

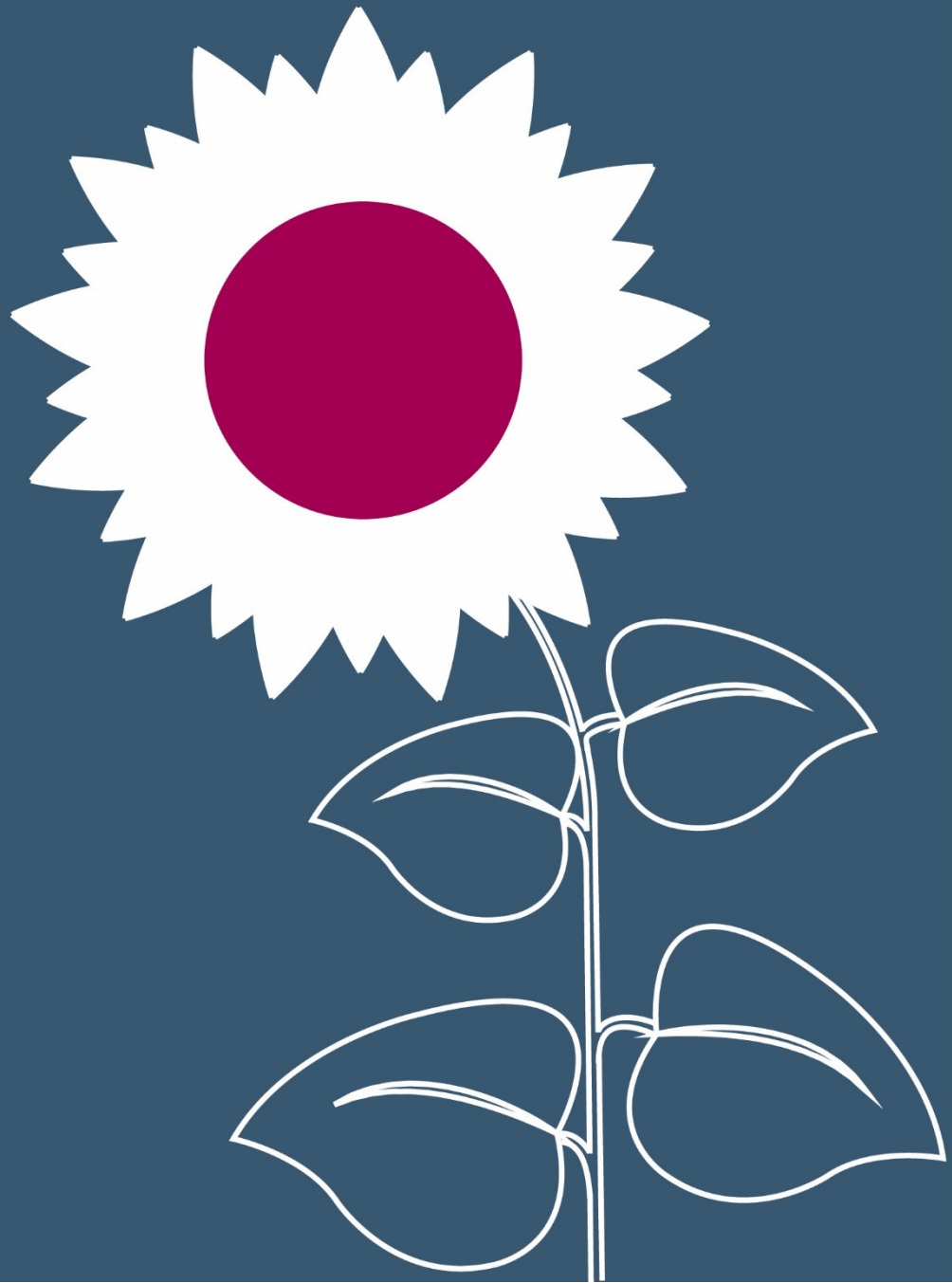


City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

# Counteracting Bullying in Residential Care

Tri x 5\_1\_31 (July 2024)

