



### Protecting children from bullying and cyberbullying

Bullying is when individuals or groups seek to harm, intimidate or coerce someone who is perceived to be vulnerable (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018).

It can involve people of any age, and can happen anywhere – at home, school or using digital technologies (cyberbullying). This means it can happen at any time.

Bullying encompasses a range of behaviours which are often combined.

#### **Verbal abuse:**

- name-calling
- saying nasty things to or about a child.

#### **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
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name.

#### **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).

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 isolated like there's no escape.

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 how to help the person being bullied. They may fear for their own safety and experience feelings of guilt for not stepping in and disclosing to a friend or adult.

### **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 another child's life difficult they may find this realisation very distressing. It can be difficult for them to get the support they need to change their behaviour and understand what they are doing is wrong.

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. If a child is seen as 'different' or 'eccentric' in some way they can be more at risk

This might be because of their:

- physical appearance
- race
- faith
- academic ability
- gender identity
- sexuality.

Or it could be because they:

- appear anxious or have low self-esteem
- lack assertiveness
- are shy or introverted.

Popular or successful children can also be bullied, for example if others are jealous of them.

Sometimes a child's family circumstance or home life can be a reason for someone bullying them.

Children with disabilities and/or special educational needs can experience bullying because they are perceived to be an 'easy target' and less able to defend themselves.

### 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 think a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on **999**. If you're worried about a child but they are not in immediate danger, you should share your concerns.

- **Follow your organisational child protection and anti-bullying procedures.**
- **Contact the NSPCC Helpline** on [0800 800 5000](tel:08008005000) or by emailing [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto: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.**

OWEN Open Water Education Network 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.

### Responding to incidents

[> 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 that work with children to create a culture where children feel they can tell someone if they have a problem and where it is clearly communicated that bullying will not be tolerated.

This might include:

- talking to young people about healthy relationships to help create positive social norms and challenge unhealthy behaviours
- promoting sources of help and information such as [Childline](#) so children know where to go to get help if they don't feel able to talk to any of the adults working with them.