

Children on bullying

A report by the Children's Rights Director for England

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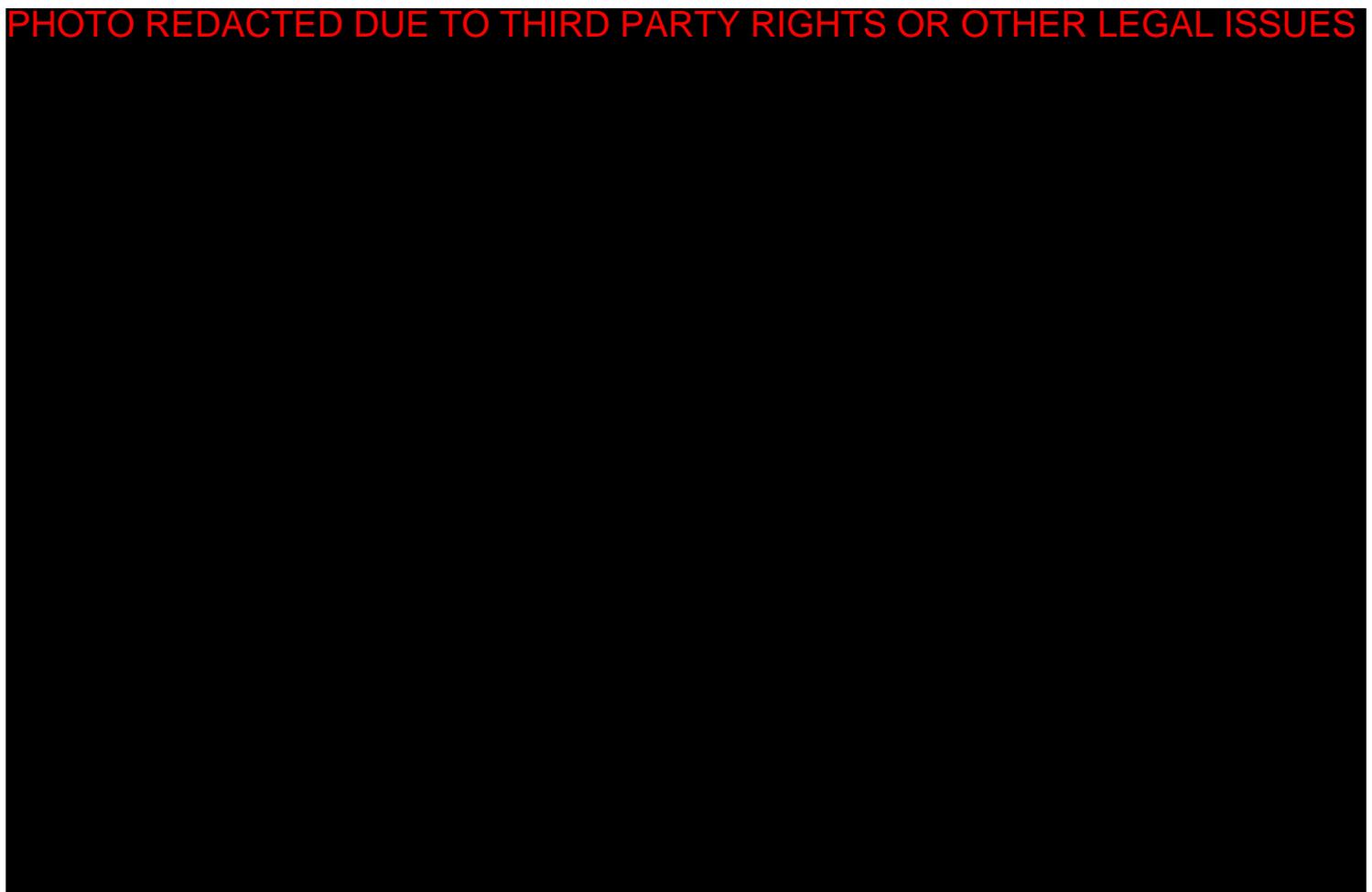


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Contents

About this report	5
The children who gave us their views	6
What is bullying?	7
What happened last time the children were bullied?	9
What triggers bullying?	11
How often do people get bullied?	12
Where does bullying happen?	12
When does bullying happen?	13
New sorts of bullying	13
Cyberbullying	14
Is bullying getting worse?	15
What makes a child likely to be bullied?	15
Who is safest from being bullied?	19
Staying safe from bullying	19
What to do or say while you are being bullied	21
Who does the bullying?	24
What makes someone a bully?	24
What would stop a bully?	25
Do bullies carry on bullying the same people?	26
What do children do when someone else is being bullied?	27
How does it feel to be bullied?	30
Worrying about bullying	30
Telling people about being bullied	31
What help children get to cope with bullying	32
How adults deal with bullying	35
Anti-bullying projects	39
Last words	40

About the Children's Rights Director



Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England

The law sets out my duties as Children's Rights Director for England.¹ One of my main jobs, with my team, is to ask children and young people for their views about how they are looked after when they are living away from home, or being helped by local councils' social care services. I then tell the Government, as well as Ofsted (which does inspections to check on how children and young people are being looked after and supported), what those children and young people think.

'Children's Views' reports of what children and young people have told me are published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my Children's Views reports on our children's rights website www.rights4me.org.

The children and young people I ask for their views are those living away from home in England (in children's homes, boarding schools, residential special schools, residential further education colleges, foster care, adoption placements, or residential family centres), those who are getting help of any sort from the children's social care services of their local council, and care leavers.

As well as asking children for their views and publishing what they tell us, I and my team also give advice to Ofsted and the Government on children's rights and welfare. We have a duty to identify and raise issues we think are important about the rights and welfare of children living away from home or getting children's social care support. We do this both for individual children and for whole groups of children.

Whenever we ask them for their views and concerns, children and young people tell us they are concerned about bullying. A lot has been written about bullying, but not so much from children and young people living away from home, or getting children's social care services. This report gives their views on what bullying is (and isn't), what makes people likely to get bullied and what they can do to protect themselves, how others react when they see bullying going on, what makes people become bullies, what it is like being bullied, what to do about bullying, and on new sorts of bullying that are becoming more common.

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Roger Morgan".

¹ In Section 120 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Children's Rights Director) Regulations 2007.

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About this report

To make sure the children's messages about bullying are clear, we have put the key messages from what children told us in a box at the start of each section of this report.

We asked children and young people for their views about bullying in three different ways. First, we invited children and young people from different council areas and different sorts of services (such as children's homes, residential special schools, boarding schools and foster care) to meet us at Thorpe Park theme park. We invited children from places we had chosen at random, to give as many children as possible an equal chance of being invited. We did not just invite children and young people who were already in their own children's rights or participation groups.

At Thorpe Park, some children and young people joined discussion groups to discuss bullying with us, while others filled in question cards about bullying. In return for giving us their views, everyone had free entry to the theme park. No staff, carers or parents joined in the discussion groups. Each discussion group was led by a member of the Children's Rights Director's team, with another member of the team taking notes. The people filling in question cards could ask anyone they chose to help them fill in their cards if they wanted. Some chose a member of our team; others chose their own parents, carers or staff.

The second way we asked children and young people for their views was by posting them our question cards about bullying, and asking them to fill them in and send them back to us. We chose at random the schools, homes and services that we sent question cards to, so we were not just asking children from places we already knew, or from places we thought had a lot, or not much, of a bullying problem.

The third thing we did was visit children and young people living in boarding schools and residential special schools. We chose schools to visit at random. On each visit, we talked to groups of children and young people who wanted to give us their views and worries about the problem of bullying.

We looked at the answers on the question cards to see how many children and young people had a particular view, and we used our notes from the discussion groups to tell us in much more depth about things to do with bullying that children themselves wanted to raise.

This report gives only the children's views, without adult views being added. We have not left out views that we think the Government, Ofsted or the Children's Rights Director might disagree with. We have not just picked out views they might agree with, either. This report is like a research report, though it comes from consulting people rather than a research project.

The numbers in the report come from the answers on the question cards. We looked at all the answers written on the cards, and added up how many people gave us each answer. Where people gave similar answers but used different words we counted them as the same answer. Where we have put the top answers from children, these are the views that were given on our question cards by 10 or more children or young people. We have included quotes from individual children where we think these sum up what others said or where we think they are important examples of children's views. The quotes are exactly what the children wrote on their question cards or said to us in one of our discussion groups – we have not changed or corrected them.

In many places in the report, the answers most frequently given on the question cards have been put in a blue box. We have summed these up in our words because many children made the same point, but in their own slightly different words.

We are sending this report to Ministers and other key people in Parliament, and to government officials. We are giving the report to the key people in Ofsted, and sending it to each of the UK Children's Commissioners, and to all children's social care authorities in England.

'anything which hurts or makes anyone feel bad'

The children who gave us their views

Altogether, **319 children and young people gave us their views** about bullying for this report. We talked to 158 in our discussion groups, and 161 filled in our question cards.

We held 11 discussion groups at Thorpe Park. A total of 74 children and young people took part in these discussions. We held eight more discussion groups on our visits to schools. We visited five boarding schools and three residential special schools. A total of 84 children took part in discussions on these school visits. Altogether, our different discussion groups had between two and 13 people in them.

We did not insist that every child who filled in a question card had to tell us their personal details, though most did. Of the 159 who told us whether they were male or female, 84 (53%) were girls and 75 (47%) were boys. Out of the 149 who told us their age, the youngest was six and the oldest was a care leaver aged 20. The median age (that is the middle age out of everyone who filled in the cards) was 15.

Most (156) children who filled in the cards told us where they were living. Seventy-six (almost half) were living in a children's home, 38 (almost a quarter) were living in a foster home, and 19 (around one in eight) were living at home with their birth parents and getting help from children's social care services. Of the others, 11 were living in a further education college, 11 were in a boarding school, and one was living with parents who were adopting them.

