NSPCC Protecting children from bullying and cyberbullying

UNITED AGAINST BULLYING

Introduction

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 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

Cyberbullying/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

Impact

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)

> "Every day I wake up scared to go to school, scared about the comments people will make and scared about walking home. Then I get in and log onto my social networking site and there are horrible messages everywhere. It's like there's no escaping the bullies. I'm struggling to cope with how upset I feel so sometimes I cut myself just to have a release but it's not enough. I can't go on like this."
>
> **Childline counselling session with a girl aged 13 (NSPCC, 2016)**

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's 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).

Who is involved?

Why children bully others

There are many reasons why children bully others and it's 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 can't 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**
  (Ditch the Label, 2019)

Or it could be because they:

- **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).

Recognising and responding to bullying

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 isn't 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're 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 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk. Our trained professionals will talk through your concerns with you and give you expert advice.**
- **Contact your local child protection services. Their contact details can be found on the website for the local authority the child lives in.**
- **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.

See our information about recognising and responding to abuse CLICK HERE

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've 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.

Find out more about writing an anti-bullying policy statement

When responding to incidents or allegations of bullying it's 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've 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's 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
- 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's 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**

View our resources on promoting healthy relationships CLICK HERE

Visit the Childline website CLICK HERE

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**

Find out more about how to have difficult conversations with children CLICK

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's 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.

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

We have a range of resources that will help you prevent and tackle bullying in your organisation, including podcasts and lesson plans..

See our anti-bullying resources CLICK HERE

Legislation and Guidance

Across the UK there is legislation to protect children from a range of bullying and cyberbullying behaviour, including:

- **persistent harassment and intimidation — such as name calling and threats**
- **sending indecent, offensive, false or threatening communications**

Find out more about the legislation and guidance about harassment and victimisation CLICK HERE

Schools' duty to protect pupils from bullying

In England and Wales, under Section 89 of the **Education and Inspections Act 2006**, maintained schools must have a policy in place to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. This includes when pupils are not on school premises and are not being supervised by a member of school staff.

The **Independent School Standards (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012** requires academies and other types of independent schools to have an anti-bullying strategy in place.

In **Northern Ireland**, under the **Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003**, all grant-aided schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils.

The **Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016** sets out the duties of grant-aided schools to prevent bullying and keep a record of incidents of bullying.

In **Scotland**, under the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007, schools are required to be 'health promoting'. This includes promoting children's mental, emotional, social and physical health and wellbeing. **The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004** provides for support for children and young people who face barriers to learning – which can include additional support needs due to bullying.

In **England and Wales**, Section 89 of the **Education and Inspections Act 2006** gives head teachers of state schools the power to discipline students for bullying incidents that occur outside of school.

Key guidance

Across the UK, statutory guidance highlights the responsibility of those in the education, community and care sectors to safeguard children from all forms of abuse and neglect including bullying and cyberbullying. Find out more about child protection legislation and guidance in:

- **England**
- **Northern Ireland**
- **Scotland**
- **Wales**
- **and key safeguarding guidance for schools in the UK**

Guidance for schools

The Equality Act 2010 and schools (PDF) is a guide for school leaders, school staff, governing bodies and local authorities in **England, Scotland and Wales** on understanding their duties under the Equality Act (Department for Education, 2014a).

In **England**, the Department for Education (DfE) has produced **guidance for headteachers, school staff and local authorities that outlines their duty to prevent and tackle bullying that occurs in and outside of school (PDF)** (DfE, 2017).

The DfE has also produced **guidance for schools on searching, screening and confiscation (PDF)**. In cases of cyberbullying school staff may use this guidance to search mobile phones (DfE, 2018b).

In **Northern Ireland**, **Safeguarding and child protection in schools - a guide for schools** includes guidance on schools' duty to protect children and young people from abuse including bullying and cyberbullying (Department of Education, 2020).

The Department of Education has published statutory guidance for schools and boards of governors to support the **implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016** (Department of Education, 2021a). There is additional guidance on schools and boards of governors' responsibilities (Department of Education, 2021b).

Pastoral care in schools: promoting positive behaviour (PDF) is a guide for schools in developing an anti-bullying policy (Department of Education, 2001).