Review July 2025



## INFORMATION SHEET

<b>Service area</b>	Children's Social Care
<b>Date effective from</b>	August 2022
<b>Responsible officer(s)</b>	Strategic Manager Children in Care
<b>Date of review(s)</b>	February 2021 July 2022 September 2023 July 2024
<b>Status:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mandatory (all named staff must adhere to guidance)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Optional (procedures and practice can vary between teams)</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Mandatory
<b>Target audience</b>	Residential Staff in the Small Group Home Service
<b>Date of committee/SMT decision</b>	
<b>Related document(s)</b>	
<b>Superseded document(s)</b>	September 2023
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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The City of Stoke-on-Trent is committed to ensuring that children in care have a positive experience of care and feel safe and secure within their placements.
- 1.2 Many children living in residential care may have difficulty trusting adults and forming positive relationships with their peers and it is recognised that some children in care will have the potential for bullying behaviour. This means that clear guidance on how best to provide protection for children and how to counteract bullying is essential. These procedures should be read in conjunction with guidance on managing behaviour. [Ref: Guidance for Behaviour management and the use of physical intervention in children's home.](#)
- 1.3 A proactive approach is needed so that bullying doesn't add to the negative experiences to which children in care have already been exposed and so a sense of community can be developed in the home. The links between bullying and disruption in residential homes are often overlooked. Reducing bullying amongst children in care will reduce disruption.
- 1.4 Addressing bullying at an early stage can lessen the effect on victims and reduce the chance of bullies getting into trouble in later life.

## 2 Aim of the Policy

- 2.1 Bullying is a damaging social problem found in many walks of life. It can take many different forms and all of them are wrong. Stoke-on-Trent Children and Family Services aim to actively address and challenge any form of bullying behaviour wherever it may occur within the services it provides or commissions.
  - To provide a consistent and proactive approach to the management of bullying behaviour;
  - To provide effective guidance and support to workers and foster carers in caring for the victims of bullying and those exhibiting bullying behaviour;
  - To ensure support and protection and to reduce the incidence of fear and intimidation experienced by children and young people;
  - To prevent, wherever possible, the breakdown of placements;
  - To raise awareness and promote the involvement of all those with corporate parenting responsibilities for developing strategies for countering bullying amongst looked after children.

## 3 Legislative Context

3.1 The policy is in line with:

- **DfE: Bullying: Don't suffer in silence;**
- **National strategy for school improvement;**
- **National Healthy Schools status;**
- **PSHE National framework;**
- **Inspecting Schools Framework;**
- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 3, 19, 3;**
- **Human Rights Act 1988, Article;**
- **The Children Home (England) Regulations 2015 Regulation 43(3).**

3.2 With regard to residential care, the **Care Standards Act 2000 Standard 18** states that there should be recorded risk assessments highlighting where bullying is an issue and what action should be taken to reduce or counteract the risk of bullying.

## 4 What is Bullying?

4.1 The DfE "Don't Suffer in Silence" pack states that there are many definitions of bullying but most consider bullying to be:

**"Deliberately hurtful behaviour repeated over a period of time and in circumstances where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves".**

This definition was recognised and accepted in case law (in Hansen v. Isle of White Council).

4.2 Bullying is, therefore:

- **Repetitive and persistent.** Bullying is usually experienced as part of a continuous pattern and it can be extremely threatening and intimidating even when very subtle. Nevertheless, sometimes a single incident can have precisely the same impact as persistent behaviour over time.
- **Intentionally harmful.** The act of bullying intends harm to another individual although occasionally the distress it causes is not consciously intended by all of those who are present.
- **Involves an imbalance of power.** Bullying leaves someone feeling helpless to prevent it or put a stop to it. In some case an imbalance of power may mean that bullying crosses the threshold into abuse requiring implementation of safeguarding procedures.