Because so few of the people who filled in the cards came from boarding schools or special schools, we made extra visits to talk with groups of children and young people in boarding schools and residential special schools, to make sure their views and concerns were counted. It is important to remember that where we give numbers in this report, these views came mostly from children and young people looked after in care or getting help from children's social care services.

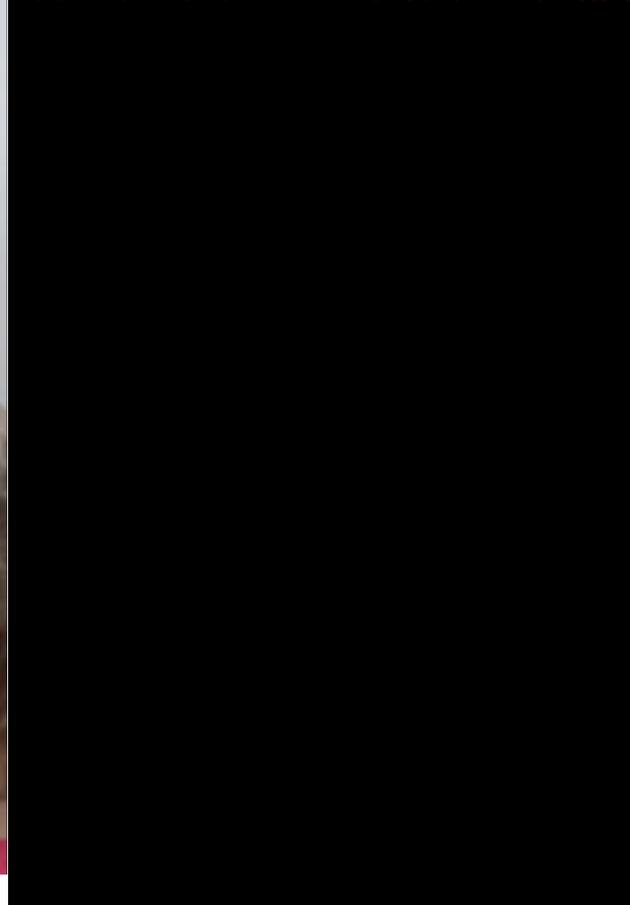
We have said in the report where the issues to do with bullying are different for boys and girls, depend on the person's age, or are different for people living in different sorts of place.

We asked about the ethnic background of children filling in the question cards, and 157 answered this question. Just over three quarters (121 children) told us they were white, and just under one in 10 (16 children) that they were black. Thirteen children told us they were of mixed race, and 5 that they were Asian.

We also asked children to tell us if they had a disability. This question was answered by 153 children, and 23 children told us that they did have a disability. Some went on to tell us what sort of disability they had. Five children said they had special needs, four said they had dyslexia, three said they had autism, and two said they had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). One child had cerebral palsy, another had anxiety issues, one had a bladder problem, and one had general physical disabilities.

Although we did not ask the children in discussion groups to tell us details about themselves, the groups included people with disabilities and there was a good mix of gender and ethnic background.

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What is bullying?

Whether something is bullying depends on how it affects the person, not on what is being done

Something is bullying if it hurts someone who can't defend themselves and doesn't deserve what happens to them

Something unpleasant that is done to a child by a group of others, or that is repeated, is more likely to count as bullying

Bullying is a mixture of physical violence and verbal hurting

Children, like people in any group, will pull themselves up in the group by pushing others down. That is not bullying unless someone is just putting one person down instead of pushing for their own position in the group

Joking, teasing, arguing, play fighting and name calling are not always bullying – but they can be if they affect someone badly

Adults sometimes get it wrong when they decide what is bullying and what is not bullying, because they don't take into account how it affects the child

The law is more likely to punish adults who bully other adults than children who bully other children

People have different ideas about what counts as being bullied, so we asked children what they thought. This question was answered by 150 children. Here are their top answers.

What is bullying?

- Being physically violent to someone (hitting them or beating them up) (59%)
- Calling someone names (45%)
- Making teasing or hurtful comments that put someone down (25%)
- Ganging up to pick on someone (12%)
- Threatening someone (7%)

Nine children wrote on their cards that **discrimination** counted as bullying. Eight wrote that **anything that actually makes someone else feel sad or uncomfortable** counts as bullying. Four wrote that **taking people's property** by force was a type of bullying.

In many of our discussion groups we heard that **being forced to do** something you don't want to do can be bullying. One group told us that one example of this is **peer pressure to take drugs**. Other groups said bullying includes **blackmail** and **sexual abuse**. One discussion group defined bullying as 'purposeful intimidation of a person'. Another defined it as 'deliberately or not deliberately making someone feel bad about themselves', or 'an unnecessary act to hurt someone'.

We heard that **actions that may seem small to some people can be bullying for others**. This could include 'people making fun of you'. Many spoke strongly about **being excluded from the group** as being a definite form of bullying. We heard that being ignored can make someone feel worthless.

Children told us three main things that can make anything count as bullying. One thing is **not so much what is actually done, but the bad effect on the person being bullied**: 'anything that has a serious impact on someone'; 'anything which hurts or makes anyone feel bad'. The second is that **the person being bullied cannot easily defend themselves** against the bully or bullies: 'picking on someone that can't defend themselves'; 'picking on someone younger or with a disability'. The third is that **the person being bullied does not deserve how they are being treated**: 'picking on a person who has done nothing'; 'picks on someone for no reason or for attention'.

It can also make a difference if what is being said or done is by a group rather than by just one person. Children told us that **it is more likely to be bullying if there is a group involved**. We also heard that something that happens just once might not have a big effect or be bullying, but **the same thing being repeated lots of times can be real bullying**.

In one of our discussion groups, young people described how people will struggle to join a group and then struggle for a good position in that group. They said this has to be accepted because it happens in all groups of people. If someone is only pushing to improve their own position, 'it's not bullying because it's not personal'. They said **it is natural for each person in a group to try to pull themselves up by pushing others down**, and to make friends in a group by putting weaker people down. They saw this as the natural survival of the fittest in any group of people, but it can become bullying if someone is trying to do one particular person down instead of just struggling for their own position amongst everyone else. The discussion group said it is not easy to tell where the line is between competition for friends, resources or space and real bullying.

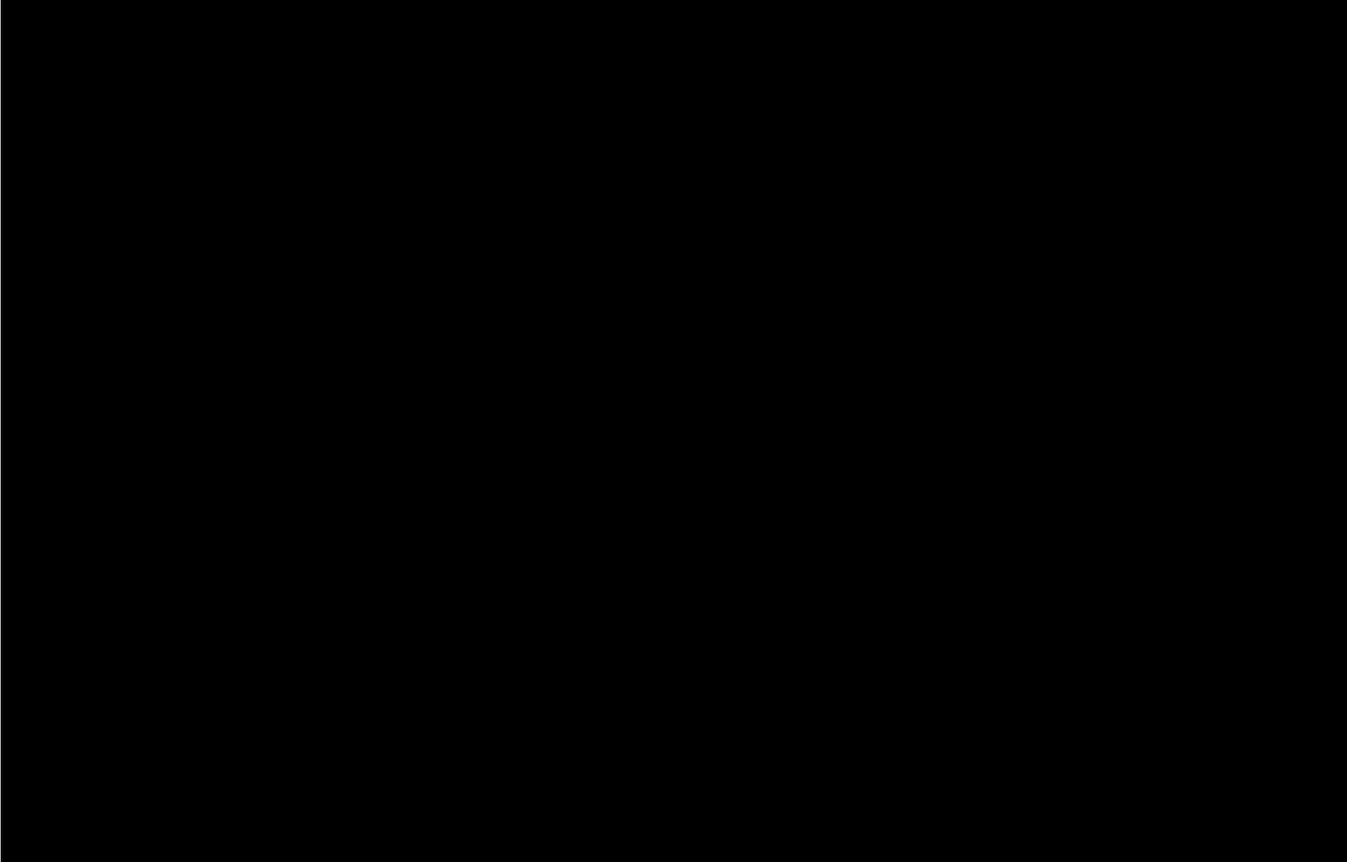
We asked whether there are some things that people often call bullying, but that the children thought didn't count. Out of the 95 people who wrote about this, 21 (over one in five) told us that everything that is often called bullying really does count as bullying for them. 'If someone feels they are bullied, they usually are.'

