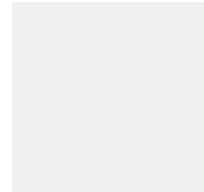


Countering Bullying Guidance



RELATED CHAPTERS

This guidance should be read in conjunction with **Countering Bullying Procedure**.

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1. Introduction/Definitions

1.1 Guidance for Children

Social Workers should ensure that all Looked After Children are provided with guidance on how to deal with and report bullying.

1.2 What is Bullying

Bullying occurs when a person or group of people behave in ways which are designed to cause distress or to hurt a person or group of people.

Some times whole organisations can bully.

Bullying can be overt and plain for all to see. It can be subtle and insidious.

Bullying can become part of the culture, recognised or believed by all or a significant number of people as 'acceptable'; it can even be encouraged and rewarded.

Bullying can include:

- a. Name calling, being sarcastic and spreading hurtful rumours;
- b. Assault or physical violence;
- c. Threats & intimidation;
- d. Spitting;
- e. Incitement of others to harass and intimidate;
- f. Destruction or taking property without permission;
- g. Extortion or undue pressure;
- h. Emotional aggression like tormenting and excluding people;
- i. Racial harassment, taunts, graffiti and gestures;
- j. Sexual aggression or harassment, unwanted physical contact or comments;
- k. Comments, threats or actions relating to people's disability;
- l. Comments, threats or actions relating to people's sexual orientation.

Staff and children are capable of bullying; and of being bullied.

2. Guidance for Residential Staff

2.1 Introduction

It is particularly important that policies and strategies are developed and implemented to deal with bullying as it affects the young people who are Looked After by the Local Authority within our Residential establishments. It is also important that the policy on countering bullying is reviewed frequently with staff and children and includes information on bullying by staff and bullying that may occur elsewhere in the home and includes different aspects of bullying.

Training should be provided for staff in awareness of and effective strategies to counter bullying.

Many of these young people have already experienced emotional abuse which has led to them being Looked After. Many also have psychological, emotional or behavioural problems related to the circumstances surrounding their admission to the home.

The Local Authority is charged with caring for these young people and making their life, while in residential care, as happy, stimulating and fulfilling as possible, in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000.

Bullying must be effectively addressed in order to achieve this aim, therefore the policy should be available and known to staff and children/young people, and should be implemented, monitored and revised where necessary.

2.2 Underlying Principles

Bullying is something, which happens in a relationship, which involves some form of hurtful abuse of power. Resulting in a wilful conscious desire to hurt another person, or to put him/her under stress.

It may be any of the following: -

VERBAL: As in name calling or making personal comments.

SOCIAL: Like not being spoken to or being left out of activities/games.

MATERIAL: As when possessions are stolen or damaged or extortion takes place.

MENTAL: As when pressure to conform is applied over short periods or Sustained periods.

PHYSICAL: As in harassment or aggression.

SEXUAL: As in harassment or aggression.

RACIAL: As in harassment or aggression.

The seriousness of any bullying will depend on a number of factors:

- How long has the bullying been going on?
- How is it personally affecting the bullied child?
- The number of children involved;
- The degree of planning and provocation.

Any child may be bullied, but bullying often occurs if a child has been identified in some ways as vulnerable, different or inclined to spend more time on his or her own. This can apply to many vulnerable young people Looked After by Local Authorities.

Staff must be very clear of their role in supporting young people to report incidents, which clearly constitute an assault.

It has been shown through research that children who bully have often been bullied themselves, but bullying may occur because a child is unhappy, jealous or lacking in confidence.

The characteristics associated with both a bully and those who are bullied are to be found in the majority of young people within residential establishments.

Staff must also recognise that bullying can bring young people perceived or actual "Rewards", including:

- The demonstration of superior power;

- A closer group identity;
- Gaining attention or material gains;
- Venting anger, frustration;
- Compensating for lack of success;
- Excitement from the fear of others.

These “rewards” are the “encouragement” required to continue the behaviour and may lead to its development into a sophisticated mechanism for control, which is both difficult to detect and challenge if it becomes the “culture” of the home.

Sorting out bullying early reduces the chances of bullies getting into trouble later in life. Bullying starts with apparently trivial events such as teasing and name calling which never the less rely on an abuse of power. Such abuses of power, if left unchallenged, can lead to more serious forms of abuse, such as domestic violence, racial attacks and sexual harassment.

