

ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

A cartoon illustration of a young girl with blonde hair, wearing glasses, a purple shirt, and blue pants. She is smiling and holding a large yellow sign. The background is filled with a repeating pattern of various types of bullying and harassment terms.

LET'S STOP BULLYING
NEED ADVICE ?? - CALL CHILDLINE
0800 44 1111 CONFIDENTIAL

WWW.ANTIBULLYING.NET

ANTI-BULLYING NETWORK
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LET'S STOP BULLYING

It's not just kids stuff.

Bullying and harassment are abuses of power which can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Much attention has rightly been paid to the harm that bullying can do to young school pupils, but it is important to remember that harassment and bullying can be just as damaging to older students.

“ In my last year of school I was bullied by a girl in my year and her friends. I was tripped down stairs, had my chair kicked in class and was called names. I ended up very depressed and often used to think about killing myself. I feel that if it wasn't for my family, I would have done so. I still have very little confidence and I am very angry about how nothing was done to help me at school.”

WHAT IS “BULLYING”?

The words “bullying”, “harassment” and “abuse” tend to be used in different circumstances but they all describe very similar behaviour and, to some extent, these words are interchangeable.

Some examples of bullying and harassment that may be of particular concern to older school pupils include:

- **DELIBERATE ISOLATION** from the class group, often accompanied by name-calling and character assassination.
- **TEXT AND E-FORMAT BULLYING.**

“ A boy was told to kill himself on a website set up at a leading school.”

- report in the Edinburgh Evening News 12/6/02

The sending of bullying or abusive text messages and e-mails and the setting up of abusive websites are new versions of an old thing. They replace, or add to, other message formats such as scribbled notes passed under desks, graffiti on toilet walls or abusive telephone calls.

- **BULLYING BY TEACHERS OR OTHER ADULTS.** Bullying is wrong, whatever the age of the people involved.

“ My son took his own life because of bullies. These bullies were students – and a teacher... As for the teacher, his was more or less verbal abuse. He told my son that his life was going nowhere and that he would amount to nothing. This was so hard on my son.”

Teachers are in a powerful position in relation to pupils. Teachers today are very aware that their actions are open to challenge and most teachers have a sense of professionalism which means they behave appropriately, even if there is a personality clash between them and one or more pupils in their charge.

However, there is a very small minority of teachers who do abuse their position of trust. At one end of the spectrum this can be child abuse, which obviously requires the firmest response. But at the other extreme it can sometimes be difficult for outside observers to distinguish between bullying behaviour and “firm but strict” discipline.

It is important that if the actions of a teacher are causing upset or hurt, that this is brought to the attention of a trusted adult, whether that be another teacher or a family member.

- **SEXUAL BULLYING AND HARASSMENT.** This may be experienced by both sexes, and be carried out against either sex. Bullies may be the same age, older or younger than their victims. They may be adults in responsible positions. The taunts used don't even have to be true to be hurtful.

“The others are always calling me names – things like gay and poofta and bummer. They do this just because I don't enjoy football and the other stupid things which they like. I can't stand it. I can't sleep at night, I've been staying off school and I just keep thinking about what they say. Maybe it's true but I don't think it is. I like girls! I think I'm heterosexual.”

- **RACIST VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT AND ABUSE.** This is closely related to, and sometimes difficult to distinguish from, bullying. Racist bullying in schools can range from ill-considered remarks, which are not intended to be hurtful, to deliberate physical attacks causing serious injury. Victims are singled out because of the colour of their skin, the way they talk, their ethnic grouping, or by their religious or cultural practices.

For example, the events of September 11th 2001 have created particular difficulties for Islamic pupils:

“My History teacher... insists on putting anti-Islamic messages into the pupils' heads. I am the only Muslim. Examples of some of the things he has said include 'Islam is an enemy'.”

- **FALSE ACCUSATIONS.** Sometimes people falsely accuse others of having done something wrong with the intention of getting them into trouble with the police or the school. Often the accusation is that they have bullied, harassed, or abused the accuser(s) in some way.

This type of lie is in itself a kind of bullying and can have serious consequences for both the falsely accused and those who accuse them. Accused pupils might be excluded from school, which can seriously damage their education. Accused teachers may be suspended, with serious consequences for their career and their families.