Over a quarter (27 children) told us they thought that **'joking around' often gets counted wrongly as bullying**, but some said it depended on how people felt about the joking. Sometimes a joke 'goes beyond what was intended'. People just saying 'joke' if they think they have gone too far doesn't change the fact that they might have just bullied someone.

In our discussion groups, children told us that something said in a teasing way by a friend may have no effect at all, but the same thing said by someone else can offend or upset you. Sometimes though, **teasing by a friend** can turn into something bigger and a child can lose friends and become a victim if they react badly to teasing.

Fifteen of the children who answered this question on our cards told us that **simply arguing with someone sometimes wrongly gets counted as bullying**. This included friends arguing or falling out with one another. Eight children wrote that not talking to someone, which can happen when friends fall out with each other, also sometimes gets wrongly called bullying. Nine children wrote that **play-fighting sometimes gets wrongly called bullying**. Many in our discussion groups told us that real fighting is often a type of bullying, though.

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Although 67 children wrote that **name calling** is definitely bullying, 7 children disagreed with this, and wrote that name calling is one of the things that sometimes gets wrongly called bullying. One wrote that ‘calling people names is not bullying because you can just ignore it’, but another wrote that it depends how the person being called names feels about it. In discussion, we heard that teasing is supposed to be funny, but in order to be funny it can have a very cruel edge to it.

We heard in our discussions that adults in charge of children will often say ‘this is bullying’ or ‘this isn’t bullying’. Children told us that this is not right, because the adults who say that do not take into account how different people are sensitive to different things. **Whether something is bullying depends a lot on how it affects the person** not just on what is being said or done.

One discussion group thought that things that happen often in everyday life should not be counted as bullying. An example was pushing in front of someone in a queue. Another was doing something because of peer pressure. We heard that **peer pressure** is why many people do lots of things, and doesn’t count as bullying unless it involves intimidation.

One group reminded us that some sorts of bullying of children are against the law. A second group said that **the law might punish adults who seriously bully other adults, but not children and young people who bully other children and young people**. A third group agreed with the person who said ‘if you do a crime you go to prison or a detention centre but for bullying there’s nothing, but it’s probably higher coz it affects people’s lives’.

What happened last time the children were bullied?

We asked children and young people who had been bullied recently to tell us exactly what had happened to them the last time they got bullied. Sixty-five children answered this question on the cards. Here are the three most usual types of bullying that had happened to those children:

The most common ways of being bullied

- Name calling (42%)
- Being hit (25%)
- Being beaten up (15%)

Children and young people can experience different forms of bullying at different times. It is clear **that the children who answered this question had experienced both verbal bullying (mainly being called names) and physical violence** of one sort or another. Children living in children’s homes were more likely to have been physically bullied than those in foster care. For six children, their last experience of bullying was being threatened, for five it was being ‘put down’ by others, and for five it was being teased.

For three children, their last experience of bullying had been racism, and for two the last time they had been bullied it was cyberbullying. Although we cannot be sure from the figures, it looks as if cyberbullying is often mixed in with other sorts of bullying: 19 children had told us on their question cards that they had at some time been bullied in this way, but only two said that it was the last sort of bullying to have happened to them.

‘if someone feels they are bullied, they usually are’

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What triggers bullying?

Bullying can be triggered by arguing with a bully or something small angering a bully

If you are seen as different from other children, bullies may bully you whenever they feel like it

Bullying can grow from banter, jealousy, or trying to get someone to react to being wound up

Bullying can be a revenge for reporting earlier bullying

On the question cards, 118 children told us what sorts of things usually trigger a bullying incident. Here are their most usual answers:

What usually sets bullying off?

- Someone arguing with a bully (41%)
- Something, however small, that angers a bully (32%)
- Just being different from other children (27%)

In our discussions we heard that you can anger a bully by something as small as accidentally tripping them up in a game or looking at them in the wrong way. We also heard that if you are seen as different in some way from the other children, bullying can happen to you without anything in particular setting it off. Someone who is seen as different risks getting bullied whenever bullies feel like it. We also heard that **a bully can attack you to get their own back if they find out you have told someone about them**: ‘if they think you’re a tell tale they might start doing it to you’.

Discussion groups talked a lot about how bullying can start and grow. One group described how **bullying can start with banter within a group**, then this can go too far and someone feels hurt by it. When they show they are affected, they are seen as someone who ‘can’t take banter’, and laughed at. They are then verbally teased about this, which turns into verbal bullying, which keeps going if they react and get upset by it.

Another group described bullying that begins with **someone being jealous** of someone else’s successes, abilities or possessions, and begins to hurt them as a result. When someone feels down and finds that the only way of pulling themselves up is by putting someone else down, bullying will grow and get worse.

Yet another group described how bullying can start with people trying, as a sort of challenge, to **wind someone up until they react** in an extreme way. If that works, the same people will try again and again to get that person to react even more extremely, and probably before long will get them into trouble for how they react, perhaps in front of staff.

To get more detail, we asked what had triggered the bullying the last time it had happened. We did not suggest any reasons. Seventy-two children answered this question. The most common reasons we were given included the child **being an easy target** (nine children), looking or **being different** from the other children in some way (nine children), the bullies **simply not liking the person** they bullied (seven children), and the bullies **already being angry** for some reason (seven children).

Six children wrote that the bullies had simply **bullied them for fun** the last time they had been bullied, and another six thought the bullies were jealous of them for one reason or another. One person told us that the last time they had been bullied it was because they had been trying to help someone else who was being bullied, and the bullies had turned on them.

Nineteen of the children (just over a quarter) who told us about the last time they were bullied said **they just didn’t know why they had been bullied** that time. One person wrote that they had been bullied the last time for ‘me being alive’.

How often do people get bullied?

On our cards, we asked each child and young person to tell us how often they get bullied these days. A total of 153 children and young people answered this question.

Fifty-nine children (39%) wrote that they never get bullied and 42 (27%) wrote that they hardly ever get bullied.

Thirty-one children (20%) wrote that they sometimes get bullied, and 21 (14%) that they get bullied often, or most of the time (12 said 'often', nine said 'most of the time').² Those aged over 15 were slightly more likely to say they are 'never or hardly ever' bullied than those aged under 15. As one of our discussion groups put it, 'every year it gets less as people get older'.

Where does bullying happen?

Bullying often happens at school, but those living in children's homes or residential schools also get bullied where they live

The street is a risky place for bullying

Quiet places and being on your own can be risky

On our cards we asked children to look at a list of places and tell us where they were most likely to get bullied. This question was answered by 95 children. Here are the top answers:

Where does bullying happen?

- At school (55%)
- At home (24%)
- Around where children live (18%)
- Around where children go to school (12%)
- Travelling from one place to another (11%)

From children living away from their original family, for example in a children's home, we heard that bullying often happens where they live, as well as at school. When we asked exactly where children had last been bullied, 69 answered the question. Thirty-three (nearly half) wrote that the last time had been at school, and 24 (just over a third) that it had been where they live. **Bullying at home rather than at school was more common for those living in children's homes than for those living in foster homes.**

Some boarding school discussion groups told us that **bullying can happen in dormitories** but this often depends on how much staff supervision there is. In all sorts of schools, we heard that bullying can often happen in playgrounds, and in classrooms that are not constantly supervised, like some IT or arts rooms, or any classroom when a teacher is out of the room.

Some told us about being bullied **in the street**, for example 'walking to school'. A discussion group explained that you might be safe at school, but not outside on the street: 'outside school, there are no teachers to help you'. A number of discussion groups said that **streets where there are gangs** are very unsafe for people likely to be bullied. These included many town and city centres.

Those in our discussion groups also saw **quiet places** as places where bullies are likely to pick on people who are away from others. These **included alleyways, corridors, and religious buildings. School toilets**, which are away from staff supervision, are also often the scene of bullying. Being on your own could be a risky time for getting bullied. As one person put it, 'if it happens when no-one sees, you're on your own'.

Seven children wrote that they get **bullied at a club or activity** they go to, and three said that they are bullied where they are **doing paid work**. One group talked of bullying on **games fields, at railway stations or bus stops**, and on **school outings**. Another talked of bullying in **parks and fairgrounds after dark**, and another about being bullied by people hanging around **fast food restaurants and corner shops**. Yet another group said bullying was likely when teenagers are coming out of **pubs** or coming back from buying alcohol, and talked about bullying in children's **playgrounds and play centres**.

A few feared bullying **everywhere**, and could not tell us places that were most risky for them: 'well, all around, it's like I turn the corner and they're waiting for me'.

² These numbers are similar to those that came from around 300 children who took part in our children's conference in 2006, which we published in our report *Looked after in England* (March 2007).

When does bullying happen?

Bullying can happen at most times of the day or night

It is likely to happen where there is no staff supervision, including break times

We also asked what time of day children are most likely to get bullied. Seventy-four children gave us answers to this question. Here are the top answers:

When does bullying happen?

