

Bullying: policies and best practice

Introduction

Despite initiatives from government, and efforts on the part of many teachers and schools, bullying remains a serious problem for many children. A study carried out by Peter Smith for the DfES in 2000 revealed that, in Britain, bullying is widespread. 45% of all children in the sample had been bullied, of which one in eight had been bullied 2 or 3 times a month or more often.

The NSPCC Prevalence Study carried out in 2000 with almost 2900 young people showed that bullying and discrimination by young people, especially in school, is one of the most common forms of harmful aggression experienced by children and young people in the UK. The issues about which respondents were bullied – their size, intelligence, social background and race - were all aspects over which they had no control. 43% reported being bullied or being discriminated against, or being made to feel different. In the vast majority of cases (94%) this bullying and discrimination had occurred in school. A quarter of those bullied by other young people (1 in 10 of all respondents) reported that they had suffered long term harmful effects from being bullied.

The study undertaken by Young Voice in 2001 with over 7000 young people found that 35% of all boys and 26% of all girls admitted that they had bullied other children; this is despite the fact that many young people are reluctant to admit that they are bullies. Other research (Smith and Shu 2000) found that 30% of bullied children tell no-one and suffer in silence.

Definitions of Bullying

Bullying is the persistent, intentional harming of another person within an unequal power relationship.

Further points of clarification:

- It is difficult for the victim to defend him- or herself.
- It can be carried out by a group or by an individual.
- A single instance can in some cases be perceived as bullying by the victim.
- We do need to recognise that sometimes the goal is not to harm and the distress of the victim is not always recognised by the 'bully'. If the victim is distressed and believes that the intent is there, we can say that a bullying incident has taken place. Rigby (2001) prefers to call this 'non-maligned' bullying.
- Traditional safeguarding methods often fail to protect children from ethnic minorities, disabled children, young people who are gay or lesbian, and those with learning difficulties, thus making them more vulnerable to this type of abuse.

The types of bullying fall into a number of categories:

- VERBAL –threatening or intimidating behaviour with consequences, spreading rumours, excluding, calling names, teasing, making sexual, racial, sectarian remarks, picking on physical appearance
- PHYSICAL - kicking, punching, hitting, spitting, biting, tripping
- EMOTIONAL – “sending to Coventry”, talking behind backs, staring out, writing nasty notes/letters/graffiti
- NON-VERBAL - getting people into trouble, leaving out of games, writing letters/text messages

Research suggests that unless new behaviours are learned and adopted, bullies may continue to bully throughout their lifetime, with damaging consequences for their mental health and well-being and their relationships with others.

Underlying Principles

Every child has a right to protection from all forms of violence and exploitation, and to expect that people will protect and help them. Every child also has the right to a safe education, where it is safe to speak out.

We believe that the existence of bullying removes these rights. We believe all schools should have clear, well supported and monitored school behaviour policies. All staff should be supported in their responsibility for preventing bullying and encouraging good interpersonal relationships throughout school, so that pupils learn to treat each other with respect and recognise bullying as wholly unacceptable.

When a school is able to effectively address the problem of bullying there are clear benefits, both short and long term for individuals, for whole school environments and all members of the school community.

Since December 1999 all schools must have an anti-bullying policy by law, as stated in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 61 (4) (b). From April 1st 2004 all schools and LEAs will have the duty to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, as per Section 175 of the Education Act 2002.

OFSTED produced a report in 2003, '**Bullying: effective action in secondary schools**' which contains guidance in combating bullying. The guidance highlights:

- The importance of involving pupils in a school's approach
- The importance of working with parents
- The key role of the LEA
- Effective approaches to staff training

Developing Anti-Bullying Strategies

At the NSPCC we believe that the most effective anti-bullying initiatives are those that form part of a whole school strategy.

