Remind them that if they receive an inappropriate touch from someone they know or care about, like a relative or babysitter, they might not be able to say “NO” or get away, but they can still tell someone. Emphasise the importance of telling a trusted adult and if the first person doesn’t believe them, they should keep telling until someone listens and believes them. Let children know it’s okay to question or challenge adults when something doesn’t seem right, especially regarding touches.

Use resources such as the [NSPCC PANTS](#) rule and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation [Stop It Now](#) resources and [toolkit](#).

Daily Check-ins: Spend a few moments each day asking your children how they are, if anything is on their mind, or if there’s something they want to talk about. This can be during bedtime or when they return from school.

Build Trust: Ensure your children feel they can trust you enough to come to you when things go wrong or if they are worried. Cultivating this trust early on helps them know you care for them, even when they make mistakes, making it more likely they will seek your support when troubled.

Teach Relationship Skills: Use conversations to help your children understand what constitutes a safe and loving relationship versus an unsafe and unhealthy one. Without this guidance, they may struggle to recognise if they are being harmed or causing harm.

Listen to Children: Always listen to children’s feelings and concerns about their bodies. Validate their feelings and encourage open communication. Be clear that they can say no to any behaviours that leave them feeling uncomfortable, and that this will be supported. Ensure that children are aware of who they can share any worries, wishes or feelings with and encourage them to have a network of varied but trusted adults with who they can do this with.

Respect Privacy: Respect children’s privacy and teach them to respect the privacy of others. This includes knocking before entering their rooms and allowing them privacy when dressing or using the bathroom.

Observe: Be aware of your child's behaviour and any changes.

Online: Be aware that HSB can be conducted online and is of equal concern. Be aware of what your child(ren) is going online, talk to them about their interests and take an active role in who they are sharing information with. For more information on online safety, please see [NYSCP \(safeguardingchildren.co.uk\)](#). Discuss agreed usage.

Be Aware: It is true that most abuse takes place by someone known to the individual.

Seek Help: If you have concerns, or are unsure on how to respond, contact professionals such as school counsellors, social workers, or helplines for guidance.



Guidance for Parents

Be aware of signs of potentially harmful sexual behaviour that could include: (Lucy Faithfull Foundation)

- Seeking the company of younger children or spending an unusual amount of time with them.

Taking younger children to a 'secret place' or playing 'special games.'

- Insisting on hugging or kissing a child who does not want to be kissed or hugged.
- Showing anxiety or reluctance to be with a specific child or children.
- Frequently using aggressive sexual language about others.
- Showing sexual material to younger children.
- Making sexually abusive telephone calls.
- Sending or sharing sexual images.
- Sharing alcohol or drugs with other children.
- Viewing indecent images of children or increasing the amount of pornography they are watching.
- Exposing their genitals to others.
- Forcing sex on others.



Please consider the age, stage and understanding of your child.
Not all sexualised behaviour involving young people is problematic. If you're unsure, see the [What is not HSB](#) section for further advice.

Parents in North Yorkshire are entitled to free parenting sessions online covering topics from pregnancy and early years to teens and dealing with trauma. Log in at [In Our Place](#) with the code

NYFAMILIES

The NSPCC has a variety of resources on talking to children, advice for parents and sexualised behaviour in children -

- [Understanding Sexual Behaviour in Children | NSPCC](#)
- [NSPCC - How to Talk to Children About Healthy Relationships](#)

The Parents Protect Website - books to share re consent and preventing abuse -

[Books about consent](#)



Resources

This section contains a round up of information for both professionals and families, focusing on valuable organisations and resources related to supporting sexualised behaviours and overall wellbeing.

Understanding HSB

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has produced information sharing the Key Messages relating to HSB, as well as a directory of support for those affected by child sexual abuse in England & Wales.

- [Children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour | CSA Centre](#)
- [Get support | CSA Centre](#)

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a UK-wide child protection charity that works to stop child sexual abuse. They work with professionals to prevent abuse from happening, and families where abuse has happened, including the perpetrators of the abuse. They have a helpline and websites aimed at both parents/carers and as well as children, young people and professionals.

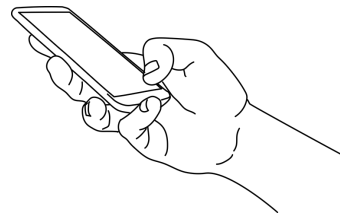
- [Lucy Faithfull Foundation | Preventing Child Sex Abuse -website](#)
- [Stop It Now | Preventing child sexual abuse](#) - Confidential [helpline](#), advising anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse and its prevention. Helping parents worried about a child or young person's behaviour, and professionals who work with children and families.
- [Parents Protect](#) - Helping parents and carers with dealing with sexual abuse. The [website](#) advises anyone with concerns about child sexual abuse and its prevention. Helping parents/carers worried about a child or young person's behaviour, and professionals who work with children and families.
- [Stop It Now! Prevention Toolkit](#) - The Lucy Faithfull Foundation has its own Toolkit providing information for parents, carers, children, young people, and professionals relating to a variety of HSB-related topics, including, (but not limited to) identifying behaviours, relationships, pornography, consent, internet safety, children & young people with SEND and young people who may be worried about their thoughts towards younger children. This is an excellent resource for carers and professionals alike.

