

BANTER OR BULLYING?

TOP TIPS FOR NAVIGATING THE LINE OF ACCEPTABILITY

What is banter?

"The playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks. Banter can be verbal, physical or happen online."

What is bullying?

"The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online."

The difference between banter and bullying

Banter is a positive part of relationship building. It is a reciprocal interaction where both parties join in. A banter interaction between friends might seem a contradictory social situation (especially for an outsider), since it often involves a negative comment or action which has no intent to cause harm. This can make recognising the difference between banter and bullying more complex.

It is OK to make mistakes: young people are still developing their social skills and may misjudge banter at times, and even adults can occasionally misstep, with words or actions unintentionally causing more harm than intended. This means that sometimes we need to take time to consider how banter might be interpreted by the person who's receiving it, and anyone else who might see or hear it, to make sure that we don't overstep the mark. An important thing to remember is that if something is being labelled 'banter' but it is hurting the person involved, it is no longer banter, it has become hurtful (even if unintended), and could potentially be considered bullying.

Equipping young people to understand banter and bullying

Be clear on definitions

Share and discuss the definition of banter, and of bullying. Refer to them regularly and include them in policies.

Have open conversations about each other's line of acceptability

This means understanding what is and isn't acceptable as banter. Since we are all different, this line will look different to us all and can change depending on our emotions and situations.

Set boundaries

Encourage young people to set boundaries when it comes to banter, and model this as an adult. Stepping over the line of acceptability with a friend could be seen as a violation of trust.

Empower young people to make mistakes

It's inevitable that mistakes will sometimes be made when engaging in banter. That's OK, as long as we learn from them and do not repeat any behaviour we know is upsetting to others.

Share and discuss the 8 ways banter can become bullying

See the following page for a breakdown of these 8 ways.



"It is important to have boundaries with banter. I guess everyone has them, there is a limit to it"

- Young Anti-Bullying Alliance Member

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8 ways banter can become bullying

1. Topic area

According to research, topic areas to avoid with banter include those considered sensitive (e.g. self-harm or death), personal (e.g. about family members), appearance-based or use derogatory language. However, this might depend on who is involved. Having open conversations and setting boundaries is a good way of identifying what these topics might be.

2. Social context

Banter is likely to be received more positively when between members of friendship groups you know and are close to, as they are more likely to know and understand the boundaries. When banter is shared outside of that group, the dynamic may have changed and it may no longer feel acceptable to the person on the receiving end.

3. Private vs public

Banter is a joking interaction between friends, where all of those involved have a shared understanding of the situation. If the banter becomes more public (e.g. online or in front of a bigger audience) and more people see/hear it, they may repeat it in future or join in, potentially changing the nature of the banter to something more hurtful to the person on the receiving end.

4. Repetition

Although a comment meant as banter may start off as funny, when it is repeated many times, it is likely to be perceived more negatively because the element of reciprocity is lost.

5. Intent

Sometimes the term 'banter' is used as a disguise for more negative intentional behaviours, or positively intended banter may have gone too far. Is the intent to cause harm, discomfort, social division/exclusion, or public embarrassment? Behaviour intended to cause harm is not banter, it is hurtful behaviour and potentially bullying.

6. Audience size

As group size increases, the acceptability of banter may decrease. Different social groups (e.g., close friends, family members) may have different values and rules, meaning that banter could be interpreted differently. This links to points 2 and 3.

7. Reactions of the target

If the person on the receiving end of the banter feels uncomfortable or upset, regardless of the initial intent, the banter may be perceived as harmful behaviour such as bullying.

If something being labelled 'banter' is hurting the person on the receiving end, it is no longer banter

8. Interpreting the online world

In some cases, the meaning of our wording online and use of emojis, memes and GIFs, can be ambiguous, or may be used to try to pass bullying behaviour off as banter.

About the Anti-Bullying Alliance

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals, working together to achieve our vision to: stop bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn. ABA is hosted by the National Children's Bureau.

For more information and resources about banter and bullying, including an online CPD training course and a toolkit with resources to use with young people, visit our website: anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/banter

Together, let's bring an end childhood bullying.

anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk



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