We would see the following principles (explained more fully below) as crucial in the development of an holistic and effective whole school strategy to tackle bullying:

1. All members of the school community should be involved – including teachers, support staff, pupils, parents and governors. Creating and maintaining a safe school is everyone's responsibility, as is creating a culture where it is safe for a young person to speak out.
2. Clear guidelines and procedures on working with individuals should be developed around changing the behaviour of bullies; supporting victims of bullying and helping them develop coping skills: and working with bystanders. It is crucial to develop these bearing in mind the involvement of not just those who have bullied or have been bullied, but also, importantly, those who have been onlookers or bystanders. It is also important to ensure that consistent responses are made to all incidents of bullying.
3. It is necessary to ensure that policies and procedures, once in place, are well-publicised, and that they are regularly monitored and reviewed.
4. Curriculum and classroom activities can be used to put across principles of prevention, non-aggression, conflict resolution, and to improve self-esteem, confidence and risk assessment. The curriculum can also be used to discuss issues of diversity and difference.
5. Ensuring that children and young people participate in all stages of the development and delivery of anti-bullying policies and practices are crucial. This will include determining what bullying means to children and young people, gaining agreement that it is an unacceptable behaviour. It will also mean identifying and monitoring areas and times that pupils feel unsafe and vulnerable, and distinguishing between bullying and normal conflict.
6. All staff should be trained and fully involved in all bullying prevention work.

1. The involvement of the whole school community: a whole school approach

The development and implementation of an anti-bullying policy should be done with the involvement of whole-school community (i.e. teachers, support staff, parents and of course, children and young people). To enable young people to take part in these discussions we would advocate the setting up of participative structures and processes, such as school councils, focus groups and questionnaires. A follow-up study of the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project (Eslea & Smith, 1998) found that, "having a whole school policy and keeping it active was a key aspect of keeping victimisation rates down" (Smith, 2000, p. 348).

According to research in Norway and Britain (Smith and Olweus), the most effective interventions against bullying:

- ◆ Involve the whole school community
- ◆ Lead to a clear understanding of what bullying is, and what to do about it
- ◆ Result in consistent prevention and response

2. Develop clear guidelines and procedures on working with individuals

Changing the behaviours of the bully

There is a lack of research on the most effective ways of dealing with bullying behaviour. It is necessary to develop a range of strategies that can be drawn upon and adapted to fit each incident. One approach that has been found to be helpful is the 'No Blame' approach (Maines & Robinson, 1992) or the 'support group' approach (Young, 1998). These approaches reduce the likelihood of retaliation. In 51 incidents of bullying where the support group approach was used, 80% were judged as having 'immediate success', 14% 'success delayed' and 6% 'limited success' (Young, 1998).

Teachers and other staff need to be aware that the behaviour of the bully may be a direct result of factors beyond their control e.g. witnessing domestic violence, or being the subject of physical or emotional abuse themselves. In these circumstances it may be necessary to initiate child protection procedures and consider the educational and emotional developmental needs of the young person.

However there needs to be recognition that in severe cases sanctions may be necessary. There are drawbacks to punitive approaches to bullying, as they can result in the bullying continuing or getting worse, may not get to the root of the problem, and often don't change the behaviour of the bully.

Supporting the victim

There is a need for complementary services to enable children to seek support and guidance if they are being bullied, e.g. peer support, group-work, and school counselling services. It has also been demonstrated that social skills and assertiveness training, especially for victims of bullying, can make a difference to the likelihood of the bullying continuing or recurring. It is also important that children know that they are listened to, taken seriously, and that any concerns or complaints that they may have will be properly considered, and acted on where appropriate.

Working with bystanders

One study found that peers intervened in only 25% of bullying incidents (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). Many children actively join in or provide encouragement, and many more stay away and avoid taking sides (Salmivalli, 1999), thereby allowing bullying to continue by silently approving it. Clearly if bullying is to be prevented in schools and wherever young people meet, it is vital that they are aware of the impact bullying has, and why all young people need to actively intervene to prevent it.

It is worthwhile recognising that children who are bystanders may become bullies, bullies may become victims etc. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

3. Policies and procedures are well-publicised, monitored and reviewed

The policy should be widely communicated and promoted within the school, in assembly and in classrooms. It should be clear to all that bullying is unacceptable and will be dealt with. Policy and practice should be evaluated and reviewed regularly, with children and young people playing an active part.