NSPCC

- [Harmful sexual behaviour \(HSB\) or peer-on-peer sexual abuse | NSPCC Learning](#)

Having Difficult Discussions with Children

- [NSPCC Learning - How to have difficult conversations with children](#)
- [Barnardo's- HSB Guide for Professionals \(Wales\)](#)



Prevention

- [How to prevent harmful sexual behaviour in children | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Social Work Toolbox - Information for professionals on bodily autonomy - Further information on bodily autonomy -](#)

Parents / Carers

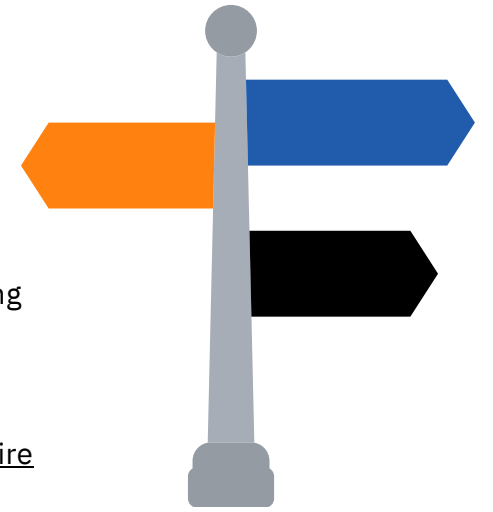
- [Stop It Now! HSB toolkit_ Talking to Children and Young People](#)
- [NSPCC - How to Talk to Children About Difficult Topics](#)
- [NSPCC - How to Talk to Children About Healthy Relationships](#)
- [Online courses for emotional health and wellbeing – Solihull Parenting](#)
- [IDAS -Sexual violence and abuse - IDAS](#)
- [Victim Support - Victim Support | Supporting Victims in North Yorkshire](#)

CSE / CCE

- [NYSCP Be Aware Child Exploitation Knowledge Hub](#) - Information for Young People, Carers and Professionals
- [Spot the Warning Signs - STOP CE -](#)
- [Ivison Trust - We support families affected by child exploitation.](#)
- [Home - St Giles](#)

Guidance for Children and Young People

- [Stop It Now! Prevention Toolkit](#): Includes specific sections for younger children, focusing on creating safe environments and open communication
- [Childline](#): Childline is a confidential helpline for young people under the age of 19 to discuss with any issues they might be dealing with.
- [Barnardo's Beacon](#): Provides support and resources for professionals working with young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours.
- [NSPCC Learning](#): Offers comprehensive resources and training for managing harmful sexual behaviour in teenagers, including peer-on-peer abuse.
- [BISH UK](#) - The website for over 14's discussing relationships, sex and love.
- [Home - Shore](#) - A safe space for teenagers worried about sexual behaviour Help, real-life stories, and anonymous support, backed by young people.
- [The Blue Door](#) - Offers free support, advice, and advocacy across the area to reduce the impact of domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
- [Fearless: Anonymous Reporting for a Safer Community | Crimestoppers](#) – A safe space to report crime 100% anonymously .Information of relationships and further support in relation to being a bystander



Resources

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- [Twinkl: Provides resources and guidance on managing sexualised behaviour in learners with SEND, Including teaching about consent and healthy relationships](#)
- [The Upstream Project | Stop It Now! Scotland | Learn](#)
- [National Autistic Society \(autism.org.uk\)](#)
- [Sexual Health | Autism Toolbox Autism Toolbox](#)
- [Learning Disabilities, Autism and Internet Safety - Cerebra](#)
- [underwear-rule-parents-learning-disabilities-english.pdf \(nspcc.org.uk\)](#)
- [RSE programme of study - Resources for SEND learners \(ASN and complex ASN tabs\)](#)
- [Mencap relationships and Sex Education Resources](#)
- [Online safety teaching toolkit for SEND learners](#)
- <https://dingley.org.uk/> - Information, Resources and Training for Early Years providers and SEND.

Schools

Please see the [Guidance for Education](#) section for resources related to schools and educational establishments, and note that other resource sections may contain information that is useful for schools, for example, the [Resources - Understanding HSB](#) section.