- During break time (19%)
- Any time during the school day (18%)
- Any time during the whole day (16%)
- Night time (15%)
- At lunch time (15%)

Free time at a boarding or residential school, or lunch time, break time, or after lessons at any school, can also be a time when **bullying happens if there is not much supervision by staff and pupils are spread around the school buildings and grounds.**

New sorts of bullying

Bullying by computer or mobile phone is on the increase

Children increasingly fear violence on the streets

Many see discrimination as increasingly involved in bullying

We asked whether there are any new sorts of bullying developing. Here are the top answers from the 81 people who told us about new sorts of bullying:

New sorts of bullying

- Cyberbullying (31%)
- Bullying by mobile phone calls and messages (26%)
- 'Happy slapping' (bullying attacks filmed on mobile phones) (20%)
- Name calling (16%)
- Discrimination (15%)

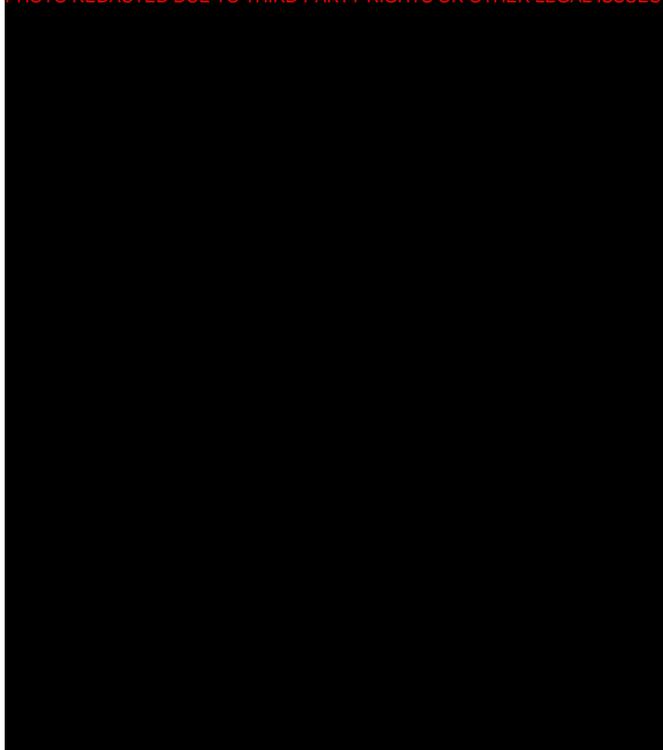
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Some of our discussion groups told us that **very serious bullying incidents are becoming more common**. They thought bullying could end up as something very serious if not dealt with properly. Bullying could develop into **rape, attacks on the street, and mugging to steal money for drugs**. It could also end up with **people being stabbed and shot on the streets**, and gangs attacking the families of their victims. Whether or not we call these things bullying or crimes, we were told that they are increasing, and that young people are getting more worried about them. One group decided that these crimes can only be called bullying if they are against someone the attacker already knows. ‘Gun crime and knives isn’t really bullying coz they don’t know the person. It’s random – more to do with probability. You can’t really bully people you don’t know.’

We heard that **discrimination against particular people or groups of people is a growing form of bullying**.

Examples of this given on our question cards were: ‘gender, size, colour, religion’; ‘people who are horrible about gay people’; ‘racist bullying’. One of our discussion groups described how children from overseas, from a different culture or speaking a different language, can become victims of bullying. Another explained that sometimes what matters is what country someone is from, not what race they are.

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Cyberbullying

Four in 10 have experienced cyberbullying

Circulating unpleasant video clips of someone is a particularly bad form of bullying, because those clips are always out there

On our question cards, 102 children told us whether or not they are being bullied through electronic means, called cyberbullying. Nineteen children told us they are being bullied through their mobile phones, nine through emails, eight through chatrooms, and seven by unpleasant things being posted about them on websites. Just over half (59) of the children who answered this question said they had never experienced being bullied in any of these ways. Around **four out of 10 had some experience of being the victim of cyberbullying**.

We heard that cyberbullying included people sending threatening text messages, making threatening mobile phone calls, posting unpleasant things about people on social websites, or taking embarrassing or unpleasant pictures of people by mobile phone and circulating them electronically. In discussion groups, we heard how badly someone can be affected by having **embarrassing video clips, including those which show them being hit or bullied, put on the Internet for everyone to see**. Once an embarrassing picture or video is sent around about you, you lose control of it, other people can copy it on, and it is always out there. People will keep coming back to it much later on.

In one group, six out of 12 children told us they had been bullied electronically. Some of them said cyberbullies had **infected their computers with viruses**. Some said they had been the victim of bullies getting access to their online games and destroying their accounts, or spoiling their games by stealing virtual items from their personal accounts. This could matter as much as having real possessions stolen. Children said that people could also use the Internet to steal personal identification details and use these to bully someone. A bully can then send other people unpleasant emails which look as if they came from someone else’s email account. ‘You can be burgled by computer.’

One person told us that a bully had made sexual suggestions to them through the Internet. Many websites have ways of reporting misuse, which can lead to people being blocked from using that site. But we heard that **bullies can make malicious reports**, which lead to the victim being blocked from using their favourite social networking sites.

We heard that name calling is seen by very many children and young people as a growing form of bullying. From our discussion groups, it is clear that this is mainly because **it has become easy to spread name calling and rumours about people electronically**, so this is linked to cyberbullying: 'emails and Facebook stuff'. Children told us that you can escape bullying messages by turning your phone or computer off, but cyberbullying messages about you on social networking sites will still be there to damage your social life and friendships.

Is bullying getting worse?

Two thirds of children in care or living away from home say that bullying is getting worse

Bullying is a bigger issue now than it used to be

Of the 157 people who answered our question about whether bullying is getting worse or better for people their age, 100 (nearly two thirds of the children) said that **it is getting worse**. Sixty-four children said bullying is getting a lot worse; 36 that it is getting a bit worse and 35 told us it is staying much the same. Only 22 children wrote that bullying is getting a bit less or a lot less.

One of our discussion groups decided that bullying is becoming a bigger issue now for two reasons. First, because more people are getting involved in bullying, and second, more action is being taken against bullying. Another group thought that bullying may not be getting worse, but **people see bullying as more of an issue these days because it is talked about much more**, is taken more seriously, and is in the media more. A different group thought the number of bullying incidents probably hadn't increased but the method of bullying, for example with knives and weapons, is worse. One discussion group thought that **bullies are getting used to anti-bullying policies and the way staff and victims react**, so that

'bullies are tougher nowadays than they used to be'. Another thought that bullying is getting to be more a part of young people's culture, particularly physical bullying: 'there's no talking just straight to action'.

Whether any one child is more at risk of getting bullied depends on many things. One group told us that **it depends on who you know** (one person said he was safe from bullies because they were all very afraid of his big brother), and **what 'territory' you live in**. In some of our school discussion groups, we heard that **bullying is becoming less of a problem in special schools and in small schools** where many pupils had been bullied before and the school made special efforts to protect them now: 'people get on more because everybody here is quite similar and knows each other'; 'all cope together as everyone has problems'.

What makes a child likely to be bullied?

Anything that makes children different from others puts them at risk of being bullied

Children who are seen as unable to stand up for themselves are at risk of being bullied

Someone without friends around them risks being bullied

Children who are part of a group or gang are safer from those in their own group, but more at risk from those in other groups

Children are better than adults at identifying who is likely to be bullied

Children told us a great deal about what sorts of people are most likely to be bullied. We didn't suggest any answers – all the answers came straight from the children.

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Here is the list, from a total of 124 answers, of the sorts of people children told us are most likely to be bullied:

What sort of person gets bullied?

- Someone who is different to the majority (53%)
- Someone who doesn't stand up for themselves (17%)
- Someone who annoys a bully (17%)
- Someone who shows off (15%)
- Someone who is quiet (14%)
- Someone who is good at school or wants to learn (13%)
- Someone who is alone or without a group to be with (7%)
- Someone who talks a lot (7%)

Children saw the biggest risk for getting bullied as **being different from the other children** wherever you are: 'taller/bigger/different to most people'; 'different hair colour, different skin colour, not fashionable, weight, how you look'; 'don't wear the same clothes'; 'look different, talk different, dress different'; 'from a different country'; 'are gay, a geek, ugly, fat'; 'people that wear glasses and braces'. Being seen as 'posh', or well off or poor, being overweight, having teeth that stick out, having a different accent, being gay, liking a different sort of music, being in care, being adopted, having different opinions to others, or having particular family circumstances, were all things that we heard can make someone a target for bullying. In every group of people, 'there's a kind of prototype of what everyone should be'.

Bullying might begin when someone very first has to start wearing **glasses or a brace**. Seven children wrote that **having a disability or an illness** makes someone likely to be bullied. In our discussion groups we heard how **having a particular difficulty, such as dyslexia, or a lisp, or anorexia**, can make someone a target for bullying. One person told us that a death in their family had led to them being teased and bullied. '**Being ginger**' came up in discussions as making someone at risk of being bullied: 'I just get bullied because I'm ginger'.

In discussions, we heard examples of children being bullied because they stood out as **particularly good, or particularly bad, at school work or sports**:

'competition, both sport and academic. It can be caused by someone doing better or worse'. Children said that being quiet or wanting to learn more than others can put you at risk of being bullied, especially if at school a child is seen to 'be a teacher's pet'.

Discussing how people being seen as different can make them likely to be bullied, one group from a boarding school told us that in their experience '**in boarding school you live with and around people all the time who are different**, from different cultures and backgrounds, so you deal with them all the time and you learn to be tolerant. When I was in other schools it was different coz they haven't got those differences and so don't learn to be tolerant'.

Different **gangs can clash and their members can bully each other**, though you are fairly safe from members of your own gang or group. An example is of gangs or groups that wear different clothes and have different cultures. One discussion group explained that a 'clan' is what they call a group of children or young people who hang out together but don't go out looking for trouble as a gang would do. You can still stand out as different and likely to be the victim of bullying if you are not a member of a clan to hang around with. Another group used the word 'posse' instead of 'clan', but for the same sort of group.

'showing you are scared makes you vulnerable'

Being **seen as someone who doesn't stand up for themselves** makes children an easy target for bullying: 'most people that get bullied are not as strong'. Bullying is likely to happen to people who are 'easily hurt, cry a lot, emotional' or who 'act like a victim'. On the other hand, someone who is seen as likely to be good at defending themselves is more likely to be left alone by bullies. One person told us 'I believe that bullies will go for anyone – unless they've seen that they're a strong fighter'. Another said 'showing you are scared makes you vulnerable – makes someone more likely to pick on you'.