The links between bullying and disruption in the unit need to be acknowledged, and reducing bullying will help reduce problems in the unit.

Tracking bullying involves looking at how people treat each other and so will improve the atmosphere of the whole unit.

- A sense of community will be achieved only if homes take seriously behaviour, which upsets young people as well as staff;
- Promotion of all children/young people within the home counters isolation of individuals by others, nurtures friendships between children/young people and supports them to adapt to their living arrangements;
- Support should be offered to children/young people for whom English is not their first language to communicate needs and concerns;
- Children/young people should be able to approach any member of staff with personal concerns not just their key worker.

2.3 Dealing with Allegations and Suspicions

In order to maintain an effective strategy for dealing with bullying each staff group needs to:

Challenge the traditional idea’s about bullying e.g.

- Its only a bit of harmless fun;
- Its all part of growing up;
- Children just have to put up with it;
- Adults getting involved make it worse.

Clear messages must be given that bullying is not acceptable.

Young people must be reassured that significant adults involved in their lives are dealing with bullying seriously.

A climate of openness should be established in which young people are not afraid to address issues and incidents of bullying.

Residential staff must not use young people to control other residents.

All complaints should be taken seriously and recorded in the complaints book and reported to Customer Care Service. Children should be aware of the options available to them if they feel the matter is not being dealt with satisfactorily. See [Representations and Complaints Procedure](#).

Respond appropriately. A range of active listening techniques which provide a more helpful response include:

THE LISTENER: Listening patiently with full attention, encouraging, clarifying, restating, reflecting, validating, summarising.

THE DETECTIVE: Investigating the situation sensitively and patiently.

THE SUPPORTER: Seeing their side, acknowledging and allowing expression of their feelings.

THE COACH: Checking out what help is being asked for and offering practical, realistic help.

Ascertain the nature of the bullying; consider the child's safety at all times.

If the bullying is that of a physical assault, should medical attention be sought? Also consideration should be given in respect of police involvement, are there child protection issues to consider, staff should consult their Line Manager.

Give reassurances. Let the child know you are pleased they have been brave enough to tell, say you believe them and you are sorry it has happened, stressing that it's not their fault.

Offer counselling/support to the bullied and the bullying child.

Anticipate an emotional reaction from the child such as guilt, shame or anger.

Find a quiet place and set aside enough time to talk, approaching the issue as a problem to be solved and as a learning experience.

Staff should always give due consideration and be aware of any underlying issues in relation to Race, Gender and Sexuality. This should be addressed and challenged accordingly.

Field Social Workers should be informed of incidents of severe or prolonged bullying in relation to the Care and Placement Plan. In all cases of physical assault the Social Worker/Team Manager should be informed, and child protection procedures followed as necessary.

Where appropriate, parents should be informed and updated on a regular basis. They should also, when applicable, be involved in supporting programmes devised to challenge bullying behaviour.

All incidents should be recorded clearly and concisely on the child's daily record sheet, and specific incident reports kept within the child's file.

Any injuries should be recorded and cross-referenced in the Accident Book and Accident Recording Forms.

2.4 Resolving/Reducing Incidents of Bullying

Create an Anti-Bullying climate within the home that is conducive to equality of opportunity, co-operation, and mutual respect for differences. This can be achieved by, i.e.

- Low Tolerance of Minor Bullying "Nipping in the bud" the incidents at the earliest sign;
- Never ignore victims of bullying, always show an interest/concern;
- Publicly acknowledge the bullied child's distress;
- Organise quality groups/circles, which allow young people to work together to identify their own problems, causes and solutions with careful sensitive facilitators;
- Encourage interdependence and feelings of mutual respect, reciprocity, compassion and assertiveness.

It is important when addressing Bullying behaviour to avoid accusations, threats or any responses that will only lead to the child being uncooperative, and silent.

Focus on the bully behaviour rather than the child, explore, and where possible deal with the reasons for the behaviour. Staff should regularly carry out recorded risk assessments of the times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying is greatest and take action to reduce it.

Assess what he/she does and what he/she gets out of it.