# 5 Types of Bullying

5.1 There are different forms of bullying and varying behaviours may be observed within the home:

## Bullying

Bullying can be defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. Bullying can include:

- Physical violence such as hitting, pushing, kicking or spitting;
- Stealing, hiding, damaging or destroying someone else's belongings;
- Name calling;
- Writing offensive things or graffiti about another person;
- Racial humiliation or abuse;
- Sexual humiliation or abuse;
- Forcing physical or sexual contact;
- Making threats;
- Teasing;
- Lying;
- Ignoring or social exclusion;
- Use of the internet (cyber-bullying) or mobile phones (phone calls, text messages or cameras) to harass someone;
- Or any other intentional behaviour, overt or covert, that causes another person to feel bad or unhappy.

**This definition includes behaviour motivated on the grounds of:**

- Race;
- Gender;
- Sexuality;
- Disability;
- Culture;
- Religion.

## Harassment

Harassment occurs when an individual is the subject of offensive treatment because of their sex, sexuality, race, disability, culture or religion and where this is believed to be the motivating factor or where evidence suggests that this is the case.

It arises when the individual is subjected to actions, which are unwanted, unwelcome and unreciprocated. Such actions may occur once, they may be repeated, and they may or may not be deliberate. The main criterion is that they cause offence to the person concerned and the perpetrator knew or should have known that they would cause offence.

Examples of harassment could include:

- Physical attacks or damage to personal property;
- Unwanted contact such as deliberate touching or patting;
- Persistent staring or leering;
- Suggestive remarks and direct sexual propositioning;
- Displaying provocative material;
- Offensive remarks and jokes about race, sex, sexuality or disability;
- Any other intentional behaviour, overt or covert that causes another person to feel oppressed or intimidated.

5.2 It is important to note that some acts of bullying also constitute unlawful behaviour and can be classed as offences, for example, sexual or racial harassment and theft.

5.3 The seriousness of the bullying depends on a number of factors:

- How much hurt was intended;
- The effect on the bullied child;
- How often it has happened;
- For how long it has been happening;
- How much threat was involved;
- How personal it was;
- How many people were involved;
- The ability of the bullying child to see the impact of his/her actions;
- Whether it was planned;
- The perceived status of the bully;
- The reaction of onlookers.

- 5.4 Anyone can be bullied. Targets for bullies may be identified by the way they respond to rough and tumble play, name calling and teasing. Any under or over reaction shows the child to be vulnerable and an easy target. They may look like they won't stand up for themselves and be more sensitive, quieter or shyer than others. The bullying may then become more serious and others may join in.
- 5.5 Some children may become targets of bullies because they are different due to age, gender, sexual orientation, colour, religion, height, weight, disability, race, nationality, class, background, area, accent, appearance, manner or attitude.
- 5.6 Children can be bullied because they are looked after and not living with their own family.

## 6 Who Bullies and What are the Effects?

- 6.1 Anyone can bully someone else, no matter what their age, gender, size, background, academic ability etc.
- 6.2 Children bully for a range of reasons including:
- A lack of confidence;
  - Unhappiness;
  - Jealousy;
  - Anger;
  - Lack of success;
  - To gain attention or material things.
- 6.3 The bully may be having their own difficulties and may have low self-esteem. They may find it difficult to show their real feelings or be able to talk about their own problems.
- 6.4 A bully may be, or may have been, bullied by someone themselves, or they may have witnessed bullying of some form when living with their families.
- 6.5 A bully may feel worthless themselves and by bullying they are trying to feel in control of situations and to present as being a powerful individual. For the bully, they may try and feel strong but this can have the opposite effect. They may end up with even lower self-esteem and not feel in control.
- 6.6 The bully may feel worried about the consequences, although they may not show these feelings.

- 6.7 Severe bullying can have a significant effect on children. It can make them feel lonely and unhappy. It can make them feel ashamed that there must be something wrong with them. They may try to deny or downplay the feature which they believe is responsible, for example, their academic ability or ethnic or family background. They may withdraw from activities both within and outside of school and have difficulty forming positive relationships. They tend to lose confidence in themselves and can become anxious, depressed or even ill. They might take out their anger on other people. They will probably be very tense and easily distracted. They may develop eating difficulties. Not surprisingly, it can put children off school and affect their progress.
- 6.8 Regular but unpredictable bullying involving threats to a sensitive child, with no support who has been unable to tell anyone, can have a devastating effect and may lead to suicide.