How people react to being bullied is as important as being able to stand up for themselves. One group said that **it is important whether people react by getting angry or upset in a way which bullies think is funny**. The sort of person who has a 'short fuse' and shows anger quickly, but never gets dramatically angry or upset, can be safer from bullies: 'there is a line which is the right amount of reaction'.

Someone can get bullied if **the way they behave towards other children is different** from others. Being someone who doesn't want to associate with others can be a risk. So can being a kind and generous person. On the other hand, showing off and talking too much can also lead to being bullied, as others can see you as 'mouthy'. **It is safest not to stand out from the group**.

A child without friends around them is at risk of being bullied. To be safe from bullying, it is important to have enough friends around you, and that you are either seen as a friend by the bullies, or at least you are not seen as being against the bullies themselves: 'don't cross the bullies'. It is **safer to be part of a steady friendship group than a loner**: 'the amount of friends you have or if you're a loner you can get targeted'. When arriving at a new school, deciding to join or not join different groups can make a huge difference: 'if you're new in school, bullies 'invite' you in – if you don't, they bully you'.

Sometimes, though, **friendships end and lead into bullying**: 'I got called names and some of my friends turned against me because of rumours'; 'my friends started to tease me because I was short and small'. Sometimes friends can be nice to someone's face, but start 'backstabbing' them by making unpleasant comments to other people about them. **Who you are not friends with matters** too. You can be bullied even if you have friends of your own if you 'get on the wrong side of the popular people'.

Not fitting in well with other people can make someone likely to be bullied. We heard that just **fitting in with others is vital** to being safe from bullying. However, being part of a popular group came out as slightly less likely to protect someone in a children's home than in other places.

Being the sort of person who tends to **provoke bullies** can put a child at risk. It is important, for example, not to be so aggressive yourself that you provoke bullies into attacking you in turn: 'don't slag anyone off, don't punch or kick anyone'.

One group told us that **children and young people are able to pick out easily who is likely to be bullied, but adults are not able to do this well**. They thought that 'there is always a reason for someone being bullied', and this is more obvious to other children than to adults in charge.

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Who is safest from being bullied?

Standing up for yourself and being in a popular group of friends are the top protections against being bullied

On our cards, children gave us 130 answers to our question about what sorts of people are not likely to get bullied. We did not make any suggestions. Here are the most frequent answers:

What sort of person won't get bullied?

- Someone who stands up for themselves (37%)
- Someone who is part of a popular group (34%)
- Someone able to ignore the bullies (23%)
- Someone who is like the majority (21%)
- Someone who is confident (17%)
- Someone who is themselves a bully or a bully's friend (12%)
- Someone generally seen as a nice person (12%)
- Someone who shows they are not afraid (12%)
- Someone who has lots of friends (9%)
- Someone who asks for help with bullying (8%)

The last point on the list is about people being **less likely to be bullied if they are getting some help and advice** about avoiding and dealing with it. However, only 11 children told us that telling someone about the bullying is something that makes a child unlikely to be bullied. Everything else is about how you are seen by others in the group of children or young people you are with.

Part of this list links up with the list of the sort of people who are likely to be bullied. From the two lists together, **the two things which children told us are most likely to affect whether someone gets bullied are whether they are seen as different, and whether they are seen as likely to stand up for themselves**. A child is safest from being bullied if they 'are what people consider normal' (and sometimes not as a threat), and if they fit in well with the majority: 'blended in so they don't stand out'. Being seen as confident and able to defend yourself are important: as one person put this, 'act hard, look hard, are hard'. One child said people who are safest from being bullied are 'normal size, act like others, supportive to bullies'.

Staying safe from bullying

Asking for help and advice helps, especially for younger children, and defending yourself helps, especially for older children

Asking for help can make things worse if the person you ask deals with it in the wrong way

Some young people carry weapons to defend themselves against serious bullying

Children's advice is to build up friendships, avoid trouble, try to blend in, and avoid being different as far as you can

If someone is being bullied, or knows they are at risk of being bullied (for example they know they are seen as being different or they don't have friends around them), it is important for them to know if there is anything they can do to protect themselves. One of our questions was about what people can do for themselves. We didn't suggest any answers to this question.

We asked what children can do straight away to make themselves less likely to get bullied. We had 132 answers to this question. Here are the top ones:

How to make yourself less likely to be bullied

- Tell someone you think you might get bullied (29%)
- Be ready to defend yourself if you get bullied (20%)
- Walk away if it happens (16%)
- Keep away from likely bullies (13%)
- Be confident (12%)
- Make lots of friends (11%)

Asking for help and advice in avoiding getting bullied comes out just top of the list, but is closely followed by preparing to defend yourself, which has also come up on other questions. **People aged 15 to 17 were more likely than those aged 12 to 14 to see defending themselves as a good protection from being bullied, and less likely than those aged 12 to 14 to see telling someone as a way of making yourself less likely to be bullied.** One discussion group gave this advice: ‘first time walk away, second time tell someone and if they don’t do anything, fight back’.

Some in our group discussions warned that **telling some people about being bullied can be risky**. Some children actually think it is ‘cool’ to get into trouble with staff for being a strong bully. Staff can sometimes embarrassingly do the wrong thing: ‘if a teacher knows, they come over to comfort you or ask you to stay behind afterwards – that makes it obvious’. Telling parents or asking for their advice can make them take something small very seriously and lead to a big row.

Some of our discussion groups told us that when bullying gets serious, a growing way of young people showing that they can defend themselves is to **carry a weapon, such as a knife or bottle**. Others said bullying between young children is a stage many go through, but bullying by older children and young people is becoming dangerous and there is a growing risk of stabbings at school.

Children told us that being able to **look confident** can be a part of being seen as likely to be able to stand up for yourself. Other things children can do are **avoid trouble and build up a group of friends**. In one group, we heard that ‘there’s security in gangs’. One person summed up the views of many with the advice ‘act confident, not bothered, and stay in a group’. Friends may not always feel strong enough to defend you in front of the bullies: ‘sometimes your mates go along with it but when they are on their own they are OK’.

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Our discussion groups talked about ways of avoiding being different to other people if you could help it. Some said a good way of doing this is to **avoid dressing differently**, instead always ‘dressing to blend in’.

Eight children wrote that **making friends with likely bullies** will help to protect you from them, and six wrote that it is helpful to act like one of the bullies. In one group, people suggested talking to the bullies about why they are bullying you, but always taking a friend with you for support when you tried this: ‘most bullies aren’t completely stupid, if you confront them about it then you might understand why they are doing it’.

With more bullying happening on mobile phones, one group told us that **it is very important that children are careful about who they give their phone number to**. Someone in a different group said that a friend you had fallen out with was often the person who had given your number to possible bullies.

Another group said that **people need to know how social networking websites work** and to be careful about inviting people to be their ‘friend’ on these sites. They said people should know about keeping their profiles safe, to prevent bullies from using the sites to bully them. One person said that everyone should know how to protect themselves on these sites, and ‘if getting bullied on web pages, you’ve invited them on by accepting them as friends, so you’ve brought it on yourself’. One group said that when someone is found bullying people on mobile phones or websites, they usually say it was all meant as a joke, and make it sound as if the victim can’t take a joke.

Six children wrote to us that they thought **there is nothing a potential victim can do to make bullying less likely**: ‘you can’t stop bullies’; ‘I don’t think there’s anything a person can do because if someone chooses you as their target then that’s it’.

What to do or say while you are being bullied

During a bullying incident, almost anything the victim says or does to try to stop the bullying can also make things worse

Best advice is to avoid crying or reacting in a way that bullies think is funny enough to try to get you to do it again

Our next question was about whether there is anything a victim can do or say while they are actually being bullied, which could make it stop. There were 125 answers to this question. Here are the top ones:

What to do or say while being bullied

- Call for help (32%)
- Defend yourself (22%)
- Tell them to leave you alone (16%)
- Say you will tell an adult (14%)
- Stay calm – don’t react by getting upset or angry (14%)
- Nothing (9%)

Those aged 15 to 17 were slightly more likely than those aged 12 to 14 to say that defending yourself is likely to stop what is happening to you. Children might get (or threaten to get) help from a teacher or other adult, or it could be from a friend. On the streets, it could involve the police.

Defending yourself while bullying is actually going on could mean a number of different things: pushing the bullies away, or ‘ask them to stop in a forceful way’, or ‘fight back’. One group said ‘you need to have the willpower to stand up to them’. Another group told us that it makes a big impact if suddenly you stand up for yourself when the bully has got used to you not doing that. They might just stop on ‘the day you stand up for yourself’.

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One group discussed whether **running away** helps. The group was divided between those who thought that if you could run fast enough, you could escape, and others who said that running just shows weakness and makes you more likely to be bullied again.

Some in our discussion groups said that **saying something funny** could sometimes help to stop a bully. One example was ‘don’t touch me. It’s contagious!’. Although ‘if you’re sensitive, a quick tongue can really get to you’ when a bully teases you, having a quick tongue yourself and using it well can sometimes get you out of trouble too. ‘Humour is a defensive weapon.’

A total of 11 children told us on their cards that they thought there was nothing a victim could do or say while they were actually being bullied that would make it stop. Seven children said that **giving money to a bully** would make them stop. ‘They could offer to pay money to get it stopped or shout and scream to someone nearby’. One group agreed with one of their members that bullies will often only stop ‘when they get tired’.

