

Briefing for schools: Preventing and tackling bullying

June 2017

Bullying can affect children's mental and physical health, school attendance and performance. School staff are in a good position to spot the early signs of bullying and help prevent it escalating any further.

All schools are expected to have measures in place to prevent and respond to bullying incidents.

School ethos, policy and training

All schools should have an anti-bullying policy and guidance that is read and understood by all members of staff so they are aware of what action to take if a child is being bullied. The policy should be regularly reviewed, and updated and should identify a range of strategies and activities that help to prevent bullying.

All school staff should attend anti-bullying training. It is important that lunchtime supervisors attend training as they are often the people who witness and have to deal with bullying at break times.

Schools should create a culture that makes it clear to children and young people that bullying will not be tolerated and that if anyone is being bullied they should tell someone immediately and it will be taken seriously and acted upon. Adults should model positive relationships and behaviour to create a school culture based on respecting others.

The school should be continually engaged in anti-bullying awareness raising and reinforcing key messages. Part of this should be the school's involvement in the national Anti-Bullying Week which takes place in November of each year.

Schools should display posters for helplines such as [Childline](#) and sources of information about bullying around the building so children know there is somewhere else they can turn to if they are not yet ready to talk to a member of staff about bullying.

Responding to bullying behaviour

All concerns and reports of bullying should be taken seriously and treated as a priority.

It is the school's responsibility to assess the seriousness of the bullying and determine the appropriate action that should be taken. Any action taken should match the severity, and to assess the severity it is necessary to consider the impact/hurt; the intent; the frequency; the duration and the imbalance of power: the nature of the relationship between the bullied and those bullying. It is also important to consider whether there was provocation.

Schools should support the child being bullied and also work with the child who has been accused of bullying, so that they understand the impact of their actions and receive support in changing their behaviour.

Dealing with online bullying

Although much online bullying takes place off site, staff can still help to prevent and put a stop to it.

How schools should respond to online bullying

If a child discloses that they are being bullied online the school should have a protocol in place that all staff are aware of. Recommended practice includes:

- making sure the child knows not to retaliate or return any messages
- advising the child to keep evidence if possible i.e. texts messages, emails or screen shots of websites they have been bullied on
- checking that the child understands how to prevent it from happening again, e.g. by changing contact details, blocking contacts or leaving a chat room
- involving parents, if appropriate, in discussions about the incident to maximise support
- taking action to contain the incident when content has been circulated: If you know who the person responsible is, ask them to remove the content; Contact the host (e.g. the social networking site) to make a report to get the content taken down
- using disciplinary powers to confiscate phones that are being used to send bullying messages
- ask the pupil to tell you who they have sent messages on to
- in cases of illegal content, contact the police, who can determine what needs to be kept for evidential purposes. Identify perpetrators - approach the police to do this if the case requires intervention.

After the incident it is important to make sure that policies and procedures are updated to include any new information and good practice learned. It is also important for schools to reinforce the message that online bullying is not acceptable.

Incident recording

Keeping records of bullying is a good way of monitoring the number of incidents and

patterns of bullying perpetrated by or committed against particular pupils. It is also a good way of evaluating the effectiveness of preventative work.

Bullying incident records should include:

- details of the nature of incident (outline of what happened, where, when, type)
- the names of those involved (those bullying, those being bullied and bystanders)
- an assessment of seriousness (based severity of impact, frequency, duration, intent, imbalance of power, empathy / remorse)
- action taken; and details of monitoring including feedback from those involved including parents.

How schools can work to prevent bullying

Schools should make use of the curriculum to spread anti-bullying messages. Assemblies are a good way of getting everyone together and spreading a consistent message. Drama groups, videos and guest speakers can be utilised to engage with young people. Both primary and secondary school PHSE lessons are also a good way of teaching children about:

- what bullying is
- how it affects the victim
- what bystanders should do when they witness bullying
- reinforcing the importance of a child telling someone if they are being bullied at school or online.

The NSPCC [Speak out. Stay Safe](#) programme enables trained volunteers to go into schools to deliver assemblies and lessons to children aged 5-11 about all forms of abuse, including bullying.

Many primary schools use circle time as a form of bullying prevention. It can help young people develop listening skills, empathy, respect for others and boost self-esteem. Although they have now been archived [Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning \(SEAL\)](#) resources are still very useful for teaching age appropriate messages about bullying.

Schools should identify bullying 'hot spots' around the school and make sure these areas are well supervised.

Buddying systems in primary schools and peer mentoring in secondary schools can be effective ways of supporting children who are vulnerable to bullying.

Involving the school's student council can be a good way of shaping realistic anti-bullying policies and practices.

Working with parents

Schools need to provide parents and carers with information so that they:

- understand what constitutes bullying and what does not
- are able to recognise the signs that their child might be being bullied or is bullying
- know how to report their concerns to schools,
- understand what sanctions will be used when bullying has occurred.

Useful links

[Keeping children safe in education](#) (Department for Education)

[National guidance for child protection in Scotland](#) (The Scottish Government)

[Safeguarding and child protection in schools - A guide for schools](#) (Department for Education Northern Ireland)

[Respecting others: anti-bullying guidance](#) (Welsh Assembly)

[Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)

[Childline](#)

Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:

Tel: 0808 800 5000 | Email: help@nspcc.org.uk | Twitter: [@NSPCCpro](https://twitter.com/NSPCCpro)

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