# A logo with colorful hand prints

# Bullying

## 1. Definition

Bullying is defined as 'behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, which intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally' (DfE definition). Repeated bullying usually has a significant emotional component, where the anticipation and fear of being bullied seriously affects the behaviour and well-being of the victim.

Under the Children Act 1989 a bullying incident should be addressed as a child protection concern when there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm'.

Although bullying in itself is not a specific criminal offence in the UK, some types of harassing or threatening behaviour - or communications - could be a criminal offence.

An Ofsted thematic review [(Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (Ofsted))](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges) identified substantial levels of sexual harassment for both girls (90%) and boys (nearly 50%) – usually in unsupervised settings. Sexual harassment and sexual violence exist on a continuum and may overlap. Where the latter occurs, there could be a criminal offence committed.

Bullying can be inflicted on a child by another child, or by an adult. Bullying can take many forms (including cyberbullying), and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender / gender identity, sexual orientation, special educational need or disability or because a child is looked after, or previously looked after or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences.

It can take many forms, but the three main types are:

* Physical- for example, hitting, kicking, shoving, theft;
* Verbal- for example, threats, name calling, racist, sexual or homophobic remarks;
* Emotional- for example, isolating an individual from activities/games and the social acceptance of their peer group.

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using technology. Whether on social media sites, through a mobile phone, or gaming sites, the effects can be devastating for the young person involved. There are ways to help prevent a child from being cyberbullied and to help them cope and stop the bullying if it does happen. It is another form of bullying which can happen at all times of the day, with a potentially bigger audience. By its very nature, cyberbullying tends to involve a number of online bystanders and can quickly spiral out of control. The Department for Education have issued guidance for school staff and parents and carers on how to recognise signs of cyberbullying and support children who are being bullied in this way ([see Preventing Bullying Guidance (GOV.UK)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying)).

Bullying often starts with apparently trivial events such as teasing and name calling which nevertheless 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 and abuse, racial attacks, sexual offences and self-harm or suicide.

Upskirting, which involves taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks to obtain sexual gratification, or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm; is a specific example of abusive behaviour which has been linked to online bullying and grooming. Upskirting is a criminal offence and should be reported to the Police.

The [Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (Ofsted)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges) also recognised a wide variety of behaviours that children and young people told (them) happened online including:

* Receiving unsolicited explicit photographs or videos, for example 'dick pics';
* Sending, or being pressured to send, nude and semi-nude photographs or videos ('nudes');
* Being sent or shown solicited or unsolicited online explicit material, such as pornographic videos.

Sexting is a term which many young people do not recognise or use, therefore it is important that when discussing the risks of this type of behaviour with children and young people the behaviour is accurately explained.

Sexting (some children and young people consider this to mean ‘writing and sharing explicit messages with people they know’ rather than sharing youth-produced sexual images) or sharing nudes and semi-nudes are terms used when a person under the age of 18 shares sexual, naked or semi-naked images or videos of themselves or others or sends sexually explicit messages.

Bullying is a type of behaviour which needs to be defined by the impact on the child being bullied rather than by the intention of the perpetrator.

## 2. Risks

### 2.1 The Child Being Bullied

The damage inflicted by bullying can often be underestimated. It can cause considerable distress to children, to the extent that it affects their health and development or, at the extreme, causes anxiety, depression and self-harm (including suicidal behaviour).

Children are often reluctant to tell anyone about their experience either because of threats, a feeling that nothing can change their situation, that they may be partly to blame for the situation or that they should be able to deal with it themselves.

Parents, carers and agencies need to be alert to any changes in a child's behaviour such as refusing to attend school or a particular place or activity, becoming anxious in public places and crowds and becoming withdrawn and isolated. Parents should be provided with information as what they should do if they are worried that their child is being bullied - i.e. where they can obtain advice and support including keeping safe on the internet.

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 their own. Bullying may be fuelled by prejudice - racial, religious, homophobic and against children with special education needs or disabilities or who are perceived as different in some way. In cases of sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying, schools must always consider whether safeguarding processes need to be followed. This is because of the potential for this form of bullying to be characterised by inappropriate sexual behaviour and the risk of serious violence (including sexual violence).

Children living away from home are particularly vulnerable to bullying and abuse by their peers.

