



## Protecting children from bullying and cyber-bullying

### What is bullying?

Bullying is when individuals or groups seek to harm, intimidate or coerce someone who is perceived to be vulnerable (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021).

It can involve people of any age, and can happen anywhere – at home, school or using online platforms and technologies (cyberbullying). This means it can happen at any time. Bullying can be a form of discrimination, particularly if it is based on a child's disability, race, religion or belief, gender identity or sexuality.

### What are the types of behaviours?

Bullying encompasses a range of behaviours which may be combined and may include the behaviours and actions we have set out below.

#### Verbal abuse:

- name-calling
- saying nasty things to or about a child or their family.

#### Physical abuse:

- hitting a child
- pushing a child
- physical assault.

#### Emotional abuse:

- making threats
- undermining a child
- excluding a child from a friendship group or activities.

#### Cyber-bullying/online bullying:

- excluding a child from online games, activities or friendship groups
- sending threatening, upsetting or abusive messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing or malicious images or videos
- 'trolling' - sending menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name.



## **What is the impact of Bullying?**

Bullying can affect children's performance and attendance at school. They may find it hard to concentrate on schoolwork and homework or be too afraid to go to school (Brown, Clery and Ferguson, 2011).

Bullying can happen at any time or anywhere - a child can be bullied online when they are alone in their bedroom trying to relax or do homework - so it can feel like there is no escape (NSPCC, 2016). This can make it even more difficult for children to cope with being bullied. If a child is being bullied online, they may not know who is bullying them (the bully may have created an anonymous online account). This can be extremely frightening.

Children who have witnessed another child being bullied may also be distressed. They may not know the best way to help the person being bullied. They may fear for their own safety and experience feelings of guilt for not stepping in (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2017; NSPCC, 2016). When a child is bullied, it can also impact the child's parents. A common emotion reported by parents is worry or concern for their child and anger towards school staff, bullies and their parents. Parents have also expressed a sense of failure that they had not been able to keep their child safe (Harcourt et al., 2015).

### The emotional effects of being bullied include:

- sadness, depression and anxiety
- low self-esteem
- social isolation
- self-harm
- suicidal thoughts and feelings (Bainbridge, Ross and Woodhouse, 2017).

## **Where does bullying occur?**

The majority of reported bullying occurred in schools. In several instances, bullying occurred following a fallout amongst the child or young person's friendship group. The report also stated others findings from an NHS report that 11-19year olds with a mental health disorder were nearly twice as likely to have been bullied in the past year, compared to those without a mental health disorder. The association of bullying and later suicide attempts is well known and has been convincingly demonstrated (Klomek et al, 2009).

Nationally 23% of children or young people reviewed by Child Death Overview Panels, were recorded as having experienced bullying or cyber bullying.

## **Why children bully others**

There are many reasons why children bully others and it is not always a straightforward situation. Some of these include:



- peer pressure and/or wanting the approval of others
- wanting to feel powerful over someone with a perceived disadvantage
- being bullied themselves
- being worried, unhappy or upset about something
- lacking social skills or not understanding how others feel.

Children who bully others may not understand that they are making life difficult for another child and may find this realisation very distressing. It can be difficult for them to get the support they need to change their behaviour (NSPCC, 2016).

When posting online, children may not consider the impact their actions will have on others. Some children may be more likely to engage in bullying behaviour online as they can create anonymous accounts which may make them feel as if they cannot be 'found out'.

### **Vulnerability factors**

Any child can be bullied. Children who are seen by others as 'different' in some way may be targeted (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2017).

This might be because of their:

- physical appearance
- race
- faith or culture
- gender identity
- sexuality
- disability or additional needs
- appear anxious or have low self-esteem
- lack assertiveness
- are shy or introverted.

It may also be because of a child's family circumstances or home life, for example if they are adopted or in care (Department for Education, 2017) or receiving free school meals (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2019).

### **Signs and indicators**

Indicators that a child could be experiencing bullying include:

- being reluctant to go to school
- being distressed or anxious
- losing confidence and becoming withdrawn
- having problems eating and/or sleeping
- having unexplained injuries



- changes in appearance
- changes in performance and/or behaviour at school.

Adults may notice that a child is not spending time with their usual group of friends, has become isolated or that other children's behaviour towards a child has changed.

## Reporting

If you have a concern about bullying, you should follow your organisation's anti-bullying procedures as soon as possible.

If you think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on **999**. If you are worried a child is at risk of serious harm but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

- **Follow your organisational child protection and procedures.** Organisations that work with children and families must have [safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures](#) in place.
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on [0808 800 5000](tel:0808 800 5000) or by emailing [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk). Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.
- **Contact Kirklees Front Door to Children's Services for Professionals on 01484 414960. For members of the public 01484 456848**
- **Contact the police.**

Services will risk assess the situation and take action to protect the child as appropriate either through statutory involvement or other support. This may include making a referral to the local authority.

## Responding to incidents

All organisations that work with children should have a consistent approach to how they respond to bullying, which should be outlined in an anti-bullying policy. This should be linked to your child protection policy.