- [North Yorkshire Police - Support for DSL's - North Yorkshire County](#)
- [Help for schools - Stop It Now](#)
- [CSA Centre - Safety Planning for Education Settings](#)

Beyond Referrals: A toolkit including self-assessment tools and guidance for schools to assess and improve their response to harmful sexual behaviour.

- [Beyond Referrals - HSB in Schools, Toolkits and Self-Assessment Resources](#)

NSPCC / and NSPCC Learning: Offers a range of resources and training for schools on safeguarding and child protection, including how to teach about healthy relationships and consent.

- [Podcast: harmful sexual behaviour in schools | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Talk Relationships: resources to deliver sex and relationships education | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Healthy and unhealthy relationships | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Harmful sexual behaviour \(HSB\) or peer-on-peer sexual abuse | NSPCC Learning](#)

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation: Offers a range of resources and training for schools on safeguarding and child protection.

- [Lucy Faithfull - Help for Schools](#)

Sex Education Forum: Provides guidance and resources for delivering high-quality RSE in schools.

- <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/advice-guidance>

Brook: A leading sexual health and wellbeing charity for young people, offering resources and training for educators.

- <https://www.brook.org.uk/>

PSHE Association: Supports schools in delivering personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education, including RSE.

- [PSHE Association](#)

Stonewall: Provides resources and training to help schools create inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ students.

- <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/schools-colleges>

NSPCC: Report Abuse in Education Helpline

T: 0800 136 663

The NSPCC has been commissioned by the DfE to set up an independent helpline for children, parents and professionals to seek expert, sensitive advice from the NSPCC and safely report abuse that has happened or is happening in educational settings. The helpline is a dedicated line for children and young people who have been victims of abuse and for worried adults and professionals that need support and guidance.

Consent

[Guide To Sexual Consent | Consent Meaning | The Mix](#)

<https://youtu.be/h3nhM9UJjc> – Consent video animation

https://youtu.be/oeReb_aUZe8 – Consent video for older teens

Other

Everyone's Invited - is a website whose mission is to expose and eradicate rape culture with empathy, compassion, and understanding. They are a safe space for all survivors to share their stories completely anonymously, and provide assistance, self help guides and a wealth of information and support options.

- [Everyone's Invited - Help](#)

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation website - has information for parents, carers and professionals to better understand sibling sexualised behaviours. Child sexual abuse frequently happens in homes among siblings, as a form of abuse within families. It is vital for parents/carers to understand more about this and be equipped with responses and to know where to seek assistance when needed.

- [Sibling Sexual Behaviour - Sibling sexual behaviour - Stop It Now](#)

The Reward Foundation - is a relationship and sex education charity. They provide evidence-based information about love, relationships, and the impact of internet porn on mental and physical health, relationships, educational attainment and legal risks.

- <https://rewardfoundation.org/>



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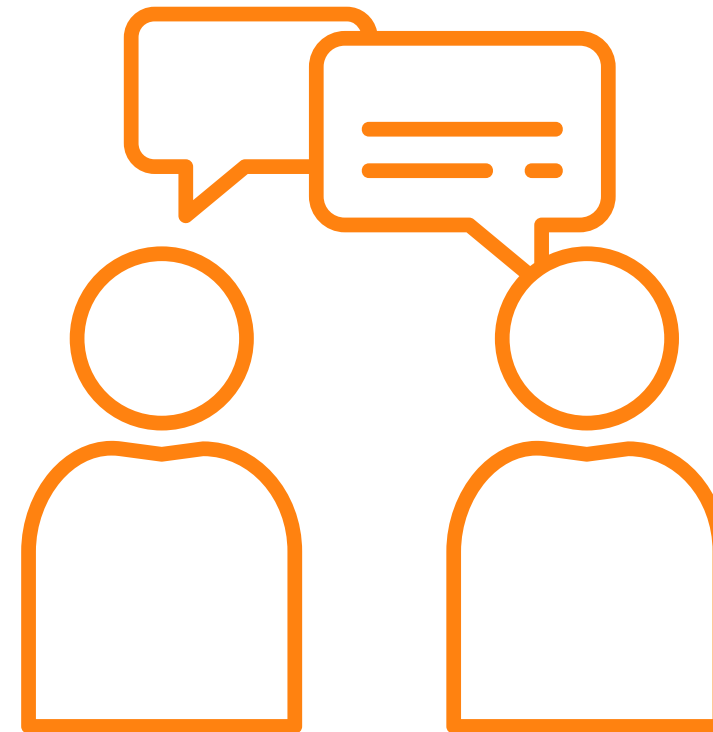
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For further suggestions/comments, please contact NYSCP@northyorks.gov.uk



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