

Bullying among children and young people

*Information and guidance for parents
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Some facts about bullying among children and young people



Photograph: NPS

What is bullying («mobbing»)?

We generally speak of bullying when one or more persons repeatedly and over a period of time say or do painful and unpleasant things to someone who has problems defending himself or herself.

The pain and unpleasantness may be due to *direct bullying* involving hitting, kicking, insults, offensive and sneering comments or threats. Teasing which is repeated again and again, despite clear indications of distress from the person being teased, is also reckoned as bullying. *Indirect bullying* can be just as painful: the experience of being excluded, not being allowed to join a group of friends, being spoken ill of and being prevented from making friends.

However, we do not usually reckon teasing at a more friendly level as bullying. Neither is it a case of bullying when two people who physically or psychologically are approximately equally strong, fight or quarrel.

Bullying is characterised by the following three conditions:

- negative or malicious behaviour
- which is repeated over a period of time
- in a relationship where there is an imbalance in strength between the parties involved.

The following newspaper cuttings illustrate two forms of bullying, affecting a boy and a girl respectively:

«For two years, Johnny, a quiet 13 year-old, was a human plaything for some of his classmates. The teenagers badgered Johnny for money, forced him to swallow weeds and drink milk mixed with detergent, beat him up in the rest room, tied a string around his neck, leading him around as a «pet». When Johnny's torturers were asked about the bullying, they said they pursued their victim because «it was fun».»

.....

«Having a child who is bullied means seeing your child become an outcast, frozen out and completely isolated. But most of what you read is about bullies and victims who are boys. Bullying is to be found amongst girls, but it is not so obvious from the outside. It is not usually a matter of damaged clothes or damaged arms and legs. Bullying amongst girls bypasses physical pain and goes right into the soul. Bullying amongst girls is less concrete or visible.

How can I as a mother accuse the girls bullying my 14 year-old daughter for having stopped 'phoning, for not saying «hello», for speaking badly of her behind her back, for changing places in the classroom, for always commenting on and making fun of what she says, etc.. Nothing they do (or don't do) is against the rules.

As a mother, I have a great sense of grief and helplessness in the face of what my daughter has to go through. In desperation I have tried to talk to the mothers of two of my daughter's previous friends. It wasn't particularly helpful; some parents just can't accept that their children are criticised by outsiders. They defend their children at any cost, no matter how ridiculous this may be.

I wouldn't wish the grief and helplessness I feel on any parents, but I wish you and your children could actually feel just for a short time what my daughter and our family have had to live with for the last six months or so. Then perhaps you would understand.

Despairing mother»

The extent of bullying

Our studies have shown that about 15 percent of pupils in primary and lower secondary school, or approximately one in seven pupils, are involved in bullying with a degree of regularity – either as victims or as bullies (1. Numbers in brackets refer to the list of references at the back of the book). Approximately nine percent or 43 000 pupils are victims of bullying and just under seven percent or 34 000 pupils bully other pupils; less than two percent (approx. 6 000 pupils) are both victims and bullies. About five percent (or about one in twenty) of all pupils are involved in more serious bullying at least once a week. Bullying is a considerable problem in Norwegian schools – a problem affecting very many pupils.



Photograph: Berne Hjälmrud/Bildhuset

The figures given above come from our major studies which were carried out in the 1980s. There are, unfortunately, indications that bullying today both occurs in more serious forms and is more widespread than was the case ten or fifteen years ago.

Recent studies from England, Holland, Spain, Japan, Canada and the US show that bully/victim problems are also to be found outside of Scandinavia, with similar or higher incidence (2, 3).

Age and sex

Most bullying takes place within a particular class or at the same class level. However, very many pupils at lower class levels are also bullied by older pupils.

There are far more boys than girls who bully, and many girls are mostly bullied by boys. It turns out that there are slightly more boys who are victims of bullying. Although direct bullying is a greater problem among boys, a good deal of bullying takes place all the same among girls. Mobbing between girls, however, has less incidence of physical violence and can be more difficult to discover. Girls tend to use indirect and subtle methods like back-biting, exclusion from a group of friends and manipulation of friendships, like taking away someone's «best friend» (1).

Where does bullying take place?

The claim is sometimes made that most bullying amongst pupils takes place on the way to school, not at school. On the contrary, our research shows that two to three times as many pupils are bullied at school compared to those who are bullied on the way to school (1). Approximately 50-75 percent of bullying takes place during breaks: in the school yard, in the corridors or in more secluded places. It can also take place during lessons unless the teacher is attentive and cracks down on any tendencies towards bullying. The school is, in other words, without doubt the place where most bullying occurs. This puts a particular responsibility on school leaders and teachers.

Of course bullying or tendencies towards bullying are also to be found in many other places than schools, for example in kindergartens, in playgrounds, in sports and youth clubs. But as many parents meet the problem of bullying in their contact with schools, and as the knowledge we have of the problem is mainly based on research involving school children, we will first and foremost look at bullying and measures to counteract bullying in a school perspective.