Anyone found to have made false accusations with the intent of getting someone into trouble may find legal action being brought against them.

IS BULLYING A CRIME?

Many of the things we call bullying can indeed be crimes. For example, hitting or kicking is an assault and extortion is a kind of theft.

Everyone has the right to report to the police any incident which they consider may be illegal. Such incidents may include an assault - whether this occurs in or out of school - or serious threats or harassment.

It is then for the police to decide what further action, if any, they can or should take.

They may simply talk to the people involved, or discuss a suitable response with teachers. Only if they are satisfied that there is good evidence that a significant incident has taken place are they able to charge someone or refer them to the Children's Reporter.

In many cases, police involvement or other legal action will be inappropriate, or will not be the best way to resolve issues in the best interests of all concerned.



WHO GETS BULLIED?

Anyone can be bullied or harassed. It is important to remember that it is not that person's fault.

Bullies often try to justify their actions by saying that there is something different about their victims which makes them "deserving" targets. This is never an acceptable excuse for bullying behaviour. There is nothing wrong with being different. In fact, being different is positively good – especially if it means that you are not part of the bullying crowd!

Young people have a right to be educated in an atmosphere free from fear and intimidation, whatever their appearance, gender, ethnic group, religion, sexual orientation, health, ability or social background.

Some people are particularly vulnerable at particular times. For example, newcomers to schools - such as travelling people, or refugees. Other people, such as those with special needs, are always particularly vulnerable.

“ I am ginger and therefore I have had more than my fair share of smug comments but I know that this is nothing compared to what some kids have to endure. My best friend has learning disabilities and all the time at school she is teased mercilessly by people who somehow think that because she has a learning disability she is inferior to them and that it doesn't hurt her when they tease her. I am worried that when she starts college things will only get worse as there are some people who show no signs of growing up.”

WHO BULLIES?

It is a sad fact that some people who bully repeatedly enjoy the sense of power that making other people miserable gives them. Some of them have low self-esteem, and bullying may be the only thing they feel they are good at, or they may be cowards who are encouraged by others to bully and do not feel able to say no. However, many people who bully others do not have low self-esteem and are not cowards. They simply like getting their own way and don't care what happens to others as a result. Whatever the situation, bullying behaviour is never acceptable.

Perhaps the most common type of bullying involves a group picking on an individual. When someone is called names by everyone around them, the effect can be devastating. But the individual "bullies" may feel no sense of guilt because they are only doing what everyone else does; because it is only meant to be a "laugh"; and because they may not realise the harm that they are doing. They may be doing it just to "fit in".

“ People joined in because they were scared of getting hassled themselves.”

Bullying and harassment are wrong, but that does not mean that the people who do it are necessarily "bad" people. Most children who have bullied others grow up to be normal, caring adults. That doesn't excuse the bullying behaviour, or mean that all of them understand, or even remember, the pain they have caused, but it does mean that it is possible for them to change their behaviour.

“ My best friend met one of our former bullies. She told me he ended up going on about how much he regretted hassling us at school. He said he was really sorry but had wanted to be one of the crowd... He had been so arrogant at school, I never dreamed he'd ever apologise.”

WHAT'S THE ANSWER

Adults and young people must work together to reduce levels of harassment and bullying in schools.

Each group has special responsibilities:

- **ADULTS** have a duty to protect the young people in their care. They should pay special attention to those who are particularly vulnerable, such as those who have been bullied in the past and those with learning difficulties. However, they must also allow young people to develop as individuals, which includes recognising that young people will make and break friendships and make mistakes in their relationships – only by making such mistakes do we learn to do better.
- **HEADTEACHERS** have an obligation to make sure that young people have the opportunity to learn the skills and knowledge they need to protect themselves from bullying. They also have a legal obligation to consult young people about a number of things which directly affect them, including the way bullying is tackled in their schools.
- **YOUNG PEOPLE** must accept that their freedom does not include a right to harm others. Everyone in school benefits if bullying and harassment are clearly seen as unacceptable. Taking part in peer support schemes is one way that young people can help and most young people who have volunteered have found it an enjoyable and worthwhile experience.