## 7 Indicators of Bullying

7.1 Possible indicators that bullying is taking place are:

- Changes in the child's approach to certain situations, e.g. they become angry/ upset when they didn't used to react in that way previously;
- Unexpected illness;
- Damaged or missing clothes or other belongings;
- Unexplained marks on the child's body, e.g. scratches, cuts;
- Going to and/or from school using a different route;
- Lower school performance;
- Not attending school;
- Becoming upset or angry very easily;
- Running away;
- Self-harming behaviours;
- Asking for pocket money early or asking for savings and wanting it immediately;
- 'Lending' belongings to other children living in the home;
- Wanting to be nearer to carers for safety;
- Difficulty sleeping or having nightmares;
- Change in eating pattern.



# 8 Management Responsibilities in Response to Bullying Behaviour

## 8.1 Set the right ethos by:

- Giving explicit and consistent messages that bullying is unacceptable;
- Seeking agreement from all parties on what constitutes bullying behaviour;
- Reviewing communal life in order to identify any practices which might allow or encourage bullying;
- Be aware of the impact of group living and take steps to address this.

## 8.2 Encourage children and carers to report bullying by:

- Providing information about the Complaints Procedure;
- Providing information about any intermediary services e.g. Children's Advocacy Services;
- Attaching importance to concerns regarding bullying;
- Ensuring that youngsters are aware of adults whom they can approach with concerns;
- Providing alternative arenas for youngsters to communicate concerns e.g. suggestion boxes, confidential letters, etc.;
- Designating time for children within residential homes to speak with staff or the manager.

## 8.3 Raise awareness by:

- Links with Education;
- Surveying opinion;
- Highlighting issues at young people's meetings;
- Ensuring all carers have sight of this policy and other relevant material;
- Ensuring that all looked after children are aware of this policy;
- One to one discussions.

8.4 Deal with problem areas and times by:

- Training and supporting all adults with responsibility for the care of looked after children;
- Identifying possible hotspots;
- Ask those with parental responsibility to share concerns regarding behaviour that may indicate bullying is taking place.

8.5 Support bullied children by:

- Reassuring them that they are not to blame;
- Creating systems for early identification of vulnerable children;
- Assigning key workers to children who are being persistently bullied;
- Ensuring that children are aware of available support systems;
- Ensuring that concerns regarding vulnerable children are shared with all Others responsible for their care i.e. at team meetings, reviews, etc.

8.6 Sometimes carers can unwittingly put up roadblocks to children trying to talk about bullying by being, for example:

- The **belittler** devaluing the problem - What's all the fuss about?;
- The **doctor** diagnosing the problem - I know what you need;
- The **undertaker** burying the problem - Take no notice;
- The **brick wall** blocking it - Not giving the child a chance to explain;
- The **interrogator** persistently questioning- I want to know everything;
- The **bully** blaming the child - Why is it you they pick on?;
- The **rescuer** taking over the problem - Leave it to me;
- The **magician** looking for the quick fix - We'll sort it out in no time;
- The **judge** expressing rigid preconceived ideas - I know exactly what you should do.

8.7 A range of active listening techniques provide a more helpful response including:

- The **listener** listening patiently with full attention, encouraging, clarifying, restating, reflecting, validating, summarising;
- The **detective** investigating the situation sensitively and patiently through the use of professional curiosity;

- The **supporter** seeing their side, acknowledging and allowing expression of feelings;
- The **coach** checking out what help is being asked for and offering practical help.

## 9 Dealing with Bullying in the Home

9.1 The ethos of the home should be an anti-bullying one where everyone values and respects people, whatever they look like or where they come from. The clear message should be that it is OK to be different. An anti-bullying ethos is created by:

- Encouraging feelings of mutual respect and reciprocity;
- Sharing out responsibilities evenly;
- Ensuring that comparisons between children on such things as academic and sport skills are minimised while a range of other skills are valued;
- Having young people's meetings which allow children to work together to identify their own problems, causes and solutions;
- Not tolerating it in the home and addressing any early signs or indicators of minor bullying;
- Not ignoring the victims of bullying, showing an interest and concern;
- Keeping a record of incidents, including who, when, where and how.