Myths about bullying

There are a number of commonly held views about bullying and the causes of bullying which have been shown to be untrue when the subject is studied more systematically. Our research has shown (1, 3):

- There is not more bullying in large towns in comparison with smaller communities.
- There is not more bullying in large schools or in large classes.
- Bullying is not a result of competition and the pursuit of good grades.
- The aggressive behaviour of the bully towards fellow pupils cannot in most cases be interpreted as a reaction to discontentment or a feeling of not achieving at school.
- Pupils do not usually, or to a much lesser degree than previously thought, become victims of bullying due to external physical differences, like being fat, having red hair, wearing glasses, speaking an unusual dialect or wearing unusual clothes.

The reasons for bullying must hence be sought elsewhere. Personal qualities or typical patterns of reaction combined with physical weakness or strength, at least with regard to boys, are of considerable significance for the development of these problems in *the individual pupil*. Meanwhile, it is clear that the behaviour, attitudes and routines of teachers and other school personnel have a decisive effect on the extent of bullying in *the individual school or class*.

Who gets bullied, and who bullies?

Who gets bullied?

Research gives a fairly clear picture of those who could potentially become victims of bullying. They tend to have one or usually several of the characteristics listed below. But please note that this kind of list only indicates main trends; in some cases the picture of the victim may be quite different.

Potential victims of bullying can be divided into two main groups (1, 4):

1) *The passive or submissive victim*

- These pupils are usually quiet, careful, sensitive and may start crying easily.
- They are unsure of themselves and have poor self-confidence (negative self-image).
- The boys in this group do not like to fight, and they are often physically weaker than their classmates, especially the bullies.
- They have few or no friends.
- They are afraid of getting hurt.
- They often find it easier to relate to adults (parents, teachers) than to their peers.

The bullying of these children cannot be explained by the fact that they themselves actively provoke other people in their surroundings. Most of them are not aggressive or teasing in their manner. However, it can generally be said that passive victims of bullying signal, by means of their behaviour and attitudes, that they are a bit anxious and unsure of themselves and would not dare retaliate if they were attacked or harassed.

Personal interviews with parents of bullied boys (predominantly of the passive/submissive type) indicate that these boys were characteristically rather careful and sensitive right from an early age (1, 5). Having this kind of personality (possibly in addition to physical weakness), may have made it difficult for them to assert themselves in their group of playmates. Hence there are good reasons for reckoning that these qualities or characteristics have contributed to these boys becoming victims of bullying. At the same time, it is obvious that long-term bullying must to a considerable extent have increased their anxiety, insecurity and negative self-image. The features that can be seen in victims who have suffered from bullying over time, may be both a cause and a result of this bullying.

2) *The provocative victim of bullying*

This type of victim is less common and accounts for about 15 to 20 percent of victims:

- They can be quick tempered and try to retaliate if they are attacked or harassed, but often without much success.
- They are often restless, clumsy, immature, have poor concentration and are generally considered difficult.
- Some of these pupils can be characterised as hyperactive (unsettled, restless with concentration difficulties).
- They are also disliked by many adults, their teacher for example, because of their irritating behaviour.
- They may themselves try to bully weaker pupils.

The bullying problems that occur in a class with a provocative victim of bullying are to some extent different to the problems to be found in a class with a passive victim. A typical feature of the bullying of a provocative victim is that quite a lot of pupils, sometimes the whole class, may be involved in harassing him.

Who bullies?

There are a number of common features of children and young people who could potentially become bullies. Again it must be emphasised that these points must just be seen as main trends. All the same, it is likely that an active bully will have one or more of the following characteristics:

- a more positive attitude to violence than most pupils
- a marked need to dominate and suppress other pupils, to assert themselves by means of force and threats, and to get their own way
- boys in this group are often stronger than their friends are especially their victims
- they are often hot-tempered, impulsive and have low tolerance for obstacles and delays (frustrations)
- they find it difficult to fit in with rules
- they appear to be tough and show little sympathy towards pupils who are bullied
- they are often also aggressive towards adults, both parents and teachers
- are good at talking their way out of difficult situations.

It has often been presumed that bullies are unsure of themselves and anxious underneath their tough surface. However, our research has not produced any support for this view (1). The results point rather in the opposite direction. Bullies are characterised by either unusually low levels of anxiety and insecurity, or they are about average. Their self-image is also about average or relatively positive.

There is great variation in the popularity of bullies. Some are popular, others unpopular, and many are middling. A bully will often have a group of two or three friends who provide him or her with support, and often join in the bullying. However, the popularity of the bully lessens at the higher class levels, and at the end of lower secondary school is below average, although they never sink to the same low level of popularity as the victims of bullying.

Group mechanisms

Bullying is also often a group phenomenon with particular characteristics. This means that there are a number of children and young people who may at times be involved in bullying, but who would not usually take the initiative themselves. These are called passive bullies or henchmen. The group of passive bullies is quite mixed and may also include uncertain or anxious pupils.