Give a clear explanation of the extent of the upset the bullying has caused, encourage them to see the bullied child's points of view, reward any good behaviour towards other children.

Closely monitor the child (bully and bullied) within the home.

If a culture of bullying continues to prevail and any child feels the issue remains unresolved then staff should ensure that the children are aware of the avenues open to them other than making another complaint through the homes complaints procedure. The child should be given access to; the Children's Rights Service/Officer, Children's Right Organisation i.e. Childline.

2.5 Incidents of Bullying Outside the Home

Any incidents of bullying reported to staff, which may have occurred at school, should be acted on immediately.

A full account should be gathered including, where possible, locations, times, names of children involved and the names of any teachers who may be aware of the incident.

This should be passed onto the school either to, the designated Teacher for Looked After Children, the Head of Year, or Headmaster.

Staff should ascertain the school bullying procedure, the process of investigation and what will happen next. This should be passed onto the child, staff should also reassure the child, with the schools assurance of their safety on return.

A written report of the incident should be forwarded to the school and a written response requested. This should then be placed on the child's file.

3. Guidance for Foster Carers

3.1 Introduction

It is particularly important that policies and procedures are developed and implemented to address the issue of bullying both within the foster home, at school and in the wider community. The policy must include information on bullying by carers and other children in the foster home and must refer to the different aspects of bullying that can occur.

Training should be provided to staff and carers to raise their awareness about the issue of bullying and to facilitate the development of effective strategies to counter its effects.

Many children and young people who become looked after by the local authority have already experienced emotional harm and they may also suffer psychological and behavioural difficulties which relate to the circumstances surrounding their admission to care. These issues will be compounded if they are already the subject of bullying or it begins as a result of their care episode.

3.2 Legal Framework

Under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Standards for Foster Care, the Local Authority is required to ensure that the fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Standard 9.6 in particular states:-

“ The fostering service ensures that foster carers are aware of the particular vulnerability of looked after children and their susceptibility to bullying and procedures are in place to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and to help foster carers cope with it.”

3.3 Principles

Bullying is a matter of concern for everyone. It can make the lives of children and young people who experience it miserable and in extreme cases can lead them to self harm and suicide.

In the past, bullying has been referred to as part of growing up however, it has become a key issue for public policy makers in recent years as the available research evidence demonstrates the profound effect it has upon a child's academic achievement and emotional well being.

For looked after children who experience bullying, the effect may be more acute because of their particular needs and experiences.

The Local Authority should work in partnership with foster carers, parents, children and other agencies who can assist in eradicating bullying.

Children and young people should participate actively in developing strategies to combat bullying and their views should be sought in relation to the shaping and review of policy and procedure.

Bullying can take many forms but in every situation it involves an abuse of power, and results in a conscious desire by the bully to hurt another person, either physically or emotionally.

3.4 Dealing with Allegations/Suspicions

Foster carers should challenge the traditional ideas about bullying such as:-

- Its only a bit of harmless fun;
- Its all part of growing up;
- Children have to put up with it, it will pass;
- Adults getting involved makes it worse;
- Carers should give clear messages to all children or young people within the household that bullying is not acceptable. A climate of openness within the foster home should be established so that children are not afraid to raise issues of concern. This should be included in the individual safe caring agreement within each foster home.

Clearly children and young people have different coping strategies and have varying degrees of resilience to being "picked on" or teased by others. Carers should try to reassure the child that their concern, however trivial it may seem, is being taken seriously by themselves and the other significant people in their lives.

3.5 Incidents Outside the Home

Most commonly bullying occurs within the school environment, although this is not exclusively the case.

Any incidents/allegations of bullying reported to foster carers should be taken seriously and acted upon as soon as is practicable. Foster carers must ensure that they make a full written account of what the child has said which includes where possible:

- What has happened?

- The location and time of the incident;
- The names of any children involved;
- Whether there were any witnesses to the event, including any adults such as teachers, or passers by;
- Whether the child has suffered any physical injury or has had any possessions stolen.

The child's safety is the first and paramount consideration, so if there has been a physical assault, medical attention may be required and consideration must be given to police involvement. Child Protection Procedures may be initiated if necessary.

Foster carers must alert the child's social worker to any incident of bullying, particularly if the incident(s) are severe or prolonged.

