

BULLYING

INFORMATION PACK

Published by
All Resources

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What Exactly Is Bullying?

Bullying is repeated abuse or harassment towards a person. It can take the form of physical or emotional intimidation but also includes aggressive and threatening behaviour.

In all cases of bullying, somebody suffers physical or emotional distress due to the actions of an individual or a group and the harmful behaviour continues over a period of weeks, months or even years.

A good definition of bullying is:

‘Bullying is a regular form of deliberate behaviour that causes the target physical or emotional distress and can be carried out by an individual or a group over a period of time.’

Bullying may take many forms:

- Physical bullying (hitting, punching breaking/taking property)
- Verbal bullying (name-calling, put downs, threats)
- Indirect bullying (rumours or stories, exclusion from a group)
- Cyberbullying (phone calls, text messages, emails or social media/chat room posts)

The most common forms are:

- Verbal bullying
 - Name-calling including put-downs
 - Spreading rumours
 - Exclusion — nobody will talk to or work with the target of bullying
 - Verbal threats
 - Constant ridicule
 - Sarcasm
- Physical bullying
 - Pushing & shoving
 - Spitting
 - Throwing objects
 - Slapping, punching or kicking
 - Practical jokes
 - Taking or breaking property including school books, mobile phones etc

- Cyberbullying

In our technology-driven world, cyberbullying is fast becoming the bullying method of choice.

Cyberbullying takes place via:

- Text messages
- Emails
- Instant messages
- Online forums
- Chat rooms
- Social networks
- Smartphone apps

Because of the anonymous nature of this type of bullying, it can be difficult to trace the people responsible.

The Bully

To most people, a bully is a powerful person who inflicts physical violence on a weaker person. We may have visions of the smaller, weaker David against the larger, more powerful Goliath, but this is not how bullying occurs. Size and strength have little to do with incidences of bullying.

Another common misconception is that bullies suffer from low self-esteem and use bullying as a way of overcoming their lack of self worth. However, many bullies are confident people who use aggressive behaviour to get their own way. They are not necessarily suffering from low self-esteem — on the contrary — they may feel good about themselves and get pleasure from making others suffer.

Furthermore, bullying does not always involve physical assault and a person who is being bullied does not necessarily have cuts and bruises to prove it. In most cases the bully uses verbal abuse which covers a variety of situations including name calling, taunting, verbal threats, demanding money and other forms of intimidation.

It is clear that bullying is a complex subject which requires a whole-school approach using a variety of anti-bullying tools.

The Target

Some people are easier targets for teasing and harassment than others. People are bullied for many reasons including:

- A physical disability or learning difficulty
- A quiet or studious personality
- Their race/religion/culture
- Their physical appearance
- A health condition
- Issues of a sexual or sexist nature
- Their sexual orientation, or that of their family members
- There is no apparent reason at all — the bully simply picks on them

The Bystander

In all cases of bullying, there are those who see what is occurring but who stand by and either watch or turn away and do nothing. These people are bystanders.

Bystanders may encourage the bully, either by cheering him on or laughing as the bully taunts, ridicules or uses physical violence against the target. They provide a supportive environment for the bully and, inadvertently, are partly responsible for the bullying.

Why Bullying Goes Unreported — The Target

The target of bullying will often refuse to discuss the situation either out of fear of reprisal or because they do not want to be seen as telling tales. They may also feel that nothing will be done about their situation, or the bullying will get worse if they report it.

Why Bullying Goes Unreported — The Bystander

Someone who witnesses bullying, known as a bystander, may keep silent for the same reasons as the target. They may fear the bully will turn on them and they will become the target. However, by turning away and doing nothing, they are allowing the bullying to continue which causes more distress to the person being bullied.

Why Tackle Bullying?

Many schools have bullying programmes for students from ages 11 upwards—this is often shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. Anti-bullying programmes should be part and parcel of every curriculum as soon as children start school.

It is unwise to deny there is a problem with bullying in your school. No matter how much has been done to combat bullying or deal with antisocial behaviour, bullying can be extremely subtle. Unless it is brought to the teacher's attention, many school professionals do not pick up on the signs so it is important that all schools have a robust anti-bullying policy. This will reassure parents who will be impressed that the school implements a zero-tolerance policy in relation to bullying. More importantly, students will feel happy and secure in an atmosphere which is conducive to learning.

A cohesive anti-bullying policy will also benefit the school financially. Bullying is costly in terms of money and time and an investigation will mean teachers must spend time dealing with the issue rather than teaching the students. It is far better to have an anti-bullying policy in place which is publicised adequately so that the whole school knows it exists. No student should be unaware of the action that will be taken against bullies and everyone should know what to do if they witness bullying. In particular, targets of bullying should feel reassured that the school will take their complaint seriously and that swift action will be taken.

The way to tackle bullying is to confront it in a secure and controlled way. Bullies need to acknowledge that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Schools must send out strong messages that bullying has serious consequences and repeated offending will be punished.

Targets of bullying must be given the tools to deal with bullying, such as help in developing confidence and self-esteem. They also need to feel that their school is taking the matter seriously, and parents need reassurance that their child is safe at school. Parents need to know that, if bullying has been reported, the school is taking urgent action to resolve the matter.

Tackling Cyberbullying

It is important to provide clear guidelines on internet etiquette or 'netiquette' to all users of technology in your school. Young people in particular need to understand the correct ways to interact while online or while texting.

It is vital that teachers and parents encourage young people to tell them about any incidents of cyberbullying that they know about. Even if they are not directly involved, they need to realise that all incidents of cyberbullying should be reported.

How All Resources Can Help

All Resources has produced many resources to help young people develop self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem. The packs cover areas such as bullying, self-esteem, depression, substance abuse, relationships, finances and suicide. Our pack 'Bullying—A Complete Approach' actively tackles bullying in a classroom setting and includes a workbook, photocopiable worksheets and helpful tips on drawing up an anti-bullying policy. There is also a short play to initiate class discussion and a section for teachers and parents with hints on how to identify bullying.

For resource packs and services, please contact us:

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