Some of the mechanisms which may be active in group bullying are as follows:

- *Social «contagion».* Some pupils may be influenced to take part in bullying if the person leading the bullying is someone they admire. It is mostly children/young people who are themselves rather insecure and who want to assert themselves who are influenced by this «contagion».
- *Weakening of normal inhibitions against aggressive tendencies.* If neither the teachers or the other pupils try to prevent bullying, the bully or bullies are rewarded through their «victory» over their victim. This can contribute to weakening the controls against aggressive tendencies in «neutral» pupils' and may contribute to their participation in bullying.
- *Decreased sense of individual responsibility.* It is well known from social psychology that a person's sense of individual responsibility for a negative action such as bullying may be considerably reduced when several people participate. In this way, pupils who are usually nice, but easily influenced, can at times take part in bullying without particular misgivings.
- *Gradual changes in the perception of the victim of bullying.* As a result of repeated attacks and degrading comments, the victim will gradually be perceived as a fairly worthless person who almost «begs to be beaten up». This also results in lesser feelings of guilt in those who are taking part in the bullying, and may be part of the explanation of why other pupils do not try to stop the harassment of the victim.

3. How do we discover bullying?

How do I find out that my child is being bullied?

If you get a note from your child's school saying that he or she is being bullied by the other pupils, you have every reason to take this seriously. The problem is, however, that you cannot always be sure that the school/teachers will discover that your child is having these sorts of problems or that they realise how serious the situation is. Neither can you expect that your child will necessarily talk about problems of this nature at home (1). There can be various reasons for this. Your child may feel that being bullied is a personal defeat or he or she may have received threats from the bullies. The child may have tried to tell an adult about the bullying at an earlier point, and may not have been given any real help, or may be afraid that involving adults will make the bullying even worse.

Therefore, you must be particularly sensitive to signs and changes in your son or daughter. You should be especially attentive if you notice any of the danger signals described below and in addition recognise your child in the description of «Who gets bullied?»(1).

Some warning signals:

Your child

- comes home with torn, dirty or wet clothes, damaged books or has «lost» things without being able to give a proper explanation of what has happened
- has bruises, injuries, cuts and scratches and cannot give a credible explanation for what caused them
- does not bring classmates home and rarely spends time with classmates after school
- seems afraid or unwilling to go to school in the morning
- chooses an «illogical» route to and from school
- loses interest in school and gets poorer grades
- seems unhappy, downhearted, depressed or has mood swings with sudden outbursts of irritation or anger
- often has little appetite, headaches or tummy ache
- sleeps restlessly with nightmares and possibly cries in his or her sleep
- steals or asks for extra money from members of the family (to soften up the bullies).

It is important that you do not try to explain away your child's problems and hope that they will go away by themselves. Bullying ruins everyday life for many children as well as large sections of their formative years. Moreover, it has become clear that bullying can have negative consequences for later adult life. Our studies have shown that long-term bullying can leave deep psychological scars which can lead to depressive attitudes and a tendency towards negative self-image, even years after the bullying has ended (5).

How do I find out that my child is bullying?

It can be difficult to discover and to acknowledge that one's own child is a bully. Bullying other pupils is obviously not something a child will talk about at home. But if several of the points described under «Who bullies?» fits your child, you should take this seriously and look more closely into the matter.

Some further warning signals:

- Your child seems to like to deride, insult, push around or ridicule other children.
- Your child has a marked need to dominate or manipulate others.
- Your child is aggressive, «cheeky», wilful and generally in opposition.

Bullying can be seen as part of a general pattern of anti-social and rule-breaking behaviour. Our research has shown that boys who are bullies when they are at school are at much higher risk of later becoming involved in crime, misuse of alcohol, etc. (1). For example, former school bullies had at the age of 24 years four times as high a level of relatively serious recidivist criminality (had been convicted for three or more criminal acts) as boys who had not been bullies at school. If your child is bullying others, it is therefore important to try to break this pattern, not just for the sake of the victim, but also with your own child's future in mind.

Photograph: Svein Erik Dahl/Sanifoto



4. A question of basic democratic rights

The victims of bullying are a large, and by many schools neglected, group of pupils. We know that many of these children and young people are bullied over long periods of time, often for many years (6). You do not need much imagination to picture what it is like to go through your school years in constant anxiety, insecurity and low self-esteem. It is not surprising that the victims' poor self-evaluation sometimes becomes so overwhelming that suicide is seen as the only way out.

The problem of bullying touches on some of our most essential values and democratic rights. It is a basic democratic right for a pupil to feel secure at school and to not be troubled by offensive and humiliating treatment. *No pupil should need to be afraid to go to school because of bullying, and no parent should need to be worried that their child may be bullied!*

In Sweden, the following clause has been added to the Swedish Education Act (in force from 1995), stating that «those employed in schools shall make every effort to prevent any attempt on the part of pupils to impose offensive treatment on others» (7). And in the «Swedish national curriculum for the primary and lower secondary school» (8) it is stated that «no one shall be victim to bullying at school». Moreover (p. 24) that the principal is responsible for the development of a programme for his or her school «to counteract all forms of harassment and bullying amongst pupils and school staff.» The question of adding a similar clause to the Norwegian Act has recently been up for discussion in the media and in a Norwegian public statement (9).