4. Use of curriculum and classroom activities

Through the curriculum, the importance of preventative work can be emphasised. The Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education curriculum should be fully used to

develop children's self-esteem, self-confidence and assertiveness, address children's attitudes to relationships, and also to issues of violence, aggression and power within those relationships. It is important that children understand the importance of difference and are given opportunities to celebrate diversity (ability/ disability, culture, ethnicity, gender, age, religion and physical appearance). Circle Time can be used as a way of discussing bullying and related issues.

5. Participation of children and young people

There may be a difference in view between how children and adults define bullying, so it is vital that children's views are considered in the development of definitions of bullying and in the development and delivery of anti-bullying policies. This involvement, and the creation of an environment where coming forward when being bullied or when others are being bullied, gives children more ownership and control over this aspect of their lives. Practical solutions such as peer support schemes and befriending schemes can also give children control over the prevention of bullying. Another practical approach is for every class to develop an anti-bullying programme, and in certain schools it might be appropriate for each year group to do the same. These are areas in which school councils, where they exist, to be involved.

6. The need for staff training and involvement.

To ensure members of staff in schools, young peoples' centres and residential facilities are able to carry out an effective anti-bullying policy, staff need to have training. Any anti-bullying policy needs to be developed alongside whole-school behaviour policies. Training for staff then needs to enable them to develop effective approaches. It also needs to consider how the 'school ethos' can address the needs of all children who are troubled, unhappy and in need of support. Staff involvement in the development and implementation of practice of anti-bullying approaches is also vital. Policies should be displayed around the school and be highly visible to all children and the school community. The importance of positive adult role models should not be overestimated; it is also vital that staff understand how they may be bullying children.

Impact of Anti-Bullying Strategies

The experience of schools where bullying is effectively addressed suggests that the following are some of the benefits schools might expect to see:

Positive Impact on Pupils - Those who have been bullied are supported by their classmates instead of being rejected or isolated. Pupils who witness abusive behaviour (and are able to identify it as such) learn to empathise with the victim and intervene, either directly or by alerting others. This means that over time disruptive pupils lose the silent collusion of their peers and are forced to change the way they relate to others.

Learning Environment - When children know that their school is actively committed to creating a safe school environment where bullying isn't tolerated, they can divert more attention to learning than to staying safe.

Whole School Environment - Both the whole school environment and the reputation of the school are enhanced where it is known that everyone in the school community

will be valued and accepted for who they are, and pupil relationships are increasingly characterised by assertiveness and co-operation.

What The NSPCC Can Offer Schools

The NSPCC Education Programme is promoting several initiatives that can directly impact on bullying. These include offering support to young people (eg. peer support and counselling services in schools), use of School Councils, training for staff in child protection and developing anti-bullying policies, or looking at the policies and procedures needed to make schools safer places for children and young people.

The NSPCC also supports schools in developing classroom activities to support emotional literacy and listening to children. In addition, the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline offers young people and parents the opportunity to speak to someone in confidence about bullying at any time on Freephone 0800 800 5000 (textphone 0800 056 0566 for the deaf or hard of hearing) or email help@nspcc.org.uk or see the Helpline website. Children and young people can also access our interactive website There4Me – www.there4me.com – which provides confidential online support and counselling.

For More Information

You can contact your Education Adviser / Schools Team at the address below, or visit our website at www.nspcc.org.uk for more general information about our work with schools.

NSPCC Education Adviser Contact
Alison O'Brien NSPCC North
Horton House
Southlink Business Park
Hamilton Street
Oldham OL4 1DE

Details:
Tel. 0161-628-1213
Fax. 0161-628-2560
Email: aobrien@nspcc.org.uk

The following organisations can also give advice and information on bullying and related issues:

Childline - Tel: 0800 1111
Freepost 1111, London, N1 0BR

Anti-Bullying Campaign
0207 378 1446

Citizenship
www.timeforcitizenship.com

Parentline Plus
0808 342 7852

Advisory Centre for Education

1B Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA

Bullying Online

www.bullying.co.uk

Barnardos

www.barnardos.org.uk

020 8550 8822

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

020 7336 8445

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