

# Bullying – the facts

## for Anti-Bullying Week



The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) defines bullying as the intentional hurting of one person by another, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It is usually repetitive or persistent, although some one-off attacks can have a continuing harmful effect on the victim. This definition is consistent with accounts from children and young people, and with research.

ABA believes that bullying is a serious issue, and that we should work to reduce and prevent it as part of our efforts to create safe, positive and stimulating environments for children. This factsheet sets out some of the recent findings on bullying, the legislative and policy context, a brief guide to resources, and the importance of participation by children and young people.

### what is bullying?

Bullying takes many forms, face-to-face, or through third parties. The hurt can be either or both physical, and emotional.

Some bullying is physical:

- kicking, hitting, pushing
- taking and damaging belongings.

Some bullying is verbal:

- name-calling
- taunting, mocking
- making offensive comments
- making threats.

Some bullying is relational:

- excluding people from groups, deliberately ignoring
- gossiping, spreading rumours.

Some bullying uses modern technology such as mobile phones, or the internet. This 'cyber bullying' includes:

- text-message bullying
- phone-call bullying
- picture/video-clip bullying (via mobile phone cameras)
- mail bullying
- chat-room bullying
- bullying through instant messaging
- bullying via websites.

### roles in bullying

There are many roles in bullying: there may be a gang of bullies, with a ringleader and followers. Some pupils watch and reinforce the bullying actively, or passively by doing nothing to stop it. Other pupils – defenders – may help the victim. These roles are not exclusive: at different times or in different contexts, children and young people can both bully and be bullied (Wolke and others 2000).

### risk and protective factors in bullying

A child or young person can be bullied for no particular reason. Sometimes personal characteristics (such as height, weight, or hair colour) are targeted. Children who are timid and unassertive are more vulnerable to being bullied, so assertiveness training can help some children. Having friends, especially friends you can trust, is an important protective factor against being bullied in the peer group. Some bullying is done because a child or young person belongs to a certain group. This has been labelled 'prejudice-driven bullying', and includes homophobic bullying, racist bullying, sexual or gender bullying, and bullying of pupils with learning or other disabilities.

It is possible for many children to get involved in bullying, too, and it is important not to 'pathologise' most cases of bullying. All bullying is unacceptable, and many children who are aggressive and lack empathy for others can be helped to understand the consequences of their actions and change their behaviour. The home background can be an important factor to take into account in addressing bullying behaviours, together with peer-group influence, which is especially significant in secondary school.

Bullying:  
See it.  
get help.  
Stop it.



## the extent of bullying

Most of our information on the extent of bullying comes from children and young people saying that they have been bullied, or have taken part in bullying others – this is called ‘self-report’ data. This is a good source, as bullying is first and foremost a subjective experience. It is also important to take account of other perspectives, for example of witnesses or bystanders (pupils, teachers, parents).

Surveys provide information on the frequency of bullying, but the figures will be influenced by: the age of the children; their understanding of what bullying is; and how the questions have been asked, for example, what time period is being referred to and how serious or frequent the bullying has to be. Pupils may report being bullied, even if this was mildly only once or twice, if this information is not specified. This could account for the figures obtained in a study on 953 pupils in 2002 (Oliver and Candappa 2003) that showed that half of all primary school children and more than one in four secondary school children who were asked said they had been bullied in the last term.

Other surveys usually produce figures that show bullying falls within the range of 10–20 per cent. Over the last few years, data gathered from some 16,000 pupils in Leicestershire schools (Pupil Attitude Survey 2005/6) shows that the proportion who say they have been bullied in school this year more than once or twice was 16.3 per cent in 2002/3, 14.9 per cent in 2003/4, 14.4 per cent in 2004/5, and 13.9 per cent in 2005/6. Levels of severe bullying appear to be declining from around 13 per cent in 1996 to 8 per cent in 2006 (Katz, 2006). These slow but steady declines do suggest that anti-bullying work is having an effect, but also that much remains to be done.