9.2 Children should be given information about different cultures, beliefs and lifestyles, and opportunities should be created to discuss these matters openly and honestly with carers and their peers.

9.3 When a child first comes to live at the home they should be advised clearly that bullying is not acceptable and that bullying in any form is always taken seriously and addressed thoroughly. Clear boundaries need to be set for each child about what is not acceptable behaviour and included in the Placement Plan if necessary. The complaints procedure and process should be clearly explained.

9.4 Any incidents of bullying needs to be taken seriously. Children put forward many reasons to explain why they find it hard to tell adults about bullying. The most common reasons are:

- Fear of the bullies getting back at them;
- Not wanting to be a 'grass';
- Shame at not being able to stick up for themselves;
- Fear of losing their friends.

9.5 When an incident of bullying is alleged, the possible victim and perpetrator are identified.

Enquiries should be made by the relevant worker and carer to determine whether bullying has occurred.

Where the carer is concerned that bullying may be taking place but there is no clear evidence then the following strategies may be employed:

- Bullying should be discussed with young people as a group at the next opportunity;
- Young people should be reassured about seeking help if they feel bullied;
- The social worker should be informed;
- Staff and carers should continue to be vigilant.

If **there is clear evidence** that bullying has occurred and it is clear who the perpetrator is, the social worker of both the victim(s) and perpetrator(s) should be informed.

9.6 All carers should exercise vigilance in monitoring the interactions between children in the home. Any incidents of bullying witnessed must be challenged immediately by carers and all children should be encouraged to do the same. Serious concerns regarding bullying behaviour should be brought to the attention of the Registered Manager as soon as possible.

9.7 All Carers are responsible for the safe management of any bullying concerns.

9.8 The issue of bullying should be raised at Young People's Meetings and a proactive approach adopted in dealing with the issue.

9.9 Where necessary, the Registered Manager should become involved in dealing with a bullying issue, for example, meeting with the person bullying and/or the person being bullied.

9.10 Continuous bullying behaviour needs to be monitored by a carers and strategies for dealing with this recorded in staff meeting minutes.

9.11 Each child should be made aware of the complaints procedure within the home. If a child is experiencing bullying they have the right to speak informally to a carer, make a formal complaint, contact an independent advocate, and to speak to their social worker or any other professional who could help them. They can also contact Ofsted.

## Working with the child being bullied

9.12 All bullying must be challenged and a consistent approach used by all carers:

- Take time to speak to the child being bullied. Find a quiet place and set aside enough time to talk;
- Give reassurance, letting the child know you are pleased they have been brave enough to tell someone; you believe them and you are sorry it has happened;
- Make sure they don't believe the things that have been said about them;
- Reassure them that they are not the only person to be bullied;
- Gather information sensitively, going at the child's pace and record it accurately;
- Encourage the child to speak openly about what is happening. This message should always be reinforced in key worker sessions;
- Encourage the child to discuss their preferences for how the issue is addressed;
- Devise a plan alongside the child on how to deal with the bullying, for example, what they could say or do when the bully is near them. Role play could be helpful;
- Restore the child's confidence in his/her own ability to sort things out;
- Reassure the child that it is not their fault that they are being bullied and that it is important to keep talking about the problem;
- Actively monitor the child to assess whether the bullying has stopped and initiate further action if required and record this appropriately.

9.13 If the child is being bullied by another child in the home, make sure the bullying is included in that child's/risk assessment.

9.14 If the bully is at school, inform the school and arrange a meeting to discuss and agree an action plan. This needs to be done in conjunction with the child's social worker and if appropriate parents.

9.15 Teaching children the skills to deal with bullying is usually not enough. Carers also need to try to change how the child sees themselves and how other children see them by setting up situations where the child can mix more positively with others. This could be done by:

- Encouraging a new hobby or skill to boost confidence;
- Providing opportunities for friendship formation.