We also asked a question about what a victim might do or say while they were actually being bullied that could make the bullying more likely to carry on. We had 113 answers to this. Here are the most frequent ones:

Reactions that might make a bully carry on

- Provoking the bully (49%)
- Fighting back (17%)
- Not saying anything (16%)
- Saying you will tell someone (12%)
- Crying or showing you are upset (12%)

These answers show that **almost everything that a victim could do to try to make a bully stop can also make some bullies carry on**. Anything that provokes a bully, including defending yourself, can also make a bullying incident carry on longer. It seems that bullies may leave you alone if they see you as someone who is well able to defend yourself, but that once they are actually bullying you, **trying to defend yourself can either stop the bullying, or make it likely to carry on**. Fighting back if you are being bullied verbally can turn the bullying into physical bullying. For boys, defending yourself was just as likely to make things worse as to make the bullying stop, but for girls defending yourself was slightly more likely to work and to make the bullying stop than to make it carry on – though some girls told us it had made things worse for them.

Being seen as someone who cannot defend themselves at all may make a bully carry on. In one discussion group, one person told us bullies carried on bullying them because ‘I would cower’.

It is also clear that ‘taking it’ by **keeping quiet, and saying nothing can make a bully keep going**: ‘ignoring it doesn’t help. Bullies think they can get away with it and just carry on’. Some groups explained that **someone who keeps quiet and then ‘explodes dramatically’ will get bullied again**, because people see the explosion as funny. They will always try to push their victim to ‘boiling point’. One person also explained how a bully will carry on **if you try to defend yourself but are not strong enough**: if you just ‘say rude things, hit with a weaker punch’.

Some children had said that giving a bully money to stop might make them stop, but we also heard how **giving in to bullies can make them bully again**: ‘they can give into what the bullies ask for so then the bullies will keep doing it’.

The one thing that comes out from these answers on what to do while actually being bullied is to **try not to show it if you are upset**, and especially to avoid crying if you can: ‘they only want a reaction’. But even this depends on who is bullying you and why. If people who are usually your friends are doing what they think is ‘friendly bullying’, seeing you are upset may make them realise they have gone too far, and stop.

Who does the bullying?

Most bullying is between children of similar age
Unfair treatment by adults such as teachers or officials can be seen as bullying

We asked those children who had told us they were being bullied to say which sorts of people bully them, from a list we suggested. Their answers showed **it was most usual for children to be bullied by someone around the same age**. Forty-six children (almost half of the 94 children who answered this question) said this. Next came being bullied by a young person a bit older: 37 children said this. The bully was slightly less likely to be someone around the same age for those children who were living in a children's home, and slightly more likely to be someone around the same age for those living in a foster home.

Fifteen children told us about being bullied by someone they didn't know at all. Sometimes the bullying was by other children or young people in the street, because of the school you went to. Some groups told us that coming from a boarding school can make you a target for other children locally.

Less often, the bullies were young people older than their victim; 14 of the answers said that. Eleven children told us about **being bullied by an adult**, and 9 (around one in 10) said they were bullied by someone younger than themselves. One discussion group pointed out that although bullying is often by a bigger person against a smaller person, **sometimes smaller people can pick on larger or older ones**. Adults sometimes get this wrong by assuming that the older or bigger person is automatically likely to be the bully.

Some groups told us that **adults can bully children by teasing them or being unfair**. One group wanted us to give this message to the Government: 'Government describe kids bullying kids, but teachers bully kids. Teachers can pick on one kid and let everyone else get away with things'. One group talked about how they thought **asylum seeking children can feel bullied by immigration staff**. They also thought asylum seeking children can get bullied by other children who are jealous of any help asylum seekers get.

What makes someone a bully?

Being bullied often leads to someone becoming a bully
Some become bullies to be accepted in a group, or for their own protection
Some become bullies because of their own personal problems or experiences

Children wrote 123 answers on their question cards saying what they thought led to someone becoming a bully. We did not give any suggestions. Here are their most frequent answers.

What makes someone become a bully?

- Being bullied (56%)
- Having personal problems (27%)
- Wanting to show off to others (19%)
- Peer pressure from other children (17%)
- Being insecure or feeling bad (16%)
- Wanting to be popular (15%)
- Being an unpleasant sort of person (11%)
- Being part of a gang (9%)

In one of our groups, someone told us how they had themselves been bullied and then started to bully other people in turn. In another group, someone told us 'I was bullied before, so I became a bully in this school to protect myself and impress friends'.

In our discussions, people told us that **many bullies start bullying in order to be accepted as part of a group**, and bullies are often leaders of groups. One group agreed with the person who said 'all the popular people are doing it'.

Some thought that bullies were people who had **personal problems** as a result of their childhood, or ‘if they have a rough time’ or ‘if they have been abused’. A discussion group agreed with the person who said ‘something traumatic might have happened in their lives that takes them into a downward spiral’. Another group thought that ‘people who bully feel low and if they see someone else low, they choose them to make themselves feel better’. Other groups said that bullies ‘do it for their own protection’, so that they do not become victims themselves.

Three of our discussion groups raised the question of whether playing **violent video games** could make someone more likely to become a bully. In two of these groups, some people thought this could happen, but others thought that video games were not likely to make anyone bully anyone else in real life. The third group thought that video games did make people more likely to become bullies, and also thought that **violence on TV** could do the same.

Just over one in 10 children answering this question on our cards saw bullies as **just unpleasant people**, who ‘like seeing others suffer’. Seven children wrote on their question cards that bullies become bullies because they find bullying fun. Nine children wrote on their cards that **jealousy** can make children bully other children. Many in our discussion groups had said this too.

Eight children told us on their cards that **people often become bullies as a way of protecting themselves from becoming victims of bullying**. One of our discussion groups thought that **lack of sleep** could make someone easy to make angry and likely to bully others.

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What would stop a bully?

Having experience of what it is like being bullied works both ways – it can make some people become bullies, and can stop others from carrying on bullying

Giving some bullies responsibilities to stop others bullying may help

We asked what would stop a bully from carrying on being a bully. Children gave us 113 answers on their cards to this question. We did not make any suggestions. Here are the top answers:

What would stop bullies from carrying on bullying?

- Knowing how it feels to get bullied (44%)
- Being punished (19%)
- Their victims standing up to them (16%)
- Having the right friends (16%)
- Feeling good about themselves (15%)
- Having their own needs met (10%)

Many children said **understanding what it is like to be a victim of bullying is likely to stop someone doing it** to other people: ‘experience it themselves and if they could understand how people feel’. However, we also know that over half the children who answered a different question thought that being bullied yourself can lead to becoming a bully. **Whether or not the bully understands what being bullied is like can work both ways** – it might make them think and stop, but being bullied might make someone become a bully of other people, possibly to be accepted by people who might otherwise bully them.

Although **punishment is on the list as an important way of stopping bullies, it is not seen by most children as a main way of stopping them**. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to say that being punished would stop someone being a bully. One discussion group thought that **expelling a bully** from a school or home might save one group of victims, but that they are likely to carry on bullying someone else at their new home or school.

Things we have already heard about, like whether their victims stand up for themselves, how the bullies feel about themselves, and what their group of friends is like, are all almost as important in stopping bullying as punishments are. In two discussion groups, we heard how someone may not be a bully if their friends persuade them not to be.

One discussion group told us that calling to **tell the bully's parents** what they are doing might stop them, though in another group people thought that parents are not likely to believe that their children are bullies: 'my kids wouldn't do that!'. Another group thought that the bully's parents and the victim's parents might end up having a row.

One group thought that bullies **being given positions of responsibility might sometimes work** (like being monitors or prefects in a school). Having been bullies, they would know how to deal with bullying, and they would stop being bullies because they would not want to lose their privileges and responsibility by misusing their position.

Sixty-three children wrote answers to our question about what they thought would have stopped them from being bullied the last time it had happened to them. Thirty-three (**just over half**) **could not think of anything that might have saved them the last time they were bullied**: 'nothing really it would of happened no matter what'. The others made a wide range of different suggestions about actions that might have saved them from the bullies the last time. These included an adult stopping the bullying, the bullies moving on to a different victim, staying in a group with their own friends, and doing more to defend themselves against the bullies. They also listed some things that they thought they shouldn't have done. These included getting too near to the bullies ('if I saw it coming I could have moved away from them'), talking to a bully, looking at a bully, and trying to run away.

One discussion group thought that **bullies rely on children having rights**, without taking on the responsibilities that children also have. They thought that more stress on responsibilities as well as rights might help.³

Members of another discussion group were clear that **bullying is more likely where children and young people are bored** and don't have enough activities to do, and so providing more activities in the area might stop bullying happening so much. They thought vocational courses for people who are bored with school might also help.

³ In our report *Children on rights and responsibilities* (published in 2006 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection), children put respecting other people and not bullying or harassing others on their list of children's top responsibilities.

Do bullies carry on bullying the same people?

When someone is bullied, there is a 60% chance that the bully has bullied them before, and a 40% chance that the bully is someone new

We wanted to find out how likely it is that bullies will carry on bullying the same child or young person, so we asked whether the last time children had been bullied was the only time they had been bullied by those people, whether the same bullies had bullied them a few times, or whether they had bullied them lots of times before. This question was answered by 75 children.

In 29 (nearly 40%) of the most recent experiences of bullying we were told about, that was the first time the bullies had bullied that child or young person. In 25 (a third) of those recent experiences, the same bullies had bullied the same person 'a few times' before. In 21 (over a quarter), the same bullies had bullied the same person 'lots of times' before. So looking just at the latest experience of bullying these children had, **there was a 60% chance that when someone was bullied, the same bully had bullied them before**. It seems that many bullies carry on bullying the same person, but there is also a strong likelihood of being bullied by someone new.

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What do children do when someone else is being bullied?

When someone is being bullied, other children are most likely to stay and watch, mainly for fun or excitement

Being scared can make you either join in bullying someone else, or go away from where bullying is happening

Giving help to stand up to a bully is more likely if the victim is family or a friend, or if the bullying is serious but not dangerous for the helper's own safety

Some will help the victim because they believe bullying is wrong

Some will join in the bullying if they don't like the victim anyway

We asked children to tell us what most children and young people usually do when they see someone being bullied. On a question card we gave children different answers to choose from, and said they could choose more than one answer. We also asked what would make somebody get involved and help if they saw someone being bullied, what would make them stay and watch, what would make them go away and ignore it, and what would make someone actually join in the bullying. We did not suggest reasons for any of these.