HELPING YOURSELF

Some young people who are being bullied or harassed try to ignore what is happening in the hope that it will go away. But if dealing with bullying was as simple as just ignoring it, then nobody would ever be bullied!

If you are being bullied you must talk to someone you trust about this. This may be a teacher or may be some other trusted adult who can talk to school staff on your behalf.

When you speak to a teacher or other trusted adult, remember five things:

- When describing what has happened to you don't exaggerate. If anything you say turns out not to be true it throws everything else into doubt.
- Make sure that the teacher understands how upset you are and that, to you, the matter is not trivial.
- Tell the teacher that you want to know about any action he or she proposes to take. If something is suggested and you think it will make things worse, you should say so, and explain why it will not help.
- Be prepared to help by making your own suggestions about what should happen. Young people have the right to expect their worries to be treated seriously, to be given the help they need and to be fully involved in discussions about any action that is to be taken.
- Remember that although certain aspects of what you tell an adult can be treated confidentially, there are some things which may be discussed with another trusted professional in order to ensure the safety and well-being of those involved.

Also remember that your school may not go into detail with you about any punishment or additional support the bully is to receive. The important thing is that the situation is addressed so that the bullying behaviour stops.

HELPING OTHERS

Young people can help each other in a number of ways. The most important thing is simply to be there if someone needs to talk, to share feelings, and to encourage the person to talk about good times as well as bad. You could offer to go with the person to talk over the problem with a member of the school staff, or another trusted adult. This is relatively easy if the person is a friend. It is much more difficult, but perhaps much more valuable, to offer such help to someone who seems not to have any friends in your school.

If your school has a scheme such as “peer support”, “peer mentoring” or “buddying” which would allow older students to provide support to those entering the school, you could volunteer to join. If your school does not have such a system, you could suggest to a teacher (the headteacher or another teacher who has responsibility for pastoral care or guidance would be best) that such a scheme would be a good idea and would help to create a more caring ethos or atmosphere. You should emphasise that everyone in the school can benefit – the peer supporters learn new skills, those being bullied have someone to turn to, and teachers have fewer relationship problems to deal with and can therefore focus on teaching. You could also mention that if there were an inspection, the school would probably be praised for having such a scheme!

In more general terms, it is important that young people are aware how certain actions and attitudes can have a distressing effect on others. All young people should be careful that their actions do not upset others, and they should make attempts to include those pupils who may normally be left out, both in classroom activities and during break times.

GETTING HELP, ADVICE & INFORMATION

Young people up to the age of 18 who are being bullied, or who know someone who is being bullied, can call the ChildLine Bullying Line on **0800 44 11 11** for advice and/or counselling. This is a Freephone service available Monday to Friday from 3.30 pm – 9.30 pm.

Outwith those hours the main ChildLine number **0800 11 11** should be contacted. This is open 24 hours a day.

Further information for young people in Scotland about bullying and harassment is available on these websites:

www.antibullying.net

www.youngscot.org

The Anti-Bullying Network has an InfoLine on **0131 651 6100** where you can find out more about how you can help your school tackle bullying. (Please note – this does not provide advice/counselling to young people who are being bullied.)

This website provides information about schools for young people with special needs:

www.enquire.org.uk

A fact sheet about the bullying of people with learning disabilities is available from the Scottish branch of the charity, ENABLE on **0141 226 4541**.

Information about anti-racism is available from this website:

www.cre.gov.uk/scotland

The Scottish Child Law Centre gives under 18s free information about how the law in Scotland affects them on Freephone **0800 328 8970**.

This leaflet is aimed at providing information relevant to school students between the ages of 14 and 18 (S3 – S6). It has been prepared by the Anti-Bullying Network (ABN), in collaboration with the Scottish Executive. It contains information for students who are being bullied or harassed and also for those who want to help others.

Illustrations in this leaflet were contributed by Lisa Creswell, Ellon Academy and Aisha Zaman, Shawlands Academy.

The quotations in this leaflet are taken from the many messages from across the world which have been posted on the ABN's website at www.antibullying.net

For further information:

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For additional copies of this leaflet:

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Astron B24547 11/02