## Working with the bully

9.16 It is important to avoid accusations, threats or condemnation, which will only serve to silence the child. The aim is to enlist co-operation without building resentment by:

- Staying calm;
- Getting them to talk about the problem to find out what they think is happening;
- Asking them to describe how they see the situation;
- Giving a clear message that while it is okay to stick up for yourself, bullying is unacceptable;
- Focusing on the bullying behaviour rather than the child;
- Giving a clear indication of the extent of the upset caused;
- Requiring that the child acknowledges their behaviour and that it is wrong;
- Assessing what the child does and what s/he gets out of it;
- Exploring and, where possible, dealing with the reasons for the behaviour;
- Discussing strategies for how the child manages their feelings of anger and frustration;
- Providing a safe method of releasing stress or frustration;
- Helping them to see the bullied child's point of view;
- Getting the child to make amends in some way. Set short term realistic goals for the child that they will be able to achieve with support;
- Encouraging skills where the child can feel better about himself/herself;
- Recognising any Positive behaviour towards peers;
- Referring for support or therapeutic intervention from relevant agencies if necessary;
- Closely monitoring the child in the home to assess whether the bullying has stopped and initiate further action if required.

9.17 Serious incidents of bullying may require the short-term withdrawal of privileges or participation in activities – this must be in line with behaviour management procedures. The police may need to be involved where the bullying constitutes a crime.

9.18 See **Appendix 1 – 4** for detailed guidance on working with the child being bullied, the bully and the role of the bystander.

- 9.19 If the bullying continues, or the situation escalates, either within the home or elsewhere, a multi-agency meeting should be arranged to discuss in detail what is happening and what co-ordinated action should be taken. Clear actions should be agreed with timescales set. These actions should be reviewed to ensure the matter is being taken seriously and progress is being made. It is important that both the person bullying and the person being bullied are present so they are clear the matter is being addressed.
- 9.20 All risk assessments should be kept up to date by the home and overseen by the Registered Manager, to ensure that bullying is dealt with proactively. All children living in the homes, wherever possible, should be involved in reviewing risk assessments and also any policies in respect of bullying.

## Children with Disabilities

- 9.21 When working with children with a disability whose communication is impaired, consideration should be given to the use of sign language, pictures, PECS and other methods of communication which may prove vital in understanding the child's feelings and behaviour.

Children who have learning disabilities should be given the support of an advocate to discuss issues relating to any potential bullying. Advocacy support should be provided where appropriate for both the victim and perpetrator of bullying behaviour and should consider:

- The young person's perspective;
- Staff's observations;
- Connect feelings to behaviours;
- Develop planning, practice, and seek alternatives;
- Re-engage young person with group and routines.

## 10 Recording

- 10.1 All reported incidents of bullying should be recorded on a detail record sheet and individual bullying monitoring forms of both the alleged bully and the bullied child. The record should contain details of staff intervention and outcomes.
- 10.2 Carers on duty (depending on the seriousness of the incident) may need to complete the Accident/Incident report form or, in the event of a restraint; the Physical Intervention log should be completed.

# 11 Bullying Involving Adults

- 11.1 There may be instances of bullying between adults and children. Whilst high standards of practice are expected of carers, there could be an occasion where a carer, or other adult, bullies a child living in the home.
- 11.2 If there is reason to suspect that a carer within the home is bullying a child this must be reported to the Registered Manager immediately. Safeguarding procedures are in place to deal with incidents like this, and these can be found within Stoke-on-Trent's **Safeguarding Procedures**. In cases where the allegation is about the Registered Manager then the information must be passed immediately to the Responsible Individual and Strategic Manager.
- 11.3 Where there is reason to believe that a child is being bullied by another professional outside the home then the same procedures apply. The Registered Manager must be informed, along with the child's social worker.
- 11.4 Where a child is being bullied by a member of their family or another adult known to the child, a professionals' meeting should be arranged involving all those relevant people involved with the child who can help address and deal with the situation.