Photograph: Tuija Lindström/Bildhuset

5. What can we do as parents?

If you suspect or it is obvious that your child is being bullied by other pupils and the school has not already informed you of the situation, then it is important that you contact the class teacher immediately. As parents, we should have the right to expect that the class teacher takes this seriously and that he or she first of all undertakes *a proper investigation of the facts in the case*. This investigation will usually involve talks with you and your child, with the suspected bully or bullies and other pupils in the class, and if appropriate a number of other parents (for example the class contact parents and the parents of the bullies) who may have important information to contribute.

Once the facts are on the table, a detailed plan must be drawn up of how the school and home together can put an end to the bullying. Although it is important that home and school work closely together in cases of bullying, it must be emphasised that *it is the school that has the main responsibility to initiate and co-ordinate the work involved in counteracting bullying in school*. On the basis of the National Curriculum and the Education Act, it is clear that the school, which is in a way a substitute for parents during school hours, must ensure that the pupils' learning environment is safe and secure.

A good number of parents who have approached schools with their worries and suspicions about their child being bullied, have experienced the door being closed in their faces with comments like «there isn't any bullying at our school» or «you are worrying about nothing». If you are reasonably sure that your child is being bullied, you must not put up with reactions like these from the school. However a good starting point for taking up the situation with the school can be to ask your child (together with you if that seems appropriate) to keep a concise log book describing the basic facts in connection with the incidences of harassment: when they occurred, who took part, and what was said and done. Then you can make a more concrete presentation when you contact the school.

It can also be a good idea to discuss the situation with the class contact parents. If there are other parents in the class who have reported problems with bullying, it will of course be easier to demand a more active involvement on the part of the school. In this case, it will also be natural to arrange a parents' meeting for the class or for several classes at once (1, 10, 11).

Don't give up!

If, all the same, it turns out that not much is being done by the class teacher, you should pursue the matter with the school principal or the educational psychology service (PP-tjenesten). If the school has an advisor or counsellor, he or she may also be an appropriate person to

contact. If, contrary to what would be expected, this does not bring about results, you can contact the director of education in the local authority (skolesjefen i kommunen), and then if necessary go even higher in the system – to the Central Government Education Office (Statens Utdanningskontor), there is an office in each district of Norway. *It is important that you don't give up!* And parents should not feel guilty about «making a fuss» about measures against bullying! By following up the case seriously and with perseverance, you will be helping both your own and other parents' children at school.

A particular problem may arise when bullied pupils do not want their parents to take up the situation with the school. As has already been mentioned, victims of bullying are often anxious and insecure pupils who do not want to be the centre of attention, and who are afraid of getting their tormentors into trouble by telling adults about what they are doing. In many cases, these children have also been threatened with increased bullying in they should «tell tales». Threats of this kind have without doubt resulted in many victims of bullying deciding to suffer in silence out of fear of being thrown «out of the frying pan into the fire». It is not unusual for the parents of victims of bullying to find themselves under strong pressure from their children not to contact the school for the same reason. Out of consideration for what they believe is in the best interests of their child, many parents have also given in to their child's wishes and pleas.

In most cases, this is doing the child a disservice. In a long-term perspective, it is also detrimental to the bullies that the situation is not brought out into the open. If it is properly dealt with, they may be given impulses to develop in a new and better direction.

Give the victim of bullying effective protection

On the background of this, one thing must be made absolutely clear: when an attempt is being made to resolve a bullying situation, the victim of bullying must be guaranteed effective protection. Close follow-up is needed until the danger of new attempts at bullying has passed. The bullied pupil must be able to rely on adults being both willing and capable of providing the help she or he needs. If bullying problems are taken up in class in a rushed and casual manner, without ensuring that the victim is given solid protection against further harassment, this will almost always make the situation worse. In order to provide the bullied pupil with sufficient security, close co-operation and frequent exchange of information is usually needed between the school and the pupil's family.

It is usually an advantage if the class teacher or the parents can get the bullied pupil to agree to the case being taken up. If the bullied child will not agree to the adults' suggestions out of fear for negative consequences, the adults must still take responsibility for sorting out the problem. It has often been shown that bullied children eventually feel a great sense of relief that the situation has finally come out into the

open. But it must again be emphasised that the class teacher especially has a particular duty to safeguard the victim of bullying at school.

Talks with the parents of the pupils involved

If it has been ascertained that bullying is taking place in a class or between classes, it is important that the school contacts the parents of both the victim and the bullies. The purpose of this is to inform the parties involved (if this has not already been done in connection with the original clarification of the situation) and to try to establish constructive co-operation. It is not usually to be recommended that the victim's parents make contact themselves with the bully's parents.

It may be most expedient for the class teacher to arrange a meeting where the pupils involved as well as their parents are present. The aim must be to bring about a thorough discussion of the situation and to arrive at a concrete plan of action. If the bullied child has had his or her clothes or other possessions damaged in connection with an episode of bullying, it would be reasonable to bring up the question of compensation (from the bullies' pocket money, for example). Another aim must also be to try to establish as positive co-operation as possible with the adults in the bullies' families, and to get them to exert their influence over their child in a purposeful way (see below).