Even if many forms of bullying are slowly decreasing, cyber bullying, as one particular form of bullying, is probably on the increase as new technologies spread more widely, including downwards to younger children. A study of more than 11,000 pupils from 2002 to 2005 asked them how often they had received any nasty or threatening text messages or emails. The percentage answering ‘once in a while’ or more often was 5.8 per cent in 2002, 5.9 per cent in 2003, 7.4 per cent in 2004 and 7.0 per cent in 2005 (Noret and Rivers 2006). An NCH survey in 2005 (NCH 2005) found that 20 per cent of young people are bullied or threatened through text messages or online: 14 per cent received bullying or threatening text messages, 5 per cent were harassed in internet chat rooms, and 4 per cent were harassed by email. A detailed report on 92 pupils (Smith and colleagues 2005) found that 7 per cent had experienced some kind of cyber bullying in the last couple of months, with phone-call,

text-message and email bullying the most common forms. Prevalence rates of cyber bullying were greater outside of school than inside.

Other studies show that children report being bullied out of school, for example ‘on the bus’, ‘on the train’, ‘on my way to school’, ‘on the way home’, ‘out on the street’, ‘in the shop’ and ‘down my local park’ (Frew 2002).

## children in public care

Children in residential care are particularly vulnerable to bullying. The Social Exclusion Unit found 60 per cent of looked after children report being bullied in school compared to 17 per cent of all children (Social Exclusion Unit 2003). A report by Barter and others (2004) found that half of the young people interviewed in children’s homes had experienced direct physical assault as victims, perpetrators or witnesses, and nearly all experienced verbal abuse.

Young people in secure settings also report being bullied. A survey by the Youth Justice Board (Challen and Walton 2004) found that 10 per cent of boys and 13 per cent of girls were bullied during their first few days in custody. In Scotland, a questionnaire given to all young offenders in Young Offenders Institutions found that 26 per cent said they had been bullied at their present institution during their present sentence; and 33 per cent said they had been bullied by staff at some point during their stay in the institution (Dyson 2005).

## homophobic bullying

A survey of homophobia in schools for the DfES (Warwick, Chase and Aggleton 2004) reported that around 82 per cent of secondary school teachers are aware of verbal homophobic bullying and 26 per cent of physical homophobic bullying. Pupil reports suggest that between 30–50 per cent of young people in secondary schools attracted to people of the same sex will have directly experienced homophobic bullying (compared to the 10–20 per cent of young people who experience general bullying). A survey in 1997 found that only 6 per cent of schools had anti-bullying policies that address homophobic bullying; in 2004 this had increased, but only to 13 per cent (YWCA 2004).

## gender or sexual bullying

Girls and boys can experience name-calling, inappropriate touching, and other forms of harassment based on gender (Duncan 1999). Young Voice (Katz, Buchanan and Bream 2001) reported that 19 per cent of young people had been insulted because of their gender. Girls and boys who are not perceived

to live up to gender stereotypes and expectations can often find themselves bullied and, whether they are gay or not, this bullying is often homophobic.

## **bullying and racism**

Research in mainly white schools in 2001/2 found that 25 per cent of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds had experienced racist name-calling within the last week. A third reported hurtful name-calling and verbal abuse either at school or during the school journey and, for more than 16 per cent this was persistent (DfES 2002).

Research with Traveller pupils found that more than half of Year 6 pupils interviewed had been called racist names; 29 of the 38 pupils interviewed who transferred to secondary school said that they had encountered some kind of racial abuse, particularly in their first year of secondary school (Derrington and Kendall 2004).

## **bullying and learning difficulties**

Children and young people with learning or communication difficulties are especially vulnerable to bullying. They may not have the ability to be assertive because they lack confidence or are more sensitive. According to a report by Mencap (2000), nearly 90 per cent of people with a learning disability experience bullying, with over 66 per cent of them experiencing it on a regular basis. Nearly three quarters (73 per cent) are bullied in a public place, including a quarter of them on buses.

