

Responding to bullying: tips for teachers

This Anti-Bullying Week our aim is to equip teachers and youth workers to respond effectively when children tell them they're being bullied. Here are tips for teachers that reflect advice from children and young people – as well as the latest research findings.

Make a
NOISE
about bullying

#ANTIBULLYINGWEEK

- 1. Make sure that students know how to report bullying behaviour and that support is well publicised.** Make sure this includes clear information about the different forms of bullying so that young people feel confident that they will be believed and that whoever they talk to will understand the different types of bullying they might be experiencing (e.g. homophobic, transphobic, racist, faith targeted, disablist).

"You need to know there is someone to talk to and that they will understand about being gay and about disability. It was never brought up in my school. It was so isolating." Consultation with young people, ABA 2015

The [Anti-Bullying Week campaign pack](#) includes a poster that you can put up in your school to signpost children and young people with concerns about bullying to a designated member of staff.

- 2. Make sure you take every report of bullying seriously.** Teachers tell us that it can be difficult to differentiate between bullying behavior and every day fall outs between children and young people. If you have a **clear definition of bullying** – and you create opportunities to educate children, young people, school staff and parents about the difference between bullying and every day conflict in relationships it will help to mitigate against this. Always take every report of bullying seriously – otherwise you risk serious cases falling through the net.

'People don't believe us' (Consultation with young people, ABA 2015)

Find out more about the [Anti-Bullying Alliance definition of bullying](#).

- 3. Keep a record of what has taken place and action taken.** We strongly recommend that all schools have a reporting system in place that records every incident of bullying behaviour and the action taken by staff to resolve the incident. It is also important to record incidents by type of bullying behaviour (e.g. homophobic, disablist, racist, faith targeted, sexist).

The [Anti-Bullying Alliance Safe2Learn programme](#) can provide your school with a unique online reporting system embedded in a whole school approach to bullying with advice and support from the Anti-Bullying Alliance.

- 4. Stick to the facts.** It can be helpful to ask the child or parent/carer reporting the bullying to keep a diary of events. Ask them to state who was involved and when – whether there were any witnesses, and whether they have any evidence – such as screen shots of online behaviour. Be careful not to ask leading questions.

See [Contact a Family's bullying log](#).

- 5. Assess whether the child is at risk of harm** – if so follow the school child protection policy. Bullying by law is a child protection issue and your first priority is to make sure that the child is safe.

Read the [Anti-Bullying Alliance guide to Bullying and the Law](#).

- 6. Ask the child what they want to happen.** It is important that the child or children on the receiving end of the bullying behaviour feel included in any action taken and that they are not surprised by anything you do. Children fear what might happen if they report bullying – particularly that the bullying might become worse. They need you to listen, give reassurance and explain that together you will resolve the situation.

48% of children would be nervous about telling someone about bullying (Immediate Media Co/ABA 2015).

- 7. Make sure that responses to bullying challenge and change the bullying behaviour, not try to change the child being bullied.** Children say it is common for teachers and other adults to tell them ‘well if you only did this you wouldn’t be bullied’. ‘You’re going to be bullied because of X’. This is not a helpful or appropriate response – there is never an excuse for bullying another person.

“They say ‘you bring it on yourself’ because you look or act different. Instead of doing something to stop it, they just said I needed to learn to fit in, because I looked differently.” (Tackling Homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying: The views of disabled young people. ABA 2015).

- 8. Be clear on your response to bullying.** Your school anti-bullying policy should state what bullying is – and how you will respond to it. While you may decide to take punitive measures, with every incident of bullying it is important to consider the role of the wider school community in affirming or challenging bullying behaviour, any prejudices that might be driving the bullying behavior – and whether there is a need for further training and support for staff and pupils about aspects of bullying.

Anti-Bullying Alliance [free online training](#) can help teachers prevent and respond to bullying behaviour.

- 9. Don’t stop until the incident is resolved – and then keep going.** When it comes to complaints about schools – bullying is right up there. We regularly hear of cases where the relationship between the parent and the school has broken down, and the child is out of education – putting them at risk of serious long term harm. Take time to work with all the children involved – and where appropriate with parents and carers until you are sure that the bullying behaviour has stopped.

Don’t stop communicating – make sure that all parties involved know what action you intend to take and when. Check in regularly that the bullying behaviour has stopped as bullying is repetitive by nature.

22% complaints to schools are about bullying – second only to discipline or behavioural issues. Complaint is about the school not dealing with it. (Parents’ and Young People’s Complaints about Schools, Department for Education, 2012)

[Anti-Bullying Alliance online portal for parents and carers](#) is available to provide information and advice to parents concerned about bullying.

- 10. Keep learning, changing and getting better at what you do.** The best schools are not the schools that say ‘we have no bullying here’ but the schools that show by their actions that they care deeply for all of their pupils; that they take all forms of bullying seriously and are not scared to challenge prejudice and change practice. Each school is at a different stage on the journey – some schools may still have some way to go – particularly when it comes to prejudicial behavior that extends beyond pupils to parents and carers and even other staff members. Remember that we are here to help and that the end goal is always to stop bullying so that every child can learn free from fear.

Anti-Bullying Alliance – Responding to bullying: tips for teachers

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Visit [our website](#) for a wealth of resources to help you respond to all forms of bullying.