



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

EU-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Children and young people without parental care and in families in vulnerable situations have often witnessed or experienced violence in their family and community. Exposure to violence can have a devastating and long-lasting impact on children's survival and their physical, psychosocial and mental health, including their cognitive and behavioural development and wellbeing, as well as their dignity. As a result, children and young people without or at risk of losing parental care are more vulnerable to becoming victims of violence from their peers or carrying out violence towards their peers.

Violence amongst children is one of the most common forms of violence children and young people experience. It is therefore of the utmost importance for the EU institutions and EU Member States to step up efforts to create a safe environment for and among children.

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child launched in 2021 and its third pillar aiming at fighting violence against children provides an important policy framework to channel actions and changes needed both in policy and in practice to better address peer violence. In particular, the upcoming initiative of the European Commission on integrated child protection systems will allow the EU to outline concrete actions to both prevent and better respond to violence, including peer on peer violence.

We call on the EU institutions and Member States to:

- Ensure peer on peer violence features high in the policy agenda, as part of wider debates on ending violence against children;
- Emphasise the importance of early intervention and prevention of violence, including violence amongst children, particularly in the framework of the upcoming European Commission initiative on integrated child protection systems. Prevention can be done by reducing the risk factors for violence, such as promoting positive relationships and building social skills and emotional literacy as well as promoting the acceptance of diversity and a culture of respect amongst children and young people;
- Support and encourage efforts to collect disaggregated data on violence against children, including peer on peer violence, to allow decision-makers to design and implement more targeted and effective policies;
- Develop awareness raising campaigns and activities on peer on peer violence at national level to increase the EU population'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;
- Promote the need to have comprehensive safeguarding policies in schools and other settings where children and young people interact and that those policies include peer on peer violence;

- Promote the set-up of a team of children and young people trained on peer on peer violence in each school;
- Ensure all adults working with and caring for children are trained to prevent, identify and respond adequately to peer on peer violence;
- Give the opportunity to children and young people to learn about what peer-on-peer violence is and why it happens, ways they can appropriately look after themselves and support their peers, so they can become active agents of change in their own environment;
- Support the better collaboration between the education, social, health and justice sector to ensure peer on peer violence is addressed in a coordinated and effective way;
- Be a strong advocate of meaningful, inclusive, and safe child and youth participation;
- Increase EU funding to end all forms of violence against children and encourage national authorities to allocate adequate funding to prevent and respond to violence against children, including violence amongst children.

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