## **why is bullying an important issue?**

Bullying is one of children and young people's main concerns. In 2004/5, ChildLine counselled 32,688 children about bullying – almost 1 in 4 of children counselled. Bullying accounted for 25 per cent of the calls to ChildLine and was the most common reason why children call the helpline. The Children's Commissioner has said that bullying is the biggest concern that children and young people contact him about.

Bullying can destroy children and young people's enjoyment of school, family and social life, as well as their capacity to learn. One study found that primary school children who were bullied were more likely to report disturbed sleep, bed-wetting, feeling sad, headaches and stomach aches. The risk of these symptoms increased with the frequency of the bullying (Williams and others 1996). Children and young people who are bullied often truant from school. They can be more anxious and insecure than those who are not bullied, and suffer from low self-esteem and see themselves as failures. Bullying

can lead to depression or, in the most serious cases, self-harm or attempted suicide (DfES 2006).

## **the legislative and policy context**

Protection from bullying and the right to attend education without fear is covered by a number of articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

In England, the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 states that 'Head teachers in state schools have a duty to encourage good behaviour and respect for others on the part of pupils and, in particular, prevent all forms of bullying among pupils' (Section 61(4)).

Since September 1999, head teachers of maintained schools in England and Wales have been under a duty to draw up measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils (Schools Standards Framework Act 1998).

The Education and Inspection Bill (2006) also reinforces the duty on head teachers to have in place a behaviour policy that includes measures to prevent bullying and states the disciplinary penalties that will result should bullying occur.

The Education Act 2002 (Section 175) gives all schools, including independent schools, the duty to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils'. The guidance issued by DfES to show how this duty applies refers specifically to bullying as an issue that needs to be considered as part of keeping children safe (DfES 2004).

In addition, schools are encouraged to sign up to *Bullying – A Charter for Action* (see the DfES website).

The Department of Health Children's Homes Regulations 2002 (Standard 18) require that 'The registered person and the staff create an atmosphere where bullying is known to be unacceptable. There is a policy on countering bullying, which is known to children and staff and is effective in practice.'

Under the Children Act 2004 (Section 11), all professionals who work with children and young people are expected to work towards five national outcomes for children:

1. be healthy
2. stay safe
3. enjoy and achieve
4. make a positive contribution
5. achieve economic well-being.

National performance indicators for children's services are being developed and Joint Area Reviews

# Bullying – the facts

for Anti-Bullying Week



are an external evaluation of how well children's services are meeting all outcomes, and these include measures to identify and deal with bullying.

From September 2005, a new school inspection framework has included the contribution made by the school to the well-being of its pupils, based on the five outcomes. This will include working to monitor and prevent bullying. Schools, local authorities and other children's services are required to self-evaluate, prior to inspection by officials (OFSTED 2005).

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires schools to work towards stopping racial discrimination and promoting race equality. This includes racist bullying.

The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) requires schools and other public bodies to promote disability equality from December 2006. Schools will need to take action to ensure that disabled pupils are not discriminated against because of their disability, including through bullying.

## resources

DfES has an anti-bullying pack for schools, *Don't Suffer in Silence*, which gives guidelines for drafting a policy and a range of suggested preventive strategies. DfES has issued guidance on anti-racist bullying; *Bullying Around Racism, Religion and Culture*; and is producing guidance on homophobic bullying in 2007. The DfES website on bullying is at [www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying)

DfES is also addressing bullying through its primary and secondary national strategies on behaviour and attendance. Many schools will be engaged in education initiatives that make specific reference to the school's need to demonstrate effective anti-bullying strategies. These include the National Healthy Schools Programme and the Primary and Secondary Strategies (Behaviour and Attendance Themes: Social Emotional Aspects of Learning/ Social Emotional Behavioural Skills Programmes DfES 2005 a,b).

The OFSTED (2003) report *Bullying: Effective action in secondary schools*, identifies a number of features of good practice found by inspectors in combating bullying in secondary schools.

There are many other resources available to help schools reduce and prevent bullying. These can be accessed through the Anti-Bullying Alliance website ([www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)).