The 157 children who answered the question gave us a total of 318 answers to what other children and young people might do when they see someone getting bullied. Here are the top answers:

What do children do when they see someone else being bullied?

- Stay and watch (41%)
- Film it on their mobile phone (29%)
- Go away from it (25%)
- Find an adult to tell (25%)
- Tell the bullies to stop (22%)
- Join in the bullying (22%)
- Encourage the bullies to carry on (21%)
- Physically help the person being bullied (17%)

This list shows that people who see someone else being bullied are likely to react in a very wide range of ways. Some of those reactions might help the victim of the bullying, but some will add to the bullying itself. The most common answer was that **children would be most likely to stay and watch the bullying.**

Boys are slightly more likely to stay and watch someone being bullied than girls are, but girls are slightly more likely to encourage bullies to carry on. Girls are slightly more likely than boys to **tell an adult** about bullying they see happening. Young people aged between 15 and 17 are less likely to tell an adult about someone else being bullied than 12- to 14-year-olds are. Children in children's homes are much more likely to tell an adult when they see someone else being bullied than children in foster care are.

We asked children to give us reasons that people might stay and watch someone else getting bullied. This question was answered by 117 children. Here are the top reasons:

Why do children stay and watch someone getting bullied?

- For fun or excitement (40%)
- Because they are scared to do anything else (26%)
- Because they are a bully too (16%)

We also asked why people might go away from where the bullying is happening. This question was answered by 118 children. Here are the top reasons:

Why do children go away from where bullying is happening?

- They are scared to stay (33%)
- They don't want to get involved (25%)
- They think they might also get bullied if they stay (14%)
- Seeing bullying makes them sad (9%)

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When we asked why someone might help the person getting bullied, 63 people gave us reasons. Here are the top answers:

Why do children help someone who is getting bullied?

- They are friends or family (41%)
- They believe bullying is wrong (30%)
- Someone is getting hit (11%)

Boys were slightly more likely to help someone who was being bullied if they were a friend, while girls were slightly more likely to help because they believed bullying to be wrong. Those in foster care were more likely than most to help someone if they were a friend.

In discussion groups, some children told us that **whether they would help depended on how serious they thought the bullying was**. They would probably not help if the bullying was name calling, but might if it involved someone being beaten up. They would be more likely to help someone being beaten up if they felt safe from being bullied in turn. But **if bullying was in the streets and involved weapons, they would probably keep well away**: ‘if you step in they might kill you’, and ‘they could join forces and gang up on you’. They also thought it is important to know what is happening and who started something like a fight, in case they helped the wrong person: ‘you didn’t know who had started it or not’.

One discussion group made their own assessment of what they would do in different situations. If they were a similar age to both the victim and the bully, they would probably walk away and leave them to sort it out themselves. If they were older than the bully, they would tell the bully to stop. If the bullying was physical and they were the same age or older than the bully, they would probably try to step in to break the bullying up. However, if the bully was bigger than them, they would probably tell a member of staff. One said they might try to get back at the bully somehow: ‘catch them unaware and punch them’.

Another group said they would **think about themselves first when deciding whether to help anyone else**:

‘I’d think about how it would affect me first before doing anything’. But ‘if the person being bullied matters to you, you would intervene’. They thought that others would probably think the same way, so there was no point in helping a stranger or someone who didn’t matter to you, as they would not help you if you were being attacked.

In one discussion group, some young people agreed that they would help a friend or member of their family who was being bullied, but otherwise they enjoy seeing other people being bullied. One said ‘I just laugh at pain’.

When we asked why someone might join in when they see someone else getting bullied, 121 people gave us reasons. Here are the top answers:

Why do children join in when they see someone being bullied?

- They don’t like the person being bullied (20%)
- They fear getting bullied if they don’t join in (19%)
- For fun (14%)
- Because of peer pressure to join in (14%)
- To show off (12%)
- To be part of the group (10%)

From these answers, the things that make the most difference to how children will react to someone else being bullied are: their relationship with the victim; whether they feel excited at watching bullying happen; whether they believe bullying is wrong; and how scared they are of what might happen to them.

Two quotes sum up what many told us: ‘scared of bully doing it to them. It is easier to be a bully than be bullied’; ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’.

How does it feel to be bullied?

Bullying makes people feel upset, angry, and in a few cases, suicidal

Some children see being bullied as a positive thing because it brings friends together to defend each other and it teaches people to stand up for themselves

Seventy-three children wrote about how being bullied had made them feel the last time they had been bullied. Forty (just over half) said it had made them feel **unhappy or upset**: ‘felt depressed and upset’; ‘humiliated, unliked’; ‘constantly miserable’.

Twenty-six (just over a third) said it had made them feel **angry**: ‘I felt angry ... why was it me that was getting bullied’. One person summed up their feelings the last time they were bullied as ‘mad and sad’. Nine children told us it had made them feel **helpless**: ‘very scared and I cried but I didn’t know what to do’. Some told us that being bullied made you trust no-one. Many in our groups said being bullied had made them **depressed**. Two children said that being bullied had once made them feel suicidal, and three of our discussion groups said people being bullied can have such low self-esteem that they might commit suicide. Two people in our groups told us about someone they knew had killed themselves because of bullying.

Many in our discussion groups told us that being bullied as a child can affect your future life as an adult: ‘if you get bullied badly it can affect you for the rest of your life’. Some in our discussions also spoke about how physical bullying can cause lasting injuries, and about how having your possessions taken or destroyed can make you feel very low.

In one group, we were told how hearing someone else being called names for a problem they do not actually have is very hard for someone who really does have that problem. For example, someone being called a ‘rexie’ (anorexic), when they do not really suffer from anorexia.

Two groups thought differently to most others. They thought that **being bullied is not always a bad thing for someone**. Sometimes it can bring friends together to defend each other, which can teach people how to cope better when things are going wrong for them. They thought that everyone needs to learn to be able to cope with some bullying throughout their lives, and coping and defending yourself needs to be learned when you are young: ‘everyone has their bullying.’

Worrying about bullying

Just under one in five worry a lot or most of the time about being bullied

Some people who aren’t being bullied still worry that it might happen

Many worry that they might be bullied when they move to somewhere new

A total of 157 people answered a question on our cards about how much they worry about getting bullied. Sixty-seven children, just over four out of 10, said they never worry about it at all, and 61 that they only worry about it a little. Twenty two (about one in seven) told us they worry about it quite a lot, and 7 wrote that they worry about it most of the time.

In our discussion groups children talked about how some people worry a great deal about bullying: ‘bullying stresses people out, people commit suicide because they are ashamed to be bullied’. One person described how being bullied because of a disability is a big worry, because ‘you can’t fight back’. One group told us how they had been bullied in the past, and worried about it a lot, but now did not worry about it because they were in a small school where bullying didn’t happen much and was always dealt with straight away.

In our discussion groups, we heard how people worry if they are being bullied, but that **some people who aren’t being bullied worry that they might become victims of bullying**. Seeing a friend being bullied can make children worry for their own safety, because **it only takes the bullies to change their minds about you for you to get bullied too**: ‘apart from individuals getting bullied, it can have an effect on the victim’s friends, even if they’re considered OK by the bullies’.

Many children said they are especially **worried about bullying when they move to live somewhere new, or start at a new school**.

We were told that **worrying about being bullied can happen at any age**: ‘you can still worry when you are bigger’. Some in our discussions had a different view: ‘it doesn’t prey on my mind – when you’re older, there’s more adults around you and they’re more mature’. One of our discussion groups also talked about how **even bullies can often worry about being bullied**: ‘you can be the hardest person in the school and bully everyone but there will always be a bully to bully that person’.

Some children had seen or heard of **bullying in places other than schools or homes**, and worried about this. Examples included adults being bullied in the workplace, and people being abducted or attacked in this country and abroad. Some talked of how they were **worried more and more by media news** about children and young people being shot or stabbed in towns and cities.

Telling people about being bullied

The most likely person to tell about being bullied is a friend, and some children tell no-one about it

Those in children's homes, and older children, are more likely than others to tell their social worker if they are being bullied

On our question cards, we asked children who said they were being bullied whether they had tried to get help by telling someone about the bullying.

Out of 102 children who answered this question, 14 said **they had told no-one**. They gave us a number of reasons for not telling anyone: 'I didn't trust them and was frightened'; 'coz no one thinks it's bullying and people think I'm the bully'; 'they won't believe me coz it's a member of staff'; 'too scared of what people might say'.

Some were worried that no-one would listen to them; some were scared about what might happen if they told; some were sure that if they told someone the bullying would end up getting worse; and two children said that although they were being bullied, they were not bothered enough about it to need to tell anyone or ask for help. One group told us that if you tell someone, you soon find out that because there is usually one victim and lots of bullies, you lose.

In one of our discussion groups, people knew that they could call **ChildLine** about bullying, but said they would not try this because they had heard that ChildLine is difficult to get through to on the phone. However, nobody in the group had ever actually tried to call ChildLine to see if this was true. Another group included ChildLine on their list of people or organisations they would tell if they were being bullied. A third group told us some people would find it easier to call a helpline than to talk with somebody they already know.

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Here are the top answers from the 188 answers we were given about who children had told about being bullied.

Who children have told about bullying

- A friend (46% of children)
- School staff (34%)
- Parents (32%)
- Staff in the children's home (26%)
- A social worker (22%)
- No-one (15%)
- A foster carer (14%)

The most likely person to tell about being bullied is a friend. Children in foster homes are slightly less likely to tell a friend if they are being bullied. If someone is being bullied at school, they might sometimes choose to talk this over with a friend from outside the school. Some told us that it can be risky talking to friends, because they might tell other people and what you said could then get back to the bullies. Some told us they found it helpful to talk to an older child or young person because they might be less likely to spread what was said around, and could give advice on whether what is happening is actually bullying, and what can be done about it.

