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Introduction

According to Bully OnLine, at least 16 children in the UK kill themselves each year because they are being bullied at school and no one in authority is doing anything about it. ChildLine has reported that four out of every five bullied children have asked for help and have done so repeatedly, despite fears of reprisal: many of ChildLine's calls are from young people who are still being bullied even after telling an adult.

How to Stop Bullying demystifies the issues of bullying showing how parents and teachers can help prevent children from becoming, and being, victims, and from becoming, and being, bullies. The book also explains what bystanders can do to help stop bullying. Bullying may exist in today's life but we can do something about it: we each need to take responsibility for our own behaviour and the reporting of, and dealing with, undesirable behaviour in others.

The terms bullies and victims are transitory – a bully can stop being a bully at any moment as can a victim stop being a victim. These descriptions have only been used throughout the book to clearly identify behaviour at a particular time and in no way labels a child inherently as either a bully or a victim.

Chapter three: What schools can do to stop bullying

A 'whole school approach' is widely recommended to combat bullying in schools which involves a large commitment from teaching and non-teaching staff and cooperation of pupils and parents. No single scheme is effective in stopping all bullying so a range of strategies needs to be developed, implemented and regularly appraised for effectiveness, adapting where necessary. Sharing ideas between schools can also be very productive. If

you are concerned about the way your child's school handles bullying use the information below to help you challenge the way the school is run.

Anti-bullying policies

By law, every school must have an anti-bullying policy. But they need to be strong documents living and breathing in minds of staff and pupils – not pieces of paper that were written to satisfy current legislation and then filed away only to be pulled out at the next inspection.

Anti-bullying policies should be written in consultation with staff, parents, children and the local community in the light of the bullying carried out by pupils attending that particular school even if it does not actually happen on the school premises – which helps staff to come to their own definition of bullying - and in the light of the solutions that have been successful. The consequences of children telling about bullying should also be included. If people are consulted, they are more likely to have an interest in making sure the policy actually works and it will encourage them to uphold the values the school promotes. Staff, as well as pupils, should be protected by the anti-bullying policy. For example, staff should be protected by the school against sexual harassment and homophobic comments as well as against physical assaults.

Schools should keep records of bullying incidents so that patterns of bullying can emerge. Schools can use this information to adjust their anti-bullying policy to target bullying behaviour in areas of need.

Schools could send out anonymous questionnaires to children to tell whether the anti-bullying policy is working and if it is being correctly implemented. However, children need to be clear on what bullying is and isn't – for example, it is not bullying when two children equally matched for strength have an occasional spat. Examples of bullying could be included in the questionnaire.

Schools could use the Bully/Victim questionnaire and the software to process the data devised by Professor Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen, Norway. He also devised a comprehensive Bully Prevention Program to reduce the incidence of bullying among primary and secondary school children.

By comparing past and present surveys schools can tell how effective their measures are. If there is no clear improvement in the amount and severity of bullying either the policy is at fault or staff members are not working together to provide the right environment for a social change in and around the school.

There could be a day's conference where teaching and non-teaching staff, educational psychologists and parents are brought together to become informed on aspects of bullying – including prejudice and stereotyping - and to suggest solutions if the anti-bullying policy is not working. The anti-bullying policy can be amended to take on board the things that have been said. By attending the conference, everyone should have the same aim in mind and be supportive of the methods agreed upon in making the anti-bullying policy more effective.

Schools could make their anti-bullying policy available on their website and on noticeboards so that parents can consult it in times of trouble and also be aware, and make their children aware, of the help and support on offer.

Clear sanctions for children who do not stop bullying should be laid out in the anti-bullying policy. They could start with removal from the class or group, being kept away from other children during lunch and break times, preventing children from going on non-educational school trips, preventing children from attending rugby or football practise.

Or a bully could be asked to write a story with her starring as the victim – or drawing a picture with her as the victim – to help raise empathy for her victim. Where a child has extorted money he should be made to repay that money – the school could give him a lunchtime job such as working in the canteen or an after school job such as picking up litter or cleaning corridors and classrooms. Alternatively the child's parents may be able to employ him at home.