Scotland's national anti-bullying service is **Respectme**. The service supports adults working with children and young people in dealing with all types of bullying behaviour including:

- developing an anti-bullying policy
- addressing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying
- understanding and responding to bullying (Scottish Government, 2021).

The **Welsh Government** provides a series of **anti-bullying guidance** for schools and other organisations. This includes information on:

- **bullying linked to protected characteristics**
- **the law related to bullying**
- **effective anti-bullying strategies**
- **responding to bullying (Welsh Government, 2021)**

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) and the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) have produced a **guide for schools (PDF)** on tackling race and faith targeted bullying that occurs face to face and online (UKCCIS and ABA, 2017).

Keeping children safe from cyberbullying

The Home Office has developed the **Online abuse and bullying prevention guide (PDF)** for those who work with young people in **England and Wales** to help them understand the types of online abuse, its consequences and where to go for help. Topics covered include:

- **threatening behaviour**
- **cyberbullying**
- **online grooming (Home Office, 2015)**

In **England,** the Department for Education has published a **guide for headteachers and school staff on protecting themselves from cyberbullying (PDF)** (DfE, 2014b).

The **Welsh Government** has produced **guidance on tacking cyberbullying in schools (PDF)**. The guidance includes information on:

- **understanding cyberbullying**
- **the law around cyberbullying**
- **preventing and responding to cyberbullying (Welsh Government, 2011)**

Take our Online safety elearning course to help anyone who works with children across the UK understand what they need to do to safeguard children online

Key policy

In **Scotland, Respect for all: the national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people** provides a framework for adults working with children and young people to address all aspects of bullying, including cyberbullying. The approach highlights the government's strategy to end bullying, including a commitment to:

- **developing and implementing effective anti-bullying policies and practices**
- **improving children and young people's skills, and those who play a role in their lives, to prevent and deal with bullying (Scottish Government, 2017)**

Keep up to date with new legislation and guidance by **signing up to CASPAR**, our current awareness service for policy, practice and research.

References and resources

Anti-Bullying Alliance (2019) **Change starts with us: a report outlining recommendations to address bullying face to face and online (PDF).** London: National Children's Bureau.

Bainbridge, J. Ross, C. and Woodhouse, A. (2017) **Inquiry into bullying and harassment in schools: children and young people's voices and experiences of bullying and harassment in schools (PDF).** [Edinburgh]: Children in Scotland.

Brown, V., Clery, E. and Ferguson, C. (2011) **Estimating the prevalence of young people absent from school due to bullying (PDF)**. [Cambridge]: Red Balloon Learner Centre Group.

Children's Commissioner for Wales (Comisiynydd Plant Cymru) (2017) **Sam's story: listening to children and young people's experiences of bullying in Wales (PDF).** Swansea: Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Department for Education (DfE) (2018a) **Approaches to preventing and tackling bullying: case studies (PDF).** London: Department for Education.

Department for Education (DfE) (2018b) **Searching, screening and confiscation: advice for headteachers, school staff and governing bodies (PDF).** London: Department for Education.

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Ditch the Label (2019) **The annual bullying survey 2019 (PDF)**. London: Ditch the Label.
Home Office (2015) Online abuse and bullying prevention guide (PDF). London: Home Office.

NSPCC (2016) **What children are telling us about bullying: Childline bullying report 2015/16 (PDF).** [London]: NSPCC.

Oxford English Dictionary (2021) **Bully.** [Accessed 03/09/2021].

Scottish Government (2021) **Respectme: Scotland's anti-bullying service.** [Accessed 03/09/2021].

Scottish Government (2017) **Respect for all: the national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people.** Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) and the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) (2017) **Tackling race and faith targeted bullying face to face and online: a short guide for schools (PDF).** London: National Children's Bureau.

Welsh Government (2021) **School bullying.** [Accessed 03/09/2021].

Welsh Government (2019) **Rights, respect, equality: statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools.** Cardiff: Welsh Government. [Accessed 03/09/2021].

Welsh Government (2011) **Respecting others: cyberbullying (PDF**). Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Childline

If a child or young person needs confidential help and advice direct them to Childline. Calls to 0800 1111 are free and children can also contact **Childline online** or read information and advice for young people affected by bullying:

- **information and advice about bullying**
- Standing up to bullying **(Childline Voice box video)**
- **Bounce back from bullying tool.**

You can also download or order **Childline posters and wallet cards.**

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