## children and young people's participation

The new inspection arrangements require that schools and all services for children consult children and young people to provide evidence for Self-Evaluation Forms and Joint Area Reviews. Young people can also participate actively in important decisions that concern their peer group, for example through engaging in school councils, youth parliaments or other democratic systems. Children and young people need to negotiate and own a strategy rather than have one simply imposed upon them.

There are a range of activities and areas that children and young people can be involved in that relate to bullying:

- decisions about how to tackle bullying
- identifying priority issues that need to be addressed, which will often include bullying
- the development and delivery of the taught-curriculum that can focus on aspects of bullying and discrimination
- identifying new forms of bullying, such as text and email bullying
- learning how to play an active participant role in challenging bullying
- peer support including mediation, listening, advocacy and mentoring for those experiencing or at risk of bullying or being bullied (Cowie and others 2002). Peer support systems have changed as the children and young people involved have become more creative and confident in developing the systems in which they have been trained to play a part, for example, by making changes in the logistics of peer support, and developing use of the internet and email support (Cartwright 2005; Cowie and Hutson 2005).
- reviewing, auditing and developing anti-bullying policy and practice and giving feedback to Ofsted
- volunteering and supporting others in the wider community to promote inclusion and reduce bullying, for example, those with learning disabilities.

## what this means for schools and other organisations

Given the continued prevalence of bullying and its impact on health and well-being, schools and other organisations that educate and care for children and young people will want to do what they can to prevent it and deal with it effectively when it occurs. Schools are legally required to have an anti-bullying

policy and to safeguard children and young people. Anti-bullying policies should refer to specific forms of bullying such as homophobic and racist bullying, as well as to particularly vulnerable groups such as children in public care, young carers and those with learning and other disabilities. Involving children and young people in developing solutions to bullying and evaluating their effectiveness will create a positive ethos and help reduce bullying.

An effective anti-bullying strategy involves three elements:

- prevention
- reacting and responding
- supporting and monitoring those who have been bullied and those doing the bullying.

## prevention

Strategies for preventing bullying need to be implemented using a whole-school approach. Schools need to create a culture where bullying is understood by all staff and pupils to be unacceptable, and anti-bullying work is supported in PSHE and across the whole curriculum. Schools also need to ensure they have effective pastoral systems including peer support.

## reacting and responding

Responding effectively to bullying using reward and sanctions as outlined in your behaviour policy.

The key tasks in responding effectively are:

- making sure the person being bullied is safe and feels safe
- establishing what happened by listening to different perspectives, including those of the person bullied, the person doing the bullying and those that have witnessed the bullying (also called 'bystanders')
- making sure the person who is doing the bullying knows it is wrong to bully, takes responsibility for their behaviour and makes amends. Doing this in an emotionally intelligent way will require focusing on the unacceptable behaviours being displayed, and not reinforcing a sense of the individual being bad
- publicly signalling, where necessary and appropriate, to the whole school that the bullying is taken seriously and has been responded to well. This will often include talking to and with parents and carers.

## supporting and monitoring

This will include:

- identifying immediate and longer-term support needs of both the person being

bullied and the person who has done the bullying. This may include friendship-based group work, accessing support from external agencies including voluntary agencies and Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

- recording the bullying incident, including what happened and who was involved, including the bystanders
- reflecting on the process to identify any lessons for the future and disseminating any learning to colleagues
- monitoring and following up with all parties concerned to ensure that the bullying has stopped, and if it hasn't, taking appropriate steps.