Another common sanction is having after school detention – but bullies could be given a compulsory programme with other bullies of anger management, learning positive social skills, learning assertiveness skills and in raising empathy for others. By showing that positive social behaviour is worthwhile, bullies might accept that it is a valuable leadership skill – and turn to influencing children through positive rather than negative means.

Victims could be offered something similar designed to help them make friends, increase their social skills and self-esteem and to teach them assertiveness skills. Some victims might also need to be taught anger management. Teachers and senior pupils could be trained to deliver such programmes.

If these sanctions and approaches have failed to stop the bullying then bullying children should be suspended or even permanently excluded. Too often it is the victims who change schools to escape bullying and then the victims, their families and other children in the school see the bullying children as having won.

Written behavioural contracts could be introduced for bullies to sign stating that they will not continue specific bullying behaviour. This gives the message that bullying has been taken seriously. The contract ought to include the sanctions the school would use should the contract be broken. The bullies' signature could be witnessed by a senior member of staff and by their parents. Schools could save time by using standard forms, so that they only need to insert the relevant details. Schools will need to follow up with bullies and victims to check that the bullying has stopped…

Peer support in schools

ChildLine in Partnerships (CHIPS) is an initiative run by ChildLine. It involves training children in primary and secondary schools to become buddies, known as Peer Supporters, focusing on the importance of children listening to one another – many children prefer talking to their peers as they don't feel comfortable talking to their parents or to their teachers.

In secondary schools, for example, Peer Supporters in Years 10 and 12 are trained to talk, listen, comfort and support children in need of help and advice, and to intervene if they see bullying behaviour - they wear a badge to identify themselves. They can run a drop in centre at lunchtimes and take it in turns to be 'on duty'; their photos can be displayed on a notice board with the times they will be available. Peer Supporters can also be attached to a form in Years 7, 8 and 9 to have direct contact with children during registration periods.

As well as having the status of a Peer Supporter, these children gain from learning and practising new skills and can demonstrate that they are dependable and respected – things which can be mentioned on job and university applications. They can share their knowledge directly with their peers or share it through example; taking positive skills home can also benefit the family.

Children could be encouraged to befriend children outside their usual circle of friends. If pupils are on the look out for children on their own they could 'mop them up' so that they won't be identified as friendless by bullies.

Older pupils could be asked to help younger pupils with their work. Children from Year 6 (or in some cases Year 7) in primary schools and Years 11 and 12 in secondary schools could regularly give help to raise the standard of children's work, protecting them from being made fun of and allowing them to achieve more for themselves.

Older children could be trained to run after-school workshops for younger children – such as on friendship and assertiveness skills. This could be a form of community service.

Sex and relationship education and homophobia

Every school should have a regularly reviewed policy for Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) containing a definition of SRE, a description of how SRE is provided and who is responsible for providing it, how SRE is monitored and evaluated and an explanation of parents' rights to withdraw their children from SRE lessons.

The *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance*, issued in July 2000 by the Department for Education and Employment, makes it clear that teachers should 'deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support.' But some teachers shy away from teaching about sexuality or are under the misapprehension that they are not allowed to discuss it with children. Fion's Year 9 class, was told by the Personal Social and Health Education teacher that homosexual relationships could not be included in their list of relationship categories as she was not allowed to talk about them.

The Education Act of 1996, Section 28, regarding the prohibition of local authorities in England and Wales 'promoting' homosexuality, was legally obsolete with respect to teaching in schools. Section 28 has now been repealed so no longer has any bearing at all on decisions schools make regarding the content of SRE.

In the 2002 OFSTED report it is stated, 'In too many secondary schools homophobic attitudes among pupils often go unchallenged. The problem is compounded when derogatory terms about homosexuality are used in everyday language in school and their use passes unchallenged by staff.' Children's understanding of the homophobic words they use and the impact they have on the children at whom they are directed should be explored in class – the same can be said of racial comments and labels.

If schools do not teach about homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality (also known as transgender) and intersex, homophobic bullying will not be addressed. Children will continue to blithely use labels like 'gay', 'bent', 'sissy', 'dyke' and 'tranny' as universally derogatory terms as well as attacking children for not being, or appearing not to be, heterosexual. Myths and prejudices children may hold about sexuality will be perpetuated and schools will fail to support children who know they are different but feel too ashamed to talk about it. Douglas and others (1998)

found that 82 per cent of schools are aware of homophobic abuse, and 26 per cent of homophobic violence, but that only 6 per cent refer to homophobic bullying in their policies.