### 2.2 The Child Engaging in Bullying Behaviour

Children who bully other children have often been bullied themselves and may have experienced considerable disruption in their own lives. The bullying behaviour may occur because the child is unhappy, jealous or lacking in confidence.

Work with children who bully should recognise that they are likely to have significant needs themselves.

## 3. Indicators

Any change in behaviour which indicates fear or anxiety may be a potential indicator of bullying. Children may also choose to avoid locations and events which they had previously enjoyed - changes in attitude towards schools or organised activities are particularly significant.

Behaviour such as:

* Being frightened of walking to and from school and changing their usual route;
* Feeling ill in the mornings;
* Beginning truanting;
* Beginning to perform poorly in their school work;
* Coming home regularly with clothes or books destroyed;
* Becoming withdrawn, starting to stammer, lacking confidence, being distressed and anxious and stopping eating;
* Attempting or threatening suicide;
* Crying themselves to sleep, having nightmares;
* Having their possessions go missing;
* Asking for money or starting to steal (to pay the bully) or continually 'losing' their pocket money;
* Refusing to talk about what's wrong;
* Having unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches;
* Beginning to bully other children/siblings;
* Becoming aggressive and unreasonable.

Incidents of bullying should be taken seriously, and the behaviour discussed between parents/carers and schools.

## 4. Protection and Action to be Taken

All settings in which children are provided with services or are living away from home should have in place anti-bullying strategies and procedures on how to refer to Children's Social Care if safeguarding children concerns are identified. See the Local Protocol for Assessment. This includes youth clubs and all other children's organisations as well as all schools.

Support should be offered to children for both children with SEND and those children for whom English is not their first language to communicate needs and concerns;

* Children should be able to approach any member of staff within the organisation with personal concerns.

In order to maintain an effective strategy for dealing with bullying, the traditional ideas about bullying should be challenged, e.g.:

* It's only a bit of harmless fun, joking or banter;
* It's all part of growing up;
* Children just have to put up with it;
* Adults getting involved make it worse.

Schools are the agency most likely to become aware of bullying and schools have statutory obligations to respond. Every school must have measures to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils; proportionally deal with perpetrators of bullying and support those have been the most impacted by it. These measures should be part of the school's behaviour policy which must be communicated to all pupils, school staff and parents.

Headteachers also have the ability to discipline pupils for poor behaviour even when the pupil is not on school premises or under the lawful control of school staff.

Clear messages must be given that bullying is not acceptable and children must be reassured that significant adults involved in their lives are taking bullying seriously.

[Keeping Children Safe in Education](https://www.keepingchildrensafeineducation.co.uk/index.html) notes that with regard to sexual harassment, all staff working with children are advised to maintain an attitude of 'it could happen here' and must respond to all reports and concerns about sexual violence and/or sexual harassment, including online behaviour and incidents that have happened outside of the school/college.

Some acts of bullying could be a criminal offence.

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

Consideration should always be given to the existence of any underlying issues in relation to race, gender / gender identity, special educational needs or disability or sexual orientation. This should be addressed and challenged accordingly.

Where a child is being bullied, action should be taken to assess the child's needs and provide support services.

If the bullying involves a physical assault, as well as seeking medical attention where necessary, consideration should be given to whether there are any safeguarding or child protection issues to consider and whether there should be a referral to the Police if  a criminal offence may have been committed.

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.

## 5. Issues

Creating an anti-bullying climate that is conducive to equality of opportunity, co-operation and mutual respect for differences can be achieved for example by:

* Low Tolerance of Minor Bullying – dealing with incidents at the earliest sign, using restorative techniques, and an open culture of how victims are supported and acknowledged;
* Never ignoring victims of bullying, always showing an interest/concern;
* Publicly acknowledging the bullied child's distress;
* Organising quality groups/circles, which allow children to work together to identify their own problems, causes and solutions with sensitive facilitators.

Practitioners may often be in the position of having to deal with the perpetrators as well as the victims of bullying. It should be borne in mind that bullying behaviour may in itself be indicative of previous abuse or exposure to violence.

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

The focus should be on the bullying behaviour rather than the child and, where possible, the reasons for the behaviour should be explored and dealt with. A clear explanation of the extent of the upset the bullying has caused should be given and encouragement to see the bullied child's points of view.