It is clear that many parents of pupils who bully others have little idea of what their child has been doing at school. When the situation is clarified for them, a number of parents will want to contribute to bringing about positive changes. On the other hand, one should also be prepared for the fact that some bullies' parents will try to play down the problems and generally take up a defensive stand point. They may not come to meetings they have been invited to either. But even if it is not possible to establish any reasonably positive co-operation with some parents, a serious attempt to do so must still be made. In any case, the bully's parents must be kept informed about the situation.

The above should make it quite clear that we take a very critical view of «anti-bullying methods» which do not involve the parents or which may even try to exclude them (12).

A meeting between the pupils involved and their parents, as mentioned above, should not be a one-off event, but should be followed up with new meetings where the development of the situation can be evaluated. It is of course also important to check that any decisions that have been made are really being put into action. These meetings will make it easier for both the class teacher and the parents to contact each other personally or by telephone to exchange information. Under favourable circumstances, relatively positive relations can develop between the parents of bullies and the parents of the victim. This can be an important step in the direction of putting an end to the bullying.

In many cases, however, it is clear in advance that the relationship between the bullies' and the victims' families is tense and hostile. Then it can be sensible to hold meetings with one family at a time before

eventually arranging a joint meeting. If the class teacher is worried that this joint meeting will be difficult to handle, it may be expedient for the school psychologist and or a counsellor or advisor to take part.

What can the parents of a bully do?

As has already been mentioned, it must be seen as the main responsibility of the school to take the initiative and co-ordinate the work with stopping bullying in the school environment. All the same, it is clear that the parents of the bullies also bear a heavy responsibility. After all it is the bullies who to a large extent are the cause of the problems by the fact that they torment and harass their fellow pupils.

Being informed by the school or another source that your child is bullying other pupils may be a difficult and tough fact to face. But trying to make excuses and playing down your child's behaviour will not help him or her. On the contrary you have every reason to act quickly on this. It is important, not only for the sake of the victim, but also for the benefit of your own child and his or her future. As has already been pointed out, children or young people who are aggressive towards their peers are a high risk group in terms of what is known as antisocial development, including criminality and misuse of alcohol at a later stage of their lives. It is therefore important to try to guide him or her onto a more socially acceptable pathway. A first step in this direction may be that you take a positive approach to co-operation with the school and with the parents of the victim.

Here are some additional pieces of advice for you as parents:

- You must make it quite clear that you take a serious view of bullying and will not accept the continuation of this behaviour. If both the home and the school come with consistently negative reactions to the child's bullying, the chances of the child changing increase.
- Together with the child or young person, you should try to set up some simple rules for relations in the family on an everyday basis. Whenever the child follows the rules, he or she is given a great deal of praise. If the rules are broken, it is important that this has some kind of negative consequence for the child (for example losing his or her pocket money or other benefits), but corporal punishment should never be carried out.
- You should spend more time together with your child and gain thorough insight into who he or she is spending their time with and what they are doing. Besides spending time with your child can lead to positive joint experiences and a better understanding of your child's ways. It is easier for the child or young person to change their aggressive behaviour if he or she feels they are reasonably well liked.
- You may be able to help your child to use his or her energy and need to dominate in a more positive way, for example in a sporting acti-

vity like football or ice hockey, where there is a set system of rules. Could your child have a particular talent which could be developed?

- You should also be aware of the fact that there is a lot of research indicating that entertainment violence on television and video probably reinforces aggressive tendencies in children and young people. There is, therefore, every reason to take a restrictive attitude.

If neither these kinds of measures nor whatever co-operation has been set up with the school have resulted in noticeable changes in the child or young person's behaviour after a period of time, parents should get in touch with a child psychologist or a child psychiatrist to get professional help.

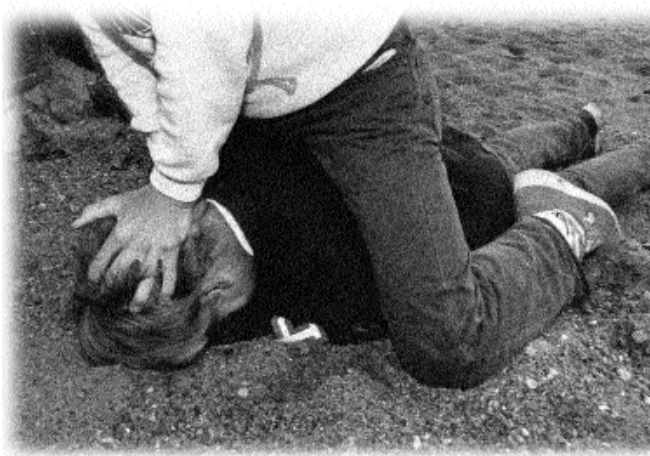
What can the parents of a victim of bullying do?

Many pupils who become victims of bullying (at least those of the passive or submissive type, see p. 11), would probably develop quite normally if they were not victims of bullying from aggressive fellow pupils (5). It is therefore quite obvious that an essential part of the work to counteract bullying in the school must be based on stopping or changing the bullies' and their accomplices' behaviour. The parents of children who are victims of bullying must on no account view bullying as unavoidable part of growing up. Therefore, parents must not give up and accept the situation passively if the class teacher or the school do not view the situation seriously enough to begin with, as we have emphasised earlier.

