

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Paper from NSPCC Wales/Cymru

Bullying

Introduction

Despite initiatives from government and efforts on the part of many teachers and schools, bullying remains a serious problem for many children. A study carried out by Sheffield University in 1994 revealed that, in Britain, ten percent of primary children and four percent of those in secondary schools are bullied once a week – that's 350,000 young people aged 8-10, and 100,000 secondary school pupils countrywide.

The effects of bullying on children and young people have been well documented. In 1994 the Department for Education reported;

"Many pupils experience bullying at some point. The fact that incidents have not been reported to staff does not mean that they are not happening. Bullying or other forms of harassment can make pupils' lives unhappy, can hinder their academic progress, and can sometimes push otherwise studious children into truancy." Department for Education (Circular 8/94)

We know that the emotional damage done to those who are bullied can be long-lasting. It is less often recognised that lasting harm is also done to those who bully. Research has begun to suggest that unless new behaviours are learned and adopted, bullies may continue to bully throughout their lifetime, with damaging consequences for their mental health and well-being and their relationships with others.

When a school is able to effectively address the problem of bullying there are therefore clear benefits both short and long term for individuals, and for whole school environments and all members of the school community.

Underlying Principles

The NSPCC has formally adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Amongst our core values are:

- Every child has a right to protection from all forms of violence and exploitation, to protect themselves and to expect that people will protect and help them.
- Every child has the right to an education

We believe that the existence of bullying negates against these rights. We believe all schools should have clear, well supported and monitored school behaviour policies, and that staff should be supported in their responsibility for preventing bullying and encouraging good interpersonal relationships throughout school, so that pupils learn to treat each other with respect and recognise bullying as wholly unacceptable.

Impact of Anti-Bullying Strategies

The experience of schools where bullying is effectively addressed suggests that the following are some of the benefits schools might expect to see:

Positive Impact on Pupils - Those who have been bullied are supported by their classmates instead of being rejected or isolated. Pupils who witness abusive behaviour (and are able to identify it as such) learn to empathise with the victim and intervene, either directly or by alerting others. This means that over time disruptive pupils lose the silent collusion of their peers and are forced to change the way they relate to others.

Learning Environment - When children know that their school is actively committed to creating a safe school environment where bullying isn't tolerated, they can divert more attention to learning than to staying safe.

Whole School Environment - Both the whole school environment and the reputation of the school are enhanced where it is known that everyone in the school community will be valued and accepted for who they are and pupil relationships are increasingly characterised by assertiveness and co-operation.

Successful Interventions

Research undertaken for the Department for Education in 1994 studied the impact of a range of anti-bullying initiatives in 24 schools. (Sharp, Smith 1994). Their investigations found reductions of up to 80% in bullying behaviours. They identified the following as the key elements in successful anti-bullying interventions:

- “There was a direct correlation between the time and quality of effort spent in developing a whole school policy and the reduction in the levels of bullying.”
- “ ... the process of developing a common understanding of the problem was as important as any other factor.”
- “Curriculum interventions were useful in raising awareness and promoting discussion, but on their own were not important.”
- “In schools that adopted a wide range of interventions there was a marked increase in the willingness of victims to tell. The creation of this ‘telling environment’ was seen by schools as a major success.”
- “Work with individuals, both victims and bullies was successful but there was a need for specialised training and back up.”

Thinking About A Whole School Strategy

At the NSPCC we endorse the idea that the most effective anti-bullying initiatives are those that form part of a whole school strategy.

We believe the following factors are crucial in the development of an effective whole school strategy to tackle bullying:

- Involve all members of the school community – including teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils, parents and governors. Creating and maintaining a safe school is everyone’s responsibility.
- Clarify exactly what bullying is; build your definition
- Gain agreement that it is an unacceptable behaviour
- Develop clear guidelines on individual responsibility - it is crucial to develop these bearing in mind the involvement of not just those who have bullied or have been bullied, but also, importantly, those who have been onlookers.
- Ensure that consistent responses are made to all incidents of bullying
- Identify/monitor areas/times pupils identify as being unsafe
- Support victims of bullying and those who bully and help them develop appropriate behaviours.
- Ensure that your policy and procedures, once in place, are well-publicised, and that they are regularly reviewed.

What The NSPCC Can Offer Schools

Through our Education Programme we are promoting several different initiatives which can directly impact on bullying, whether by offering support to young people (eg. peer support and counselling services in schools), or looking at the policies and procedures needed to make schools safer places for children and young people (eg. school councils). In addition, the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline offers young people and parents the opportunity to speak to someone in confidence about bullying at any time on Freephone 0800 056 0566.

In addition we can offer:

- Advice and support for schools wanting to address bullying and issues that may arise concerning discriminatory behaviour, including sexual or racial harassment, through our Regional Education Advisors
- Information on good practice through reports, publications and briefings

- Opportunities for schools to share ideas and learn from each other through our education website. The site contains briefings and news updates on different aspects of our work. We hope to establish a discussion forum on bullying and related issues by January 2000. Details of the schools website can be found on the NSPCC website at www.nspcc.org.uk

For More Information

You can contact your Education Adviser / Schools Team at the address below, or visit our website at www.nspcc.org.uk for more general information about our work with schools.

NSPCC Education Adviser Contact Details:

Jane Harries

Unit 1, Cowbridge Court, Cowbridge Road West, CARDIFF CF5 5BS

Tel: 029 2056 3421

Fax: 029 2057 6965

e-mail: eharries@nspcc.org.uk

The following organisations can also give advice and information on bullying and related issues:

Kidscape

2 Grosvenor Gardens, London, SW1W 0DH.

Tel: 020 7730 3300

Fax: 020 7730 7081

Email: contact@kidscape.org.uk

Website: www.kidscape.org.uk

Childline - Tel: 0800 1111

Freepost 1111, London, N1 0BR

Advisory Centre for Education

1B Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London, N5 2EA

Scottish Council for Research in Education

15 St John Street, Edinburgh, EH8 8JR.

Tel: 0131 557 2944

Fax: 0131 556 9454

Email: scre@scre.ac.uk

Website: www.scre.ac.uk

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