

Serious Incidents of Bullying

Bullying may be defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. It can take many forms but the main types are:

- *physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, theft)*
- *verbal (e.g. racist or homophobic remarks, threats, name-calling)*
- *emotional (e.g. isolating an individual from the activities and social acceptance of their peer group)*

The damage inflicted by bullying (including bullying via the internet) can frequently be underestimated. It can cause considerable distress to children, to the extent that it affects their health and development or, at the extreme, causes them significant harm (including self-harm). All settings in which children are provided with services or are living away from home should have in place rigorously enforced anti-bullying strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 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 them significant harm including self-harm.
- 1.2 There is the potential for bullying wherever groups of children spend time together on a regular basis or live together, such as in schools, youth centre's, Young Offender Institutions, children's homes and sometimes within the family home. Agencies should promote a culture of healthy adult / child and child / child interaction that discourages bullying.
- 1.3 Children are often held back from telling anyone about their experience either by threats or a feeling that nothing can change their situation.

2. IDENTIFICATION

- 2.1 All settings in which children are provided with services or are living away from home should have in place anti-bullying policies. This includes schools as well as all youth clubs and all other children's organisations where the anti bullying policies should be rigorously enforced.
- 2.2 Children should be able to approach any member of staff within the organisation with personal concerns. Clear messages must be given that bullying is not acceptable and children must be reassured that significant adults involved in their lives are dealing with bullying seriously. 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 and sexuality. This should be addressed and challenged accordingly.
- 2.3 Parents, carers and agencies need to be alert to any changes in behaviour such as refusing to attend school or a particular place or activity, or becoming withdrawn and isolated.
- 2.4 Professionals in all agencies should be alert to bullying and competent to support and manage both the victim and the abuser.

3. RESPONDING TO A SERIOUS BULLYING INCIDENT

- 3.1 We need to be clear how to respond when a bullying incident(s) has been identified or reported. The 'Responding when a Bullying Incident Occurs' flowchart at the end of this chapter clearly shows what steps need to be taken to ensure the safety of children and young people involved in all bullying incidents and in particular those where there is a risk of significant harm.
- 3.2 There are key points to remember throughout the process responding to any incident:
 - Record all incidents and actions taken.
 - Be prepared to share information with partners as appropriate.
 - Keep channels of communication open with all individuals involved
 - Share learning or action points
 - Inform your manager
 - Refer any media requests to DMBC Marketing and Communications team

- 3.3 When a bullying incident has been identified the first step is to assess the situation and speak to all parties involved. Identify who has been involved and what exactly has happened. It is essential to ensure the immediate safety of the child or young person that has been bullied. This may include ensuring a safe place at break times or a safe route home from school
- 3.4 Parents / carers must be informed of any incident, even if it has been dealt with. If there is a criminal element to the incident (such as assault or harassment) they may decide to contact West Midlands Police, if they have not already been informed. West Midlands Police will deal positively with all reports of criminal activity and can offer advice on personal safety.
- 3.5 The person in your setting who is responsible for bullying (for example child protection co-ordinator, sports coach, senior staff member) should be informed of any incidents and any action that has been taken. Most incidents of bullying can be responded to within the organisation in accordance with their anti-bullying policy and procedures. In some cases, where particular vulnerabilities are identified, it may be appropriate to consider Common Assessment processes and team around the child and / or family
- 3.6 Practitioners should make a referral to West Midlands Police if appropriate, based on risk and vulnerability.
- 3.7 Consideration will need to be given to whether any of the individuals involved in the incident are at risk of suffering significant harm. The Children Act 1989 defines significant harm as the threshold that justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of children. This harm can be physical, emotional or sexual harm, through abuse or neglect. Additional factors such as the individual's background, vulnerability, family situation etc should be taken into account when making the decision whether to refer to Children's Social Care.

For further guidance refer to [Section 1 'Dudley Safeguarding Children Board Inter-agency Protocol'](#). In addition to section 1 [Section 18 "Abuse by Children and Young People."](#) offers guidance around work with children and young people who abuse others, while [Section 28 "Child Abuse and New Technologies."](#) offers further

guidance in situations where new technologies have been used in incidents of abuse (e.g. cyber bullying)

- 3.8 If it is felt there is a risk of significant harm as outlined above a referral must be made to Children's Social care. This can be done by using the inter-agency referral form, see [Section 2a - Inter-agency referral to children's social care of a child in need](#) and via a phone call made to the relevant area office. They in turn will contact West Midlands Police if appropriate.

Further advice and support with regards to a referral should be sought from your organisations designated child protection lead or co-ordinator

- 3.9 Once a referral has been received Children's Social Care will assess whether the case comes under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (a child in need) or Section 47 (child protection enquiries). In either case, the referring individual should be informed of further actions that have been or need to be taken. For further information see [Section 2: Referral and Assessment - What to do if you are concerned about a child](#)
- 3.10 If there is no risk of significant harm, any further work that can be done with all individuals involved or the setting as a whole should be identified. These steps could include a common assessment, Restorative Justice or a more generalist and holistic approach such as specific lessons or assemblies.

For more information on whether common assessment is appropriate, go to <http://www.dudley.gov.uk/education-and-learning/parental-support/information-sharing-and-assessment-isa/information-for-practitioners>

- 3.11 When an intervention has taken place the following questions need to be asked:
- Is the Victim safe?
 - Has the bullying behaviour been challenged and changed?
 - Has the wider group learnt from the incident?

Responding when a Bullying Incident Occurs