Where appropriate, the child's social worker will inform their parents and keep them updated on a regular basis. They may also be involved in supporting their child through police interviews, medicals or meetings at school where this is required.

Foster carers and staff should always be alert to the possibility that the bullying the child is experiencing is aggravated by issues in relation to race, gender and sexuality. This should be addressed with the child and in any plan put in place to counteract the bullying.

If the bullying has taken place within the school environment, the Head Teacher or Designated teacher for Looked After Children should be advised immediately.

The child's social worker should obtain a copy of the school's anti bullying procedure and should ascertain what will happen next in terms of ensuring the child's personal safety and wellbeing within school.

If the school is aware of the incident(s) they should initiate their anti bullying procedures and inform the foster carer and child's social worker accordingly.

In any event the foster carer has a vital role to play in supporting and reassuring the child that they were right to let people know what was happening and that they are believed.

Counselling should be sought for the child if appropriate.

3.6 Incidents within the Foster Home

Any incidents/allegations of bullying within the foster home should be taken seriously and acted upon.

Within a foster placement it is possible for one child to bully another. Carers must be alert to the sometimes complex dynamics between children placed with them, or indeed between foster children and their own birth children.

If an incident which may constitute bullying is reported to a foster carer, they may use their own judgement based on their knowledge of the child(ren) and their skills as carers to determine the seriousness of the matter and the consequent response.

There are always likely to be arguments and disagreements between children or young people within the home environment but the carer must be aware that this could develop into systematic bullying if it is not checked.

If carers have any concerns or are unsure how to respond they must discuss them with the child's social worker, or their own link worker.

If any instances of bullying do occur within the foster home, the carer must ensure that they make a full written account of what the child has said which includes where possible:-

- What has happened?
- The location and time of the incident;
- Who was involved?
- Were there any witnesses?
- Has the child been injured or had any belongings taken?

The child's safety is the first and paramount consideration, so if a child has been physically assaulted by another child, medical attention may be required and the involvement of the police may be appropriate. It may also be necessary to initiate the Child Protection Procedures.

The Foster carer must notify the child's social worker and their link worker as soon as is practicable. There could be implications for the foster placement and consideration may have to be given as to whether the placement(s) remain viable.

3.7 Children who Bully

There are many reasons why a child or young person becomes a bully; both staff and carers must recognise that bullying can bring with it actual or perceived status for the "bully" within their peer group. The rewards for being a bully include:-

- A sense of power;
- Being respected or feared by other children/young people;
- Material gain;
- Compensation for a lack of success in other areas of their life;
- Gaining excitement from the fear of others.

These rewards are the encouragement that the bully requires to continue his or her behaviour and may lead to its development into a sophisticated mechanism for the control of others who are seen as weak and vulnerable. This is difficult to detect and challenge.

Tackling the bullying behaviour at an early stage reduces the chances that it will become entrenched. Bullying starts with apparently trivial events such as teasing or name calling but can escalate to a more serious abuse of power. Such abuses of power if left unchallenged can lead to more serious forms of abuse such as domestic violence, racial or sexual harassment.

If an allegation of bullying is made against a child or young person who is looked after, a decision will need to be made on how to tackle the issue and foster carers will play an integral part in this process.

The child will be spoken to by an appropriate adult, for example a teacher, foster carer, social worker or parent and a written agreement drawn up to be by the child's social worker to outline the strategies to be employed to challenge and modify the behaviour.

The agreement should include:

- A focus on the bullying behaviour; explore and where possible deal with the reasons for the behaviour;
- Obtain information about what the child does and what they get out of it. Record times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying is greatest and what action will be taken to reduce it;
- Give clear explanations about why the behaviour is unacceptable and encourage them to see the victim's point of view. Record how this will be done and by whom;
- Ensure that ways of rewarding positive attitudes towards other children are recorded and followed through;
- Ensure that the agreement is signed by the child;
- To be reviewed on a regular basis.

In certain cases, if the child's bullying behaviour has caused severe injury or distress to their victim, the police may be involved. If the child is over the age of criminal responsibility (10 years) there is the potential for a criminal prosecution.

3.8 Allegations against Foster Carers

If an allegation of bullying is made by a child or young person against a foster carer, See [Allegations/Complaints against Foster Carers Procedure](#).