A restorative approach and the use of restorative enquiry and subsequent mediation between those involved can provide an opportunity to meet the needs of all concerned. The child who has been bullied has the chance to say how they have been affected. The opportunity is provided for the child doing the bullying to understand the impact of their actions and to make amends.

Both the child engaged in bullying behaviour and those who are the target of bullying should then be closely monitored. The times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying is greatest should be ascertained and action taken to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Whatever plan of action is implemented, it must be reviewed at regular intervals to ascertain whether actions have been successful and whether the bullying behaviour has ceased.

Where bullying exists in the context of gang behaviour, or where it is of a sexual harassment/violence nature, there should be an institutional and multi-agency, as well as an individual, response to this.

## 6. Further Information

See also:

[Preventing and Tackling Bullying - Advice for Headteachers, Staff and Governing Bodies (Department for Education, 2017)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444862/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf)

[Cyberbullying: Advice for Headteachers and School Staff (Department for Education, 2014)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374850/Cyberbullying_Advice_for_Headteachers_and_School_Staff_121114.pdf)

[Advice for Parents and Carers on Cyberbullying (Department for Education, 2014)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444865/Advice_for_parents_on_cyberbullying.pdf)

[Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (Ofsted)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges)

Specialist Organisations:

* [The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA):](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work) Founded in 2002 by NSPCC and National Children's Bureau, the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) brings together over 100 organisations into one network to develop and share good practice across the full range of bullying issues;
* [Kidscape](https://www.kidscape.org.uk/): Charity established to prevent bullying and promote child protection providing advice for young people, professionals and parents about different types of bullying and how to tackle it. They also offer specialist training and support for school staff, and assertiveness training for young people;
* [The BIG Award](https://www.bullyinginterventiongroup.org/big-award): The Bullying Intervention Group (BIG) offer a national scheme and award for schools to tackle bullying effectively.

Cyberbullying:

* [ChildNet International](https://www.childnet.com/): Specialist resources for young people to raise awareness of online safety and how to protect themselves;
* [Child Exploitation And Online Protection Centre (CEOP) Education (previously known as ‘Think U Know’)](https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/) : Resources provided by NCA-CEOP  for children and young people, parents, carers and teachers on how to stay safe on a computer, tablet or phone;
* [Advice on Child Internet Safety](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251455/advice_on_child_internet_safety.pdf): The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) has produced universal guidelines for providers on keeping children safe online;
* [Sexting](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647389/Overview_of_Sexting_Guidance.pdf): How to Respond to an Incident: The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) an overview for staff on how to respond to incidents involving sexting;
* [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people): advice for education settings working with children and young people.

LGBT:

* [Ditch the Label](https://ditchthelabel.org): Resources to use when tackling gender stereotypes;
* [Schools Out](http://www.schools-out.org.uk/): Offers practical advice, resources (including lesson plans) and training to schools on LGBT equality in education;
* [Stonewall](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/best-practice-toolkits-resources): Resources to help schools, colleges and other settings ensure they are LGBT inclusive.

SEND:

* [Mencap](https://www.mencap.org.uk/): Represents people with learning disabilities, with specific advice and information for people who work with children and young people;
* [Changing Faces](https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/): Provide online resources and training to schools on bullying because of physical difference;
* [Cyberbullying and Children and Young People with SEN and Disabilities](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/online-bullying/online-bullying-and-sendisability): Advice provided by the Anti-Bullying Alliance on developing effective anti-bullying practice.

Racism:

* [Racist and Faith Targeted Bullying](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/at-risk-groups/racist-and-faith-targeted-bullying): Information on racist and faith targeted bullying including top tips for schools, advice countering intolerance and prejudice, promoting shared values and what the law says;
* [Show Racism the Red Card](https://www.theredcard.org/): Provide resources and workshops for schools to educate young people, often using the high profile of football, about racism;
* [Kick it Out](https://www.kickitout.org/): Uses the appeal of football to educate young people about racism and provide education packs for schools;
* [Anne Frank Trust](https://www.annefrank.org.uk/): Runs a schools project to teach young people about Anne Frank and the Holocaust, the consequences of unchecked prejudice and discrimination, and cultural diversity.

Please note that internal servers may block access to some of these sites. Schools wishing to access these materials may need to adjust their settings.