7-11 GUIDE 9. TEASING, NAME-CALLING AND BULLYING

Features such as red hair, big ears or the wrong style of trainers can make a child the butt of jokes and ridicule. Most children become sensitive about their appearance as they grow older. During this time children also often become more judgmental about the appearance of others.

Children who look noticeable within a group are particularly vulnerable to being on the receiving end of taunting and teasing from other children. Children with a visible difference are more likely to be severely bullied as their counterparts without a visible difference. The effects of such treatment can be long lasting.

1 A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

The school's policy documents on behaviour and bullying will set out agreed procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying that arise in your school and should give a strong message to teachers, children, parents/carers and governors that any form of bullying will not be tolerated. The policy should also include information and guidelines about preventing bullying and making children more aware of how to recognise and deal with it.

Teasing, name-calling, bullying (including cyberbullying) and ostracism are less likely to occur if the peer group does not collude with the unkind or cruel behaviour. The strategies outlined below which are aimed at supporting an individual who is being bullied, should be used in conjunction with work that enables all pupils to understand the part played by acquiescent bystanders when bullying occurs. Unkind behaviour needs to be addressed and challenged and pupils need to know how to do this appropriately and safely.

Unkind or bullying behaviour towards a pupil who has a visible difference is a rights issue. As with other aspects of teaching about equality issues, visible difference can be addressed within many different areas of the curriculum. It is a part of the transmission of values that happens in all areas of learning.

2 WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Unacceptable behaviour will be specified within your school's definition of bullying as set out in your school's policy. However, deliberately hurtful behaviour can be difficult to detect. Teasing, name calling, ostracism, staring and allusive insults can all be directed at a child who looks unusual by other children.

According to the NSPCC (https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/) no single sign will indicate for certain that a child is being bullied, but it is useful to watch out for:

- belongings getting 'lost' or damaged
- physical injuries, such as unexplained bruises
- being afraid to go to school, being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school
- not doing as well at school
- asking for, or stealing, money (to give to whoever's bullying them)
- being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed and withdrawn
- problems with eating or sleeping
- bullying others.

They go on to describe the effects of bullying and state that they can go on into adulthood. At its worst, bullying has driven children and young people to self-harm and even suicide.

Children who are bullied:

- may develop mental health problems like depression and anxiety
- have fewer friendships
- aren't accepted by their peers
- are wary and suspicious of others
- have problems adjusting to school, and don't do as well.

All children who are affected by bullying can suffer harm – whether they are bullied, they bully others or they witness bullying.

How this can happen:

- The jibes are made swiftly, when the teacher's back is turned
- The taunts are non-verbal – a gesture or a glance, shared with other members of the peer group but unnoticed by adults
- The incidents happen on the journey to and from school
- The incidents happen online
- The insult is not direct but allusive – e.g. 'I like to swim in the sea!' directed at a child who has fused fingers and whose hands are perceived as being like flippers.

It is important to actively look for unkind or bullying behaviour not only because it can be covert, as described above, but also because the child being hurt may not report it. There are a number of reasons why a child may not tell school staff (or parents/carers) what is happening:

- Feeling so confused or demeaned that he/she does not want to tell
- Fear of not being listened to and no appropriate action being taken against the bully or bullies
- Fear of retaliation by the perpetrators for having told
- Fear of a worsened situation, with others ganging together
- Avoiding causing parents/carers to worry
- Not expecting much from the school (or from life)
- Not wanting their appearance to be the focus of any further attention.

3 SUPPORTING A PUPIL WHO IS BEING BULLIED

Above all, the school must address the unacceptable behaviour of any pupil who bullies or directs unkind remarks to another child about their disfigured appearance. However, it is also possible to provide the child who is being bullied with the useful strategies outlined in this *Guide*.

The advice to 'ignore it' is not an effective strategy. It will not make it go away. It is likely to reinforce the child's sense that adults cannot help and to increase her feeling of powerlessness. However well-intentioned the advice, a child should never be told to just ignore comments or teasing or invisible harassment such as persistent staring.

Another well-intentioned but unhelpful response is to say 'perhaps you imagined it'. This can leave the child feeling that her experience and perceptions are of no value. This can also reinforce their feelings of powerlessness and their belief that adults do not know what to do.

When staff say these things to a child who reports unkindness or bullying, their usual intention is to encourage them to behave in a way which shows indifference to the unpleasant behaviour or not to take comments to heart. But teaching a child good self-talk is a more effective strategy for increasing

resilience, especially if combined with actively deciding to leave an unpleasant situation and go to a more positive setting.

Another difficulty is that staff may perceive a child as 'having brought it on themself' by their own inappropriate behaviour. Bullying behaviour must be stopped, regardless of its 'cause'. But it also worth bearing in mind that a child may be mishandling interactions with other pupils for various reasons:

- low self-esteem
- poor social skills
- difficulties of self-expression
- behaves aggressively or timidly towards bullies because previous bullying has not been satisfactorily addressed.

There is no substitute for fully and effectively addressing bullying behaviour. However, when responding to an incident it is important that someone tries to understand the child's point of view and to help them to find better ways of managing their interactions with other pupils. This requires time and sensitivity. Self-esteem, social skills and self-expression can be helped over time – see the relevant *Guides*. The following strategies may also be helpful.

4 TEACH GOOD SELF-TALK

How we think can make a difference to what we feel. Help the pupil you are working with to identify what they are thinking when an unpleasant situation is developing around them. Usually (and very understandably) the child will have thoughts such as 'I'm scared', 'I hate them', or 'I wish I wasn't here'.

Self-talk is a way of replacing a negative reaction – for example, replacing 'They make me feel scared' with 'I don't need to listen to this'.

A child can use self-talk to stop showing that they are upset. The self-talk will also help to modify the feeling itself and help them to avoid falling into the victim role. An example of good self-talk would be repeating achievements and reinforcing positive relationships, e.g. 'I have made three friends since I came here and I can go and find them'.

5 TEACH WAYS OF LEAVING THE SITUATION

Good self-talk here would be 'I can spend time with people I like'. The best way to manage a nasty situation is often to leave it. It is important to spot trouble developing as soon as possible and not wait for it to start. It is also important to look confident when walking (never running) away. Encourage your pupil to look on this as a positive response and to walk off in a way that shows confidence, even if they do not altogether feel it. It is also important for the pupil to have somewhere or someone to go to when leaving a situation.

6 CREATE SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES TO THE BULLYING AT SCHOOL

Many schools have an established system for supporting children. These can be very helpful when a child is actively ostracised by others or has not yet acquired the social skills to join in a game.

A playground buddy system means that a child always has other children available for company at break times. A Circle of Friends can provide several weeks of targeted and monitored support and helps a child to feel secure within the peer group.

Organised games with a lunchtime supervisor or other member of staff can give a child the opportunity to join in with other children and to be accepted as one of the group.

7 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are some useful websites that provide advice and support on bullying

- Changing Faces 'What is bullying?' and associated resources available at https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/adviceandsupport/self-help/children-young-people/what-is-bullying
- The NSPCC has useful information on bullying and cyberbullying available at https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/
- Anti-Bullying Alliance has useful information and places to go for support. Their website is at Anti-Bullying Alliance