



## Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence amongst Children and Young People

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### CREATING SAFE SPACES for CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

to grow up in an environment

FREE from PEER ON PEER VIOLENCE:

**Because children have the right to be protected from violence!**

Based on the current gaps identified in the five EU countries where the “Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence” project was implemented (*Belgium, France, Italy, Romania and Spain*), we present here a set of **key recommendations which address areas that require more attention from policy- and decision-makers** if we are to move closer towards an “EU zone free of peer on peer violence” on the way to the globally accepted goal of “Ending All Forms of Violence against Children” by 2030 (SDG 16.2).

1. Better data collection and more research is necessary (e.g. regarding the number of children affected, root causes of peer on peer violence, profile of children most affected, effect of peer on peer violence on children, etc.) in order to collect evidence and better inform policy-makers.

One of the significant gaps is inadequate and inconsistent data collection at national level. This lack of systematic data collection makes it difficult to compile a comprehensive database on the prevalence of peer on peer violence and to have quantitative baseline and target indicators in place by which to monitor the effects of policies and related actions. Without accurate data and quality evidence, it is challenging to design effective policies to prevent and address peer on peer violence.

2. More focus on prevention and early intervention is needed, including ensuring that peer on peer violence safeguarding policies are in place in spaces where children and young people interact and that more communication and awareness-raising on peer on peer violence takes place.

Existing policies mainly focus on addressing the consequences of peer on peer violence instead of prevention and early intervention. More emphasis has to be placed on reducing the risk factors for violence, such as through promoting positive relationships and building social skills and emotional literacy. It is essential to promote the acceptance of diversity and a culture of respect and tolerance amongst children and young people.

Comprehensive peer on peer violence safeguarding policies should exist and be implemented in schools and other settings where children and young people interact in order for them to become safe spaces. This includes the presence of at least one nominated "Safeguarding Officer" (in smaller organisations it may be an additional role rather than a position in itself). Correspondingly, all adults working with and caring for children (including parents) should be trained on how to recognise signs of peer on peer violence, respond appropriately, support children affected by peer on peer violence, and prevent recurrence.

Children and young people themselves should be given the opportunity to learn about topics such as what peer on peer violence is and why it happens, ways they can appropriately look after themselves and support their peers, and thereby be enabled to become active agents of change in creating a safe environment for themselves and their peers. Adults need to recognise the power of peer-led initiatives and support their development.

Awareness-raising campaigns are needed for the general population in order to increase everyone's understanding of what peer on peer violence is, where it happens, its impact and ways it can be prevented, responded to, as well as reported. Adults should understand the importance of being positive role-models for children and young people.

**3. Better collaboration across different sectors such as education, social welfare, health, and justice is key to ending peer on peer violence against children.**

There is a need to develop and implement cross-sectoral policies that address the issues related to peer on peer violence in a coordinated and holistic way. Indeed peer on peer violence happens everywhere, and preventing and responding to it should be everybody's business.

A multidisciplinary approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of peer on peer violence. Each sector brings its unique perspective, knowledge, data, and resources that can contribute to identifying the root causes of violence and developing effective solutions.

Collaboration can help ensure that prevention and response services are provided in a coordinated and effective manner. This can reduce the duplication of efforts, improve service delivery, and ensure that all children and young people who experience peer violence receive the appropriate care and support across different sectors.

**4. More funds and resources to enable improvements to happen.  
5. Meaningful child and youth participation – "nothing for us without us"**

These two cross-cutting recommendations are essential to ensuring the three key recommendations above can be actualized in an appropriate, effective and participatory way.

Without allocating the necessary funds and resources needed to prevent and respond to peer on peer violence, those who care for and work with children and young people will be unable to bring about the changes needed to create safer spaces for children and young

people, and children will not be supported to become active agents of change in their own environments.

In addition, the meaningful participation of children and young people is vital in shaping and delivering policies and actions that work towards the prevention of peer on peer violence. Not only is it their fundamental right to be involved in these processes, but their involvement is key to creating solutions that fully address the needs of children and young people.

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