Rivers (2000) found that lesbian, gay and bisexual children are more likely to leave school at 16, despite achieving the equivalent of six GCSEs at grade C, that many have a regular history of absenteeism at school due to homophobic harassment and that 50 per cent contemplated self-harm or suicide – 40 per cent had made at least one attempt to self harm.

It is thought that between 4 and 10 per cent of the population is lesbian, gay or bisexual – so a significant number of children in a school at any one time will be lesbian, gay or bisexual. So staff should not assume heterosexuality in one another, in their pupils or in their pupils' parents. Some children at school may have same sex parents.

Other ways schools can help

Having a clear leadership structure that supports the message that bullying is unacceptable is vital. Serious bullying should always be referred to a senior member of staff.

Having a strong ethos that promotes tolerance and respect, including respect for difference and diversity, increases children's trust for teachers so that they are more likely to seek help.

Ensuring good communication between staff, parents and children allows everyone involved in a child's well being to be kept informed of any problems – bullying or otherwise.

Using parent-teacher meetings to inform parents about the steps the school is taking to combat bullying and to explain what methods are being used and how successful they are – and how parents can help – can be an effective way of communicating progress and needs.

Being swift to act whenever the issue of bullying comes up, and following it up to check it does not resume, gains victims' trust.

Dealing with bullies on an individual basis allows a fair and appropriate resolution. All children involved should be dealt with understanding and personal and home problems should be taken into account.

Dealing with victims on an individual basis instils trust and respect. It involves listening to what they want – some children just want a listening ear or some advice and do not want intervention; some may want to try to handle the situation themselves with support.

Ensuring consistency in approach by all staff – teaching and non-teaching - reinforces the anti-bullying message. All staff members need to respond and act in the same way, take children's concerns into account when dealing with them and know to whom to report incidents of bullying and other bad behaviour.

Having clear standards of behaviour for staff as well as children reinforces the anti-bullying message by example. For example, staff and children should know that any form of sexual harassment is unacceptable. Staff should not make personal comments to children and they should stop children from using them on one another. The school should also have a clear policy on how it tackles swearing – as well as showing disrespect for others swearing can be used as a tool for bullying.

Encouraging teachers to share vulnerabilities and experiences helps make the school an effective community and improves peer support and development. Working in isolation also leaves teachers vulnerable to stress related illnesses; it can also mean that discipline is harder to maintain and so lessons are harder to teach.

Having mentors for new teachers helps guide and support them in effective classroom and school practices.

Ensuring that sufficient supervision is given at break times has been found to greatly reduce bullying. Low levels of supervision increase the risk of bullying.

Many children are afraid to use the school toilets as they fear getting trapped by bullies and don't feel safe going to the loo. In some schools, the doors hang off the hinges so can't be shut properly. Toilets should not be no go areas for children.

Having lunchtime clubs helps to reduce the risk of bullying as vulnerable children can choose to join in supervised activities whilst having fun at the same time. Schools could provide a room supervised by, for example, non-teaching staff, for vulnerable children to go to. Games could be provided or children could bring their own. Children should also be supervised as they leave the premises at the end of the school day.

Having helpline numbers clearly visible in parts of the school gives victimised children access to adult help should they feel unable to confide to a teacher or to their parents. As well as having suggestion boxes for notes to be posted, secondary schools could also advertise a dedicated bullying email address so that children could secretly

email their difficulties at any time. Research has shown that as children mature they are less likely to seek help directly from another person preferring getting advice from helplines and the Internet.

Displaying anti-bullying posters that children themselves have made ensures that children feel involved and thereby committed to stopping bullying behaviour.

Removing offensive graffiti as soon as it is seen, and regularly checking toilets for graffiti, can help tackle homophobic and racist attitudes.

Avoiding sex-role stereotyping so that girls are not made fun of for being butch and boys are not made fun of for being camp is important in tackling homophobic bullying.

Avoiding showing favouritism to individuals or groups of children helps to decrease bullying due to jealousy. In Freya's school, two children from Year 6 were regularly asked to read in assembly – but no one else - and these children and their friends had regular special lessons with the Headteacher in the staff room and were given cakes to eat. They were targeted for bullying.