## references

- Barter, C and others (2004). *Peer Violence in Children's Residential Care*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cartwright, N (2005) Setting up and sustaining peer support systems in a range of schools over 20 years. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 23, 45-50.
- Cowie, H and Hutson, N (2005) Peer Support: A strategy to help bystanders challenge school bullying. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 23, 40-44.
- Cowie, H and others (2002) Knowledge, use of and attitudes towards peer support. *Journal of Adolescence*, 25, 5, 453-467.
- Challen, M and Walton, T (2004) *Juveniles in Custody: A unique insight into the perceptions of young people held in prison service custody in England and Wales*. London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons.
- Derrington, C and Kendall, S (2004) *Gypsy Traveller Students in Secondary Schools: Culture, identity and achievement*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- DfES (2000) *Bullying – Don't Suffer in Silence. An anti-bullying pack for schools* (2nd rev. ed). London DfES.
- DfES (2002) *Minority Ethnic Pupils in Mainly White Schools*. Research Report 365.
- DfES (2004) *Safeguarding Children in Education*. DfES: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/childprotection/guidance.htm](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/childprotection/guidance.htm)
- DfES (2005a) *Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement 2005–2006*. London DfES.
- DfES (2005b) *Excellence and Enjoyment: Social and emotional aspects of learning*. London DfES.
- DH (2002) *Children's Homes. National Minimum Standards: Children's Home Regulations*. London: The Stationery Office.

# Bullying – the facts

for Anti-Bullying Week



Duncan, N (1999) *Sexual Bullying*. London: Routledge.

Dyson, G (2005) Examining bullying among institutionalised young offenders: triangulation of questionnaires and focus groups. In Ireland, J (ed.) *Bullying in Prisons* (2002), pp.84-108. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

Frew, R (2002) *Anti-bullying Research for Camden Children's Fund*. London: Camden and Islington Family Service Unit.

HMSO (1998) *Schools Standards Framework Act*

Katz, A (2006) *Various surveys 1996-2006*. Young Voice.

Katz, A, Buchanan, A and Bream, V (2001) *Bullying in Britain: Testimonies from teenagers*. East Molesey: Young Voice.

Mencap (2000) *Living in Fear: The need to combat bullying of people with learning difficulties*. London: Mencap.

NCH (2005) *Putting U in the picture*. Mobile Bullying Survey 2005. NCH. [www.nch.org.uk/uploads/documents/Mobile\\_bullying\\_%20report.pdf](http://www.nch.org.uk/uploads/documents/Mobile_bullying_%20report.pdf)

Noret, N and Rivers, I (2006) The prevalence of bullying by text message or email: Results of a four-year study. Poster presented at British Psychological Society Annual Conference, Cardiff, April.

OFSTED (2003) *Bullying: Effective action in secondary schools*. OFSTED. [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3235](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.summary&id=3235)

OFSTED (2005). *Every Child Matters: Framework for the Inspection of Children's Services*. OFSTED. [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=3765&type=pdf](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=3765&type=pdf)

Oliver, C and Candappa, M (2003) *Tackling Bullying: Listening to the views of children and young people*. Research report RR400, DfES publications.

Pupil Attitude Survey 2005/06, Leicestershire, MIS, Statistics and Information Unit.

Smith, P and others (2006) *An Investigation into Cyber Bullying, its Forms, Awareness and Impact, and the Relationship Between Age and Gender in Cyber Bullying*. Report to the Anti-Bullying Alliance, January.

Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *A Better Education for Children in Care*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.

Warwick, I and others (2004). *Homophobia, Sexual Orientation and Schools: A review and implications for action*. Research report RR594, DfES publications.

Williams, K and others (1996) Association of common health symptoms with bullying in primary school children. *British Medical Journal*, 313, 17-19.

Wolke, D and others (2000) The association between direct and relational bullying and behaviour problems among primary school children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 41, 989-1002.

YWCA (2004) *Pride not Prejudice: Young lesbian and bisexual women*. YWCA Briefing. Oxford: YWCA.

## acknowledgements

This list was originally collated by ABA in 2005 and has been revised for Anti-Bullying Week 2006.

Published by the National Children's Bureau on behalf of the Anti-Bullying Alliance  
8 Wakley Street, London, EC1V 7QE  
Telephone +44 (0)20 7843 1901  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7278 6053  
Website: [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)  
e-mail: [aba@ncb.org.uk](mailto:aba@ncb.org.uk)

NCB Registered Charity No: 258825  
© NCB, 2006

Bullying:  
See it.  
Get help.  
Stop it.

