

BULLYING

Information for
teachers and professionals working with young people

www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111

What is bullying?

Bullying, says the DfES, is deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated often over a period of time. Others argue that bullying doesn't have to imply a series of incidents – it can be any occasion where someone deliberately intimidates or harasses another. It is important to note that children are often disturbed enough to call ChildLine after only a single incident. Those who have called have described bullying as:

- being called names
- being teased
- being hit, pushed, pulled, pinched or kicked
- having their bag, mobile or other possessions taken
- receiving abusive text messages or emails
- being forced to hand over money
- being forced to do things they don't want to do
- being ignored or left out
- being attacked because of religion, gender, sexuality, disability, appearance or ethnic or racial origin.

Who gets bullied?

'What hurts me so much is that she used to be my friend.' Louise, 15

Children with obvious differences aren't the only victims of bullying. Some children are victimised because they are different in some way, but many others are bullied for no obvious reason. Adults tend to believe that people don't pick on others without cause, but a ChildLine survey found that none of the children who admitted bullying singled out their own or their victims' individual characteristics as an explanation. And for nearly 20% of the children who call

ChildLine about bullying, their current tormentor is a former friend.

Our survey found that bullying was common even in schools that had anti-bullying policies in place. Half of primary school children and more than one in four secondary children said they had been bullied within the last year.

Who bullies and why

'It got to be a habit. The awful thing was that I felt good seeing him cry. The others laughed and that made me feel even better. But then the teacher said that he was in the hospital because he had tried to hurt himself to get away from the bullying. It was only a bit of fun really – I didn't mean him to take it seriously.' Jay, 15

'I want to stop but I'm scared the ringleaders will turn on me.' Rob, 11

Bullies and the bullied are not always distinct groups. 15% of primary school children we surveyed and 12% of the secondary students said they had both bullied and been bullied in the last year. Among those who had bullied, some described bullying as a bad habit they were trying but failing to break.

Like adults, children tend to become crueller with numbers. Almost three out of four children who called ChildLine were being bullied by a group rather than a single person.



What bullying does to children

'It took me a long time to get my confidence back – years, really. I still think about it and get upset.'

Darren, 26

Bullying breaks children down. It is shameful, humiliating and frightening, and young people often feel powerless to stop it.

And it doesn't just affect children's social lives. Concentration lapses and skipped lessons are not uncommon for bullied children, even those who have always performed well in school. Sometimes the thought of going to school is so terrifying that children pretend they are ill or refuse to attend. A very few find life so unbearable that they attempt suicide. Many more carry the effects of bullying long into their adult lives.

Witnessing bullying

'I saw a small boy being bullied by a gang in the park. They swore at him and kicked him. I was too scared to do anything in case they turned on me.'

Duncan, 13

Bullying affects everyone, not just the people directly involved. When young people see someone being humiliated or abused, they are forced into an extremely compromised position. If they intervene, they run the risk of being turned on themselves. But standing idly by makes them feel helpless and guilty.

Asking for help

'If you're being bullied you don't want to tell a teacher because you don't know what that teacher will do.'

Augustin, 14

'The boys have sworn to get back at me. They said they would kill me.'

Chris, 11

Many people think that the reason bullied children don't receive help is because they don't ask for it. ChildLine's evidence shows that this isn't true. More than four out of every five bullied

children have asked for help and have done so repeatedly, despite fears of reprisal. In fact, many of ChildLine's calls are from young people who are still being bullied even after telling an adult.

What can schools and youth groups do?

'Teasing, name-calling, excluding from games and spreading rumours have always happened and always will.'

Anonymous parent

A generation ago, racism and sexism in schools were accepted as facts of life. Hopefully the next generation will look back with astonishment on a time when bullying was seen as a natural part of growing up. Schools and youth groups have the power to create an environment in which bullying is not acceptable.