Avoiding too much emphasis on competitiveness at school helps prevent jealousy between children and decreases the bullying of teachers towards children. Gerard, who was having anxiety problems, was harangued by teachers in his private school to keep up with work as his GCSE grades would affect the school's position in the league tables. He was told that if he could not overcome his problems he might be asked to leave before he sat his external exams.

Being flexible regarding some school rules shows that the school is a caring school and encourages pupils to be caring too. For example, insisting children should not wear hats in school when they are bald from cancer treatment is blatantly unkind. One Headteacher even rang up a child's parents asking him not to attend school until his hair had re-grown – which does not allow other children in the school to learn acceptance and showed that the school was not prepared to protect the child from being bullied. What is more surprising was that the reason for his not having hair was not addressed – that he was at risk of dying. Was it fair to give the child an additional burden to deal with?

Dealing with children in non-aggressive ways encourages children to behave without aggression. This does not mean that if the teacher has to raise his voice to be heard above the hubbub that is wrong. For teachers, their voice is an invaluable tool. But what it does mean is matching their behaviour to what the children are doing.

When Gavin was about to strike Daniel with a plank of wood at the other end of the schoolyard, it was sensible for the teacher who saw this to yell at Gavin to stop as his voice would reach Gavin before he could. But when shouting is used for minor insignificant offences, it is aggressive. There is a saying that if you have a noisy teacher, you have a noisy class. To some extent my experiences back this up.

Banning camera phones in school - to avoid 'happy slapping' - and the use of other mobile phones in school time can reduce cyber bullying. It is unrealistic to ban phones altogether since many parents want their children to be able to contact them in the event of a change of plan in after school activities or in an emergency. The proper use of mobile phones could be a matter of discussion among pupils.

Emphasising the fact that children cannot shift blame helps children realise that everyone, even if acting as part of a group, is individually responsible for their behaviour and that they are not absolved of an offence by saying someone made them do it.

Integrating anti-bullying issues into the school curriculum and highlighting them in assemblies, newsletters, student newspapers and on notice boards raises awareness of the unacceptability of bullying behaviour.

Openly valuing minority groups by having discussions about famous people in, for example, literature, history, science and maths, and by holding assemblies on different themes relating to prejudice, sexual harassment, sexuality and bullying helps reduce discriminatory behaviour among pupils.

Schools could also celebrate minority ethnic festivals such as the Hindu Festival of Light: Diwali, and the Jewish Festival of Light: Hanukkah. Dr Simon Hunter, from the University of Strathclyde, found that children who felt proud of their ethnic community coped best with bullying in terms of being more resilient to it and feeling less depressed, even among children as young as eight.

Having class discussions on behaviour and bullying actively involves every child in the school in bullying issues. Teachers in primary schools could use circle time and teachers in secondary schools could use free time during form periods – one day a week could be protected from assembly and administrative tasks - Personal Social and Health Education or Citizenship lessons.

Children could be asked to come up with solutions to make their class a more rewarding one to be in. Suggestions might include having a few children nominated to remind other children to keep their behaviour within

reasonable limits – but these children need to be taught how to do this assertively or they may behave towards aggression with further aggression. Having clear class rules can also help – such as not interrupting another child who is already speaking.

Subject classes that have problems could be invited to come up with their solutions. As well as promoting positive behaviour it helps children get on with people in a wider community – which is part of Citizenship.

Inviting current or past pupils to talk about their experiences of bullying can increase empathy pupils have for victims and show them that bullying is not a game; it is far more serious. Past pupils could talk about 'coming out' and the prejudices they may have encountered, urging the current school population to be more tolerant of differences.

Considering methods of keeping children safe from physical bullying will help look after children in the school's care and satisfy parents that the school is doing all it can. In Finland, some schools give wrist alarms, developed for the elderly, to known victims who are at risk of physical bullying continuing to summon help if they see their bullies approaching. When pressed, the button on the alarm sends a signal to a mobile phone – held by the teacher on duty. As a cheap alternative, victims could be given a Wrist-Mate Personal Alarm that sounds very loudly when pressed to alert staff.