Meanwhile, it is also clear that many victims of bullying are rather unsure of themselves and anxious by nature, with relatively low self-confidence and few or no friends. So in some cases, it may be sensible for parents to try to help their child or young person to adapt better to school life and to other environments – regardless of the actual bullying situation.

Here are some pieces of advice:

- Try to help your child to strengthen his or her self confidence, for example by stimulating the development of any talents or positive qualities he or she may have.
- Help your child to make contact with other groups of children of the same age (who preferably are not in the same class at school), for example through sporting,



Photograph: Mimsy Moller/Samfoto

music or other leisure time activities. Physical training in particular, if there is any interest or ability in that direction, results in the child «sending» different signals» to those around him or her.

- Encourage your child to make contact with (and perhaps bring home) a quiet friendly pupil from the same class, or from another class. As socially excluded children often lack contact-making skills, it is important that parents or perhaps the school psychologist help the child with concrete advice on how to go about making contact with peers.
- It is important that parents consistently try to support their child's movements towards contact and activity outside of the family. Try to avoid being over-protective, but keep a discrete eye on what is going on all the same, and set up situations which can bring about a positive development.
- Sometimes, the child (especially the provocative victim of bullying) behaves in a way that irritates and provokes those around him or her. In such cases the parents have the task of carefully but firmly and consistently trying to help their child find more suitable ways of reacting and gain greater understanding of interaction in friendship groups.
- If there is an element of hyperactivity in the behaviour of the (provocative) victim of bullying, it may in some cases be necessary to get extra help from a specialist psychologist or child psychiatrist. (For more detailed information on what the parents of bullies and victims can do, see 1.)

Changing class or school?

If despite repeated efforts, it proves to be difficult to put an end to a case of bullying of a child, it may be appropriate to consider changing class or school. This may be a «solution» which has also been suggested by the school. The disadvantage of moving a victim of bullying is that it gives a negative signal: in a way it puts the blame on the victim and suggests that the problem will resolve if he or she just disappears from the class or school. Therefore, *one should as far as possible try to solve the problem «on the spot» without changing classes*. If, all the same, it is necessary to make a move, the aggressive, bullying pupil or pupils should be the first to be thought of.

If there is an unfortunate combination of aggressive pupils in a class, a division of these pupils between different classes and even different schools should be considered after consultation with their parents. Good results can often be achieved by splitting this kind of «gang». Just the fact of presenting an aggressive pupil with the possibility that he or she may be moved if the bullying does not stop, can also increase the pupil's motivation to alter his or her behaviour.

If these measures do not bring about the desired results either, one should, as a last resort, consider letting the victim of bullying move to another class or school. For experience has shown that moves of this kind can, in some cases, have positive effects for the bullied pupil. However, it is important that *the move is thoroughly planned and prepared* for in consultation with the class teachers in question and the parents in order to ensure that the outcome is as successful as possible. Amongst other things, it is important that the pupils in the new class are friendly and have a positive attitude to the newcomer.

6: What more can schools do?

A school based intervention programme against bullying

We have now discussed a number of things the school can be expected to do in connection with a concrete case of bullying in school. However, since this book has mainly been written as a guide to parents, we have first and foremost taken up measures which directly or indirectly affect parents. It is therefore important to at least provide some information on what the school can do in more general terms to prevent and reduce problems with bullying using a specially school-based intervention programme. This intervention programme against bullying has been developed and scientifically evaluated in 42 schools (with 2 500 pupils) in Bergen over a period of two and a half years.

In this book we will report the main results of the scientific evaluation which has shown very clear positive effects. Here we will just give an summary of the core elements in Olweus' intervention programme (see p. 24) and some of the principles they are built on. A detailed description of the programme is to be found in the book «Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do» (2). The measures for parents which are mentioned in this book are included as parts of this intervention programme.

The effects of the intervention programme

- The frequency of bully/victim problems was greatly reduced – by between 50 and 70 percent. The problems did not shift to the way to and from school. The effects of the programme were more marked after two years than after one year.
- There was not only a reduction in bully/victim problems. A clear reduction in other forms of anti-social behaviour was also registered, for example vandalism, theft and truancy. The social climate in the classroom improved, pupils got on better at school and their attitudes to school and school work became more positive. The intervention programme also had a preventative effect: the number of «new victims of bullying» was markedly smaller after the introduction of the programme (1, 13).

The results can only be described as very positive, particularly as many earlier attempts (in other countries) at reducing aggressive and anti-social behaviour among children and young people have had relatively little success. The significance of these results is also emphasised by the fact that there has been a most disturbing increase in violence and other anti-social behaviour in most industrialised countries during the last decades. In the Scandinavian countries, for example, various form of registered criminality, including violent crimes, have increased by 300-500 percent or more since the 1960s.

