

Bullying behaviour can be displayed by children as young as 3 years old¹. Early years provision can provide a good opportunity to understand and influence how young children play together and communicate.

Bullying behaviour has four key aspects:

IT'S HURTFUL

IT'S INTENTIONAL

IT'S REPETITIVE

IT INVOLVES A POWER IMBALANCE

The definition of bullying is very important to understand when assessing the difference between 'relational conflict' – where there is a 'falling out' between individuals – and when it tips the balance to bullying.

For example, if Rashid and Ava are arguing over a toy. Rashid takes the toy and then Ava grabs it back and vice versa. This is likely to be a relational conflict where they share the balance of power. This doesn't mean it shouldn't be challenged, it just isn't bullying. Take the same example, but this time every time Rashid uses the toy, Ava snatches it away. Rashid doesn't snatch it back but Ava insists on taking it from Rashid each time. This happens over a number of days. In this example the relational conflict is now bullying. It is repetitive, there seems to be intent in the action, it's hurtful and the power seems to have shifted because Ava is continuously showing force over Rashid.

Children have a right to play in a safe and supportive environment. If you're a childminder or nursery practitioner, it's important to know how to tackle bullying. Whether a child is being bullied or you just want to prevent it from happening, here's our anti-bullying tips for you.

1 – Vlachou, M., Andreou, E., Botsoglou, K., & Didakalou, E., (2011). Bully/victim problems among preschool children: a review of current research evidence Educational Psychology Review. 23(3). 329.

- Bullying is not a 'rite of passage'. It is well researched that bullying causes long term damage to both the person on the receiving end and those who bully. Challenging bullying behaviour in the early years gives you a great opportunity to 'nip it in the bud'.
- It is not a child's fault if they are bullied. Children should never be told to just ignore it, or to change who they are. It is the children doing the bullying that need to change their behaviour and their attitude.
- Children need to be supposed to speak out if they think someone isn't being nice to them. They need to feel comfortable to come and tell you.
- Make sure you have an Anti-Bullying Policy and it's up to date, freely accessible and regularly promoted – and that it makes clear how you will respond to bullying as a community. Share it with parents as well.
- Do not label a child a 'bully'. This is an unhelpful label and says that bullying is something you are rather than a behaviour choice you can change. Instead, talk about bullying behaviour.
- Praise positive behaviour amongst staff and parents.
- Use story telling: there are many books you can use or you could use dolls to act out scenarios to explore empathy and cover sensitive topics with children, for example about children not being good friends or not playing together nicely.
- Challenge stereotypes such as 'these are boys toys' in a positive and friendly way.
- If you do see instances of bullying or conflict in your setting, think carefully about any ways that you might prevent this happening again. For example, is there areas that are less supervised then others or are there ways to empower children to alert you to issues as they arise? Or do you challenge negative language?
- Be clear about how children should behave respectfully towards each other. For example: do you have ground rules such as not being able to say 'you can't play with me/us'?
- Encourage restorative approaches including supporting children to express their feelings in a safe space and apologies to each other in meaningful ways.
- Undertake empathy building activities which help young children learn how to express their feelings and recognise emotions in others, discussing the way that people are different, talking about kindness and helping others to feel better when they are upset.
- Encourage assertiveness in children who might find it difficult to stand up for themselves. For example, you could role-play scenarios or undertake activities that show children how to express their emotions clearly and calmly.
- Work with parent to ensure they understand your approach to bullying and relational conflict. Are they aware of signs to look out for in case their child might be bullied? Have a clear route for them to report anything they might be worried about to you. Be clear that it is important to not tell their child to fight back as this may make matters worse.
- Help young children make sense of differences: present positive attitudes and messages about differences amongst us all and the benefits such attitudes bring to all people.



You can complete free online CPD training about bullying for professionals at <http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/online-training>