We have created an example anti-bullying policy statement that you can tailor according to the context of your organisation. It covers the key topics you need to consider and gives examples of some of the supporting documents you need to put in place.

### **When responding to incidents or allegations of bullying it is important for staff and volunteers to:**

- listen to all the children involved to establish what has happened
- record details of the incident and any actions you have taken
- inform your nominated child protection lead
- inform parents and carers (unless doing so would put a child at further risk of harm)



- provide support to the child/children being bullied, children who witnessed the bullying and the child/children who has been accused of bullying
- ask the child/children who have been bullied what they would like to happen next
- consider appropriate sanctions for children that have carried out bullying
- continue to monitor the situation even if the situation has been resolved.

It is important to review your anti-bullying policies and procedures regularly in the light of any incidents that have taken place, any new information learned and best practice. Your anti-bullying procedures should include information about how you will respond to bullying that takes place outside your organisation but involves children who know each other through your activities. This should include online bullying, bullying that happens on the way to and from school, and bullying that happens in other public places.

#### **When responding to online bullying:**

- make sure children know not to retaliate online or reply to any bullying messages. This could be done through a group awareness session, via a guest speaker in assembly or interactive sessions/lessons. This avoids relying on children to tell someone they are being bullied online before 'making sure that they know' not to retaliate or reply to the messages.
- make sure children understand how they can take steps to prevent online bullying from happening again, for example by changing their contact details, blocking contacts or leaving a chat room
- ask the child if they have shared the bullying content with anyone else (if so, who).

If bullying content has been circulated online, take action to contain it:

- if appropriate, ask the person responsible to remove the content
- contact the host (such as the social networking site) and ask them to take the content down
- contact the [NSPCC helpline](#) for advice about what to do.

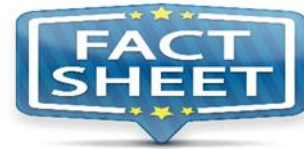
**If the content is illegal, contact the police who can give advice and guidance.**

#### **Preventing bullying**

It is important for organisations to create a culture where it is clear bullying will not be tolerated and children feel they can tell someone if they have a problem.

This might include:

- talking to young people about healthy relationships and challenging unhealthy behaviours
- promoting sources of help and information such as [Childline](#).



You should produce accessible versions of your anti-bullying policy and procedures, and share these with children, parents and carers.

Talk to children about:

- what bullying is
- how it affects the people involved
- why people bully others
- what bystanders should do when they witness bullying
- the importance of children telling someone if they or someone else is being bullied.

Consider whether there are any areas where bullying may be more likely to happen, for example in toilets or areas of the school that feel unsupervised. You should take steps to make these areas safer, for example making sure staff do regular checks.

Your staff and volunteers should be alert to the dynamics of children's relationships. Consider what approaches might be appropriate to prevent any situations that might escalate into bullying. This could include talking to children and young people in assemblies or lessons or having smaller discussions.

## **Schools**

A whole-school approach is key to preventing and tackling bullying (Department for Education (DfE), 2018a; Welsh Government, 2019). This includes bullying that happens outside school and online.

Schools should work to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where children, young people and adults treat each other with respect. As part of this, staff and volunteers should challenge inappropriate behaviour or language and not dismiss it as 'banter' (DfE, 2018a).

It is good practice to nominate a member of staff who will co-ordinate the school's response to bullying. The school should make sure that incidents are recorded centrally so that any concerning patterns of behaviour can be identified. This could include accessing resources from Northorpe Hall or Kooth.

Buddying systems in primary schools and peer mentoring in secondary schools can be effective ways of supporting children who are experiencing or at risk of bullying.

Involving the student council can be a good way to shape realistic anti-bullying policies and practices and ensure children and young people's views are heard.

## **Resources**



- [1.4.4 Bullying \(proceduresonline.com\)](#) – Contains procedures and guidance around bullying
- [Recognising and Responding to abuse](#) – Contains useful information around recognising and responding to bullying
- [Find out more about writing an anti-bullying policy statement](#) – Contains useful tips and a template for writing an anti-bullying policy
- [Resources on promoting healthy relationships](#) – Resources for tips for promoting Healthy Relationships. Contains tips and resources for all ages.
- [Childline website](#) – Contains support and tips for young people
- [How to have difficult conversations with children](#) – Contains helpful tips for navigating difficult conversations with young people
- [NSPCC anti-bullying resources](#) – Resources designed to help professionals recognise, respond to and prevent bullying
- [Kirklees Safeguarding Children website](#) – Contains lots of information and places to signpost young people, parents/carers, and professionals
- [Anti-Bullying Alliance website](#) - This website can help to plan bullying awareness sessions with children. It includes a resource pack and short videos
- [State of the nation 2022 Children and young people's well being](#) - A report on the wellbeing of children and young people over the academic year 2021 to 2022.
- [Bullying – Evidence from a longitudinal study of young people in England 2, wave 2](#) - Research into the health and wellbeing of 14-year-olds.
- [Ditch the label – The Annual bullying survey 2017](#)
- [Ditch the Label – The Annual bullying survey 2020](#)