Overview of Olweus' core intervention programme against bullying

(++ core component + highly desirable component)

General prerequisites

- ++ Awareness and involvement on the part of adults

Measures at the School Level

- ++ Questionnaire survey (answered anonymously by the pupils)
- ++ School conference day
- ++ Improved supervision of break time
- + Establishment of a co-ordination group in the school

Measures at the Classroom Level

- ++ Class rules against bullying - praise and sanctions
- ++ Regular class meetings (teacher and pupils)
- + Class parents meetings

Measures at the Individual level

- ++ Serious talks with bullies and victims
- ++ Talks with the parents of involved pupils
- + Teacher and parent use of imagination

Principles and characteristics

This intervention programme builds on a few key principles which have been deduced from research on the development and modification of problem behaviour, especially aggressive behaviour. It is important to try to create both a school and home environment characterised by warmth, positive interest and involvement from adults on the one hand, and of firm limits against unacceptable behaviour on the other. Thirdly, a non-physical, non-hostile form of negative consequence (sanction) must be applied if a pupil breaks the rules that have been agreed on. Fourthly, it is expected that the adults in the school and at home act as authorities, at least in some respects. It could also be said that this intervention programme is based on an authoritative (NB! *not* authoritarian) model for the relationship between adults and children, where teachers are expected to be authorities with responsibility for the pupils' total situation, not just their learning, but also their social relations.

The programme has the following four subgoals:

- *Increasing the awareness and knowledge of problems related to bullying as well as dispelling a number of myths about the causes of bullying. The use of the questionnaire about bullying in an anonymous survey is an important step towards the acquisition of more concrete information about the occurrence and forms of the problem in the individual school (14).*

• *Getting teachers and parents to become actively involved.* This also means that the adults must take responsibility for controlling what is going on amongst the pupils in the school, at least to a certain extent. One (but only one) aspect of this is organising good supervision of outdoor breaks. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to intervene in situations which arouse suspicion, and to give a clear message to the pupils: We will not accept bullying in our class/school. Teachers are also strongly encouraged to initiate serious discussions with victims of bullying and bullies, and with their parents if a problem with bullying has been identified or is suspected in the class (as has been discussed earlier). Again the basic message should be: We don't allow bullying in our class/school, and we will make sure it's stopped. Of course, these measures must be closely followed up and monitored by the adults. Otherwise the situation of the victim can easily decline from «bad to worse».

• *Developing clear rules against bullying.* The following rules have been shown to be a good starting point:

«We shall not bully other pupils.»

«We shall try to help pupils who are bullied.»

«We shall make a point to include pupils who become easily left out.»

A set of rules like this can also provide the basis for discussions in the class about what bullying is, and what negative consequences (sanctions) should be put into effect when pupils break the rules. The class council (regular class meetings) is a good forum for this kind of discussion, and here it is possible to follow up the way



Photograph: Scanfoto

pupils relate to the set rules and whether the planned measures are working as they should. It is important that the teacher consistently makes use of some form of negative consequence when the rules are broken, but also that he or she gives plenty of praise when the rules are followed.

- *Providing support and effective protection to the victim.* If the above mentioned rules are followed, this will usually provide good protection for pupils who are easily bullied. In addition, the teacher can help by trying to get «neutral» or well adjusted pupils to improve the situation for victims of bullying in different ways. The teacher can use his or her imagination further and help bullied pupils stand up for themselves in the class in a positive way and to make themselves useful and valuable in their classmates' eyes. The parents of bullied children are encouraged to motivate them to make contact with new friends, and to show them in detail how they can get to know others and how they can maintain friendly relationships.

Even though many of the measures in this school based programme do not directly involve the parents of the pupils, it is very important that parents know that this kind of intervention programme exists and that it has documented effects. It is also important to know that this intervention programme does not require large scale investments in the form time or money. This is first and foremost a question of the attitudes, behaviour and routines of the teachers and principal. *In other words, a dramatic reduction in the extent of bullying can be achieved with relatively simple, but carefully selected means.*

Knowing this, individual parents or groups of parents in a school can *put a certain amount of pressure on the school* to ensure the introduction of problem-reducing and preventative measures. In this connection, it may be worth knowing that according to a recent circular (1996) from the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs (15), the principal of every school is directed to develop a special plan of action against bullying for that particular school, in close collaboration with pupils and parents/guardians.

However it must be emphasised that bullying in schools is not a problem that can be solved once and for all. Therefore schools should be in a *permanent state* of readiness to counteract any tendencies towards bullying in the school environment; this can best be achieved by having a good intervention programme as a standard element in the everyday life of the school.

7. How can we prevent bullying?

What kind of family conditions create aggressive children?

A prominent characteristic of pupils who bully others is that they have an aggressive pattern of reaction; they behave aggressively in many different situations. A large number of these aggressive children have been behaving in this way a long time before they started school (16). So the important question is: what kind of family conditions lead to the development of an aggressive pattern of reaction?

Four factors in particular have been shown to be significant for the development of an aggressive pattern of reaction (17, 18). Once again, research has primarily focused on boys.

Firstly, the basic emotional attitude of the parents and especially the primary provider of care towards the boy is important, perhaps particularly for his first three to four years of life. A lack of warmth and involvement clearly increases the risk of the boy becoming aggressive and developing a hostile attitude to his surroundings.