Here are some ideas you may want to incorporate into your anti-bullying work:

- Acknowledge the problem. Bullying happens everywhere in our society, including the staffroom. It is important that everyone in the school community recognises that bullying exists.
- Ask your pupils what they feel constitutes bullying. Discussions about what is and is not bullying can help form the basis for the school's anti-bullying policy.
- Establish support mechanisms to help children who are being bullied. Young people need to know they can rely on support from a source they feel comfortable with. This could be an assigned group of staff, a help network such as ChildLine or a group of pupils formed through a peer support scheme.
- Tailor your anti-bullying strategy to your school's needs. Every school is different and what works in one may not work in another. For different approaches see the DfES pack

Bullying – Don't Suffer in Silence, which can be downloaded from www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying

- Develop a whole school approach in which children and adults work together to create an environment where bullying is not tolerated.
- Bullying doesn't end at the school gates. Try to work with the local community, perhaps through the police or the local youth services. For further information contact Crime Concern on www.crimeconcern.org.uk
- Involve young people in anti-bullying work, as this is far more likely to succeed than if ideas are imposed on them. If strategies are created with and supported by children and young people, pupils will become more responsible and more aware of other people's needs. Children and young people often have the best approaches to solving problems within their peer groups. For further information on involving young people in decision making, contact School Councils UK on www.schoolcouncils.org.uk
- Try to find constructive ways to help those who are bullying change their behaviour. Punishing bullies doesn't end bullying. It is important to stress that it is the bullying behaviour that is not liked, rather than the person. The No Blame support group approach is one way to do this. For more info contact Lucky Duck at www.luckyduck.co.uk
- Bullying often takes place in groups. Children have a choice of watching from the margins, joining in, trying to remain uninvolved or trying to help those being bullied. Acknowledge and reward children who help prevent bullying.
- Support schemes that encourage children to make friends. Having friends is one of the best defences

against bullying – but not everyone has the right social skills to make friends easily. Teaching assertiveness skills and confidence-building to the class may be a way to help more children make friends. You could also think about strategies for introducing new children to a class – particularly if they find it difficult to join already established groups. For further information visit

www.circle-time.co.uk

- You may want to set up a peer support scheme. This could involve buddying, peer listening or peer mediation. These schemes can create a happier, friendlier environment and offer much needed support to children who have problems.

For help setting up a peer support scheme see www.childline.org.uk/resources.asp or visit The Peer Support Forum at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/peer/forum.htm

- Organise a project on bullying for individual classes or the whole school. This can be a good way to generate discussions about bullying and how to end it. Healthwise have produced a pack on bullying for primary school pupils. Call **0151 703 7777**.
- You can phone ChildLine on **020 7239 1000** for information about ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS), our schools outreach and training programme.



www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111

Young people can call ChildLine free, at any time, on **0800 1111** for confidential information and advice about all problems including bullying. Young people who live in Scotland can also call ChildLine Scotland's bullying line, Monday–Friday 3.30pm–9.30pm on **0800 44 11 11**. Children who are deaf or find using a regular phone difficult can try our textphone service on **0800 400 222**. To read more about bullying, visit the ChildLine website at www.childline.org.uk

Contact the ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS) outreach and training team, who can offer direct work with groups of young people on a range of issues including bullying. For your nearest

CHIPS team member call **020 7239 1054** or visit the CHIPS website at www.childline.org.uk/schools.asp

Other helpful organisations

Kidscape produces leaflets and booklets on bullying, and runs a helpline Monday–Friday 10am–4pm on **020 7730 3300**.

The Advisory Centre for Education publishes information sheets on bullying and runs a helpline Monday–Friday 2pm–5pm on **020 7354 8321**.

Citizenship 21, a Stonewall project, has produced *Safe for all: a best practice guide to preventing homophobic bullying in schools*. Call **020 7881 9440**.

To order more copies of this information sheet or for general enquiries please call 020 7650 3200

ChildLine is a registered charity, no. 1003758

Please note – all names and identifying details have been changed to protect young people's identities.

© ChildLine May 2004