The extent to which the parents have excused and tolerated aggressive behaviour on the part of the child is also very significant. If the primary providers of care have been «tolerant» and have allowed a good deal without setting clear limits for aggressive behaviour towards friends, siblings and adults, this will lead to an increase, not a reduction (as many seem to believe) in the child's aggression.

So far, we can summarise the results by saying that *too little love and care and too much «freedom» during childhood* (particularly during the pre-school years) have a strong contributing effect on the development of an aggressive pattern of reaction.

A third factor which increases a child's level of aggression is parents' use of what is called power oriented methods of up-bringing like physical punishments («beating») and violent emotional outbursts. «Violence breeds violence». It is important to set clear limits and to have set rules for the child's behaviour, but this must not be done with beating, physical punishment and similar methods.

Finally, *the child's temperament* also has a part to play in the development of an aggressive pattern of reaction. A child with an active and hot temper is more likely to develop into an aggressive teenager than a child with a more normal or quieter temperament. The effect of this temperament factor is, however, lesser than the first two conditions: *insufficient love and a lack of clear limits*.

It should be emphasised that these are main tendencies. In some cases there may be other factors, like the absence of the father or the presence of a brutal father, which play a key part, and the causal relationships may turn out to be somewhat different.

Love and limits

These results and other research on the family conditions of children can lead to the following important, general conclusion:

A lot of love and involvement on the side of the person bringing up the child, clear limits for what behaviour is allowed and not allowed as well as the use of non-violent methods of upbringing, creates non-aggressive, harmonious and independent children.

We can presume that this conclusion is equally true for girls as well as boys and that these factors are important both for young children and older children / young people. It is also very important that parents of teenagers try to maintain a level of supervision of their child's activities outside school, what they are doing, who they are with. Most undesirable activities, including bullying and anti-social or criminal activities usually take place when parents do not know what their child is doing or when neither they nor any other adults are present.

The four factors of upbringing we have mentioned as important for the development of an aggressive pattern of reaction, are of course not independent of the relationship between the adults in the family. If there are many areas of conflict with constant disagreement and open quarrelling between the adults in the family, whether or not this leads to divorce, this will create an insecure situation for children and is associated with use of less suitable methods of child-rearing mentioned above. To reduce these possible negative effects, parents should at least avoid drawing the child into the conflict as an ally against the other party. Some research shows that conflicts between parents have less negative consequences when they are taken up in private than when they are played out openly in front of the child.

It is also interesting to find out which circumstances have been shown to have no connection with boys' aggression in the studies mentioned. This is the case with what is known as the family's socio-economic conditions including levels of income, education and living standards. In other words, both aggressive and non-aggressive children are to be found at all levels of society, and the same is true for children who are bullied. In most cases, therefore one cannot give poor social or economic conditions in the family as a reason for a pupil bullying or being bullied. Neither is there any connection between the family's socio-economic conditions and the four factors of up-bringing. So it seems that there are relatively the same number of «good» and «less good» parents at all levels of society.

Parents must try to use the best methods of up-bringing possible and create the right kind of childhood conditions to prevent the development of aggressive patterns of reaction. The results we have reported give a certain indication of *what parents can and what they preferably should not do* to prevent their children developing in an aggressive direction. (See also «What can the parents of a bully do?» page 23)

«Common sense rules for parents»

In addition, we would like to include some general common sense rules which may be useful for providers of care who want to give children a positive childhood. Here is a selection from an original set of ten common sense rules for parents written by Aud Fossen and former Ombudsman for children Målfrid Grude Flekkøy (19, 20):

- Do not give into your child to avoid conflict. Children feel more secure when they have limits around them in their every day life. But they cannot help testing their limits. Their «sporting instinct» is too strong.
- Let your child feel he or she is important. Children have a great need to feel they are important for their parents. Children grow on love and challenges.
- Keep the agreements you make with your children. Children feel helpless if you break agreements without good reason. If your child isn't sure whether he or she can rely on you, whom can he or she rely on then? Remember that what you do today contributes to forming the future.
- Do not frighten your child unnecessarily. Sometimes you may need to scare your child to keep him or her away from dangerous situations, but children should not be frightened into obedience. Spare your child upsetting knowledge about things he or she cannot do anything about.
- Laugh *with* and not *at* your child. Children are proud, and can be deeply hurt when they feel they have been made fun of. Laugh with your child, humour is positive. Don't laugh at your child. The clown's mask can cover a good deal of sadness.
- Remember to praise your child. Encouragement and kind words motivate a child to co-operate. Positive support strengthens the child's self-image and creates a go-ahead spirit. We constantly meet new challenges in life. It is good to be able to believe in oneself when they arise.
- Remember that you are a role model for your child. Your child is bonded with you in the deepest love and admiration. That is why he or she wants to be like you, at least when he or she is young. Whatever you do, your child will do. Whatever you say or believe, your child will repeat.



Conclusion

Today we have a good deal of systematic knowledge about bullying among children and young people. We also have intervention programmes which have documented positive effects in terms of reducing and preventing problems with bullying. In the end, it is the adults' willpower and involvement that determines how much bullying takes place in our schools and other environments for children and young people. A great deal can be achieved with relatively simple means as shown above. This kind of endeavour will make life easier for many thousand children and young people in Norway.

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