Children in children's homes were much more likely than those in foster care to tell their social worker. Those aged 12 to 14 were more likely than those aged 15 to 17 to tell their social worker, and less likely than those aged 15 to 17 to tell a friend.

What help children get to cope with bullying

Many get no help in coping with bullying

Talking with a friend or adult sometimes helps

Because how bullying affects someone depends on the individual, there is no particular sort of bullying that is either easy, or hard, to cope with

As well as finding out who children and young people go to for help about bullying, we wanted to find out what sort of help they actually got in coping with bullying. Of the 44 children who answered this question on our cards, 14 (almost a third) told us that they are getting no help in coping with bullying. Five children told us that the advice adults had given them had not helped because they had just been told to ignore bullies: 'I was told to ignore it'.

Ten of the 44 children told us that they are being helped to cope with bullying by **talking it over with an adult**: 'my carers are supportive'; 'my mum and dad help me'. Seven children said they are getting practical help to stop the bullying, and five said they found it helpful to **talk it over with their friends**, getting, as one person put it, 'confidence boosts from friends'. Girls were more likely than boys to find it easier to cope with bullying if they could talk it over with someone, though many boys found it helped to talk to someone about it.

When we asked for suggestions about action people can take to make it easier to cope with bullying, 64 out of the 118 children who made suggestions advised talking it over with someone: 'talk to someone I trust'; 'talk to someone who's been bullied before'. Sometimes, we heard, it is better to tell a friend about being bullied than to tell an adult in charge of you. One person said that at school, it was better 'telling friends – NOT TEACHERS as this can lead to worse bullying for snitching'.

Not all children wanted other people to help them to cope with being bullied. For example, one said they dealt with being bullied by 'sticking up for myself', and another told us 'I can cope without help and support'.

In some of our discussion groups we heard that the sort of help some people might get from a friend, or a group of friends, would be help to get back at the bullies later on by fighting them. One group said that 'the best person to tell is someone who would give you advice on how to handle it'.

Groups which discussed attacks involving knives or guns talked about **calling the police** as a way of getting help when things got this serious. This did risk bullies retaliating against someone they found out had called the police, though. Some thought that the police did not take enough action when bullying crimes were reported to them: 'I told the police but they wouldn't do anything coz it wasn't bad enough'.

The young people in one group said they **might call their youth offending team worker** if they were being bullied, and one group said they **might tell an inspector** visiting where they live.

On one of our cards, we asked what sorts of bullying were **easiest, and hardest, to cope with**. Of the 60 children who told us what was easiest to cope with, 30 said name calling was easiest. Of the 62 children who told us what sort of bullying they found hardest to cope with, 37 said that physical bullying is the hardest: 'when they beat you up'. In discussion groups we heard that this is particularly hard to cope with when those bullying you are physically bigger and stronger than you are. It can be easier to cope with when there is only one person bullying you, rather than a group.

Some in our groups said that **sexual harassment** was particularly hard to cope with, and others said that **racist abuse** is especially hard to cope with. Those aged 12 to 14 were much more likely than those aged 15 to 17 to find physical bullying the hardest to cope with. Some in

our discussion groups said that although name calling can be ignored most of the time, it is harder to ignore if it is constant. For any sort of bullying, 'it all depends how often and how bad it is'.

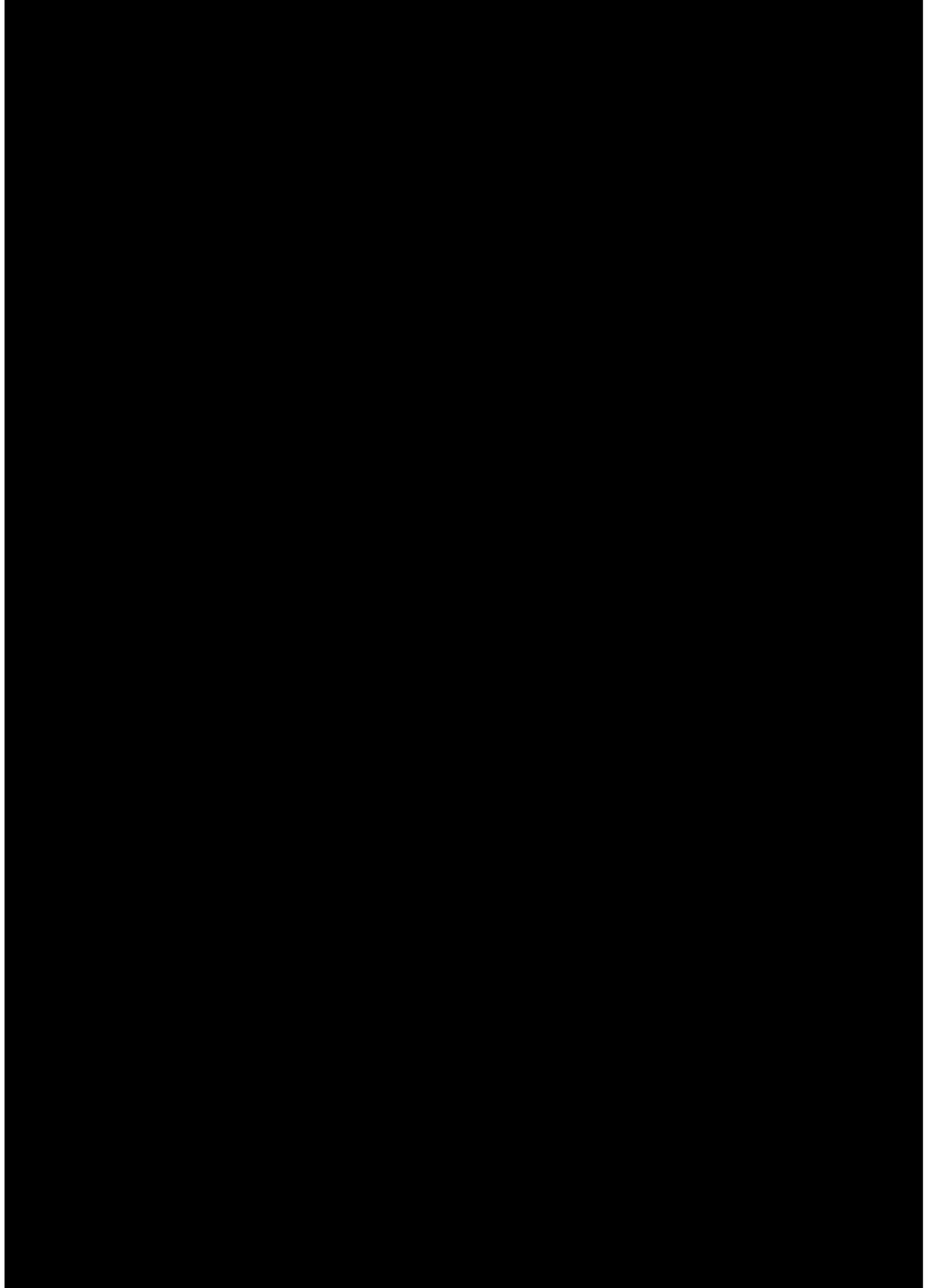
Fourteen children said that **emotional bullying** was the hardest for them to cope with: 'verbal abuse – emotional scars reopen'; 'playing games with you'. One of our discussion groups compared physical and verbal bullying, and decided that verbal bullying can be the worst to cope with if it goes on longest, which it is likely to do, but physical bullying can be the hardest to cope with if you keep seeing your attackers again and worry about the next attack. They thought that any bullying can become easier to cope with if you manage to get revenge on the bullies. Verbal bullying and name calling can be difficult to cope with in a boarding school if you 'get up and go to bed being called a name'.

Thirteen children wrote that there is no easier sort of bullying: 'none of it, nothing is easy in my life when it comes to school'. And 12 children wrote that **all kinds of bullying are hard to cope with**: 'they're all hard to cope with depending on the person'; 'I don't think you could ever cope with being bullied'.

One group decided that bullying would only become easy to cope with 'if the world was a happy place with lots of fluffy clouds and rainbows'.

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How adults deal with bullying

Children can't predict what many adults will do when they find out about bullying

What adults do about bullying usually helps but can make things worse

Adult help works best for younger children

Adults often make wrong assumptions about what is happening when they see or hear about bullying

Adults should help children with things that help protect them against bullying, like not standing out as different from other children, and making friends

More police on the streets might reduce bullying on the streets

Staff working with children should be trained to deal with bullying

On one of our question cards, we asked children to tell us what adults usually do when someone is being bullied. We had 123 answers to this question; we did not make any suggestions. Here are the top answers:

What adults usually do when someone is being bullied

- Take practical action to try to stop the bullying (38%)
- Talk to both the bully and the victim (18%)
- Contact the place where the bullying is happening (11%)
- Contact the bully's carers (11%)
- Nothing (11%)
- Tell off or punish the bully (10%)

Two other important points were made in the answers to this question. The first was that **different adults do very different things when they hear about bullying, so that children are not always sure what is going to happen**: 'depends on what adult it is'; 'different adults do different things'; 'some help and some don't do anything'. The second was that **what the adults do can often make things worse for the victim**: 'they make a big fuss which makes it worse'; 'talk to the parents, confront the bullies. And sometimes make it worse'.

We also asked children whether adults usually make things better or worse. We were given answers by 125 children.

Well over half (71 children) said that adults do help to stop bullying, a quarter (30 children) said that what adults do makes no difference, and nearly one in five (24 children) said that what adults do makes bullying worse. **Adults were more helpful to younger children.**

The main reason that adults did not make any difference was that **bullies don't take enough notice of what adults say**: 'the bullies still carry on when adults can't see'. Some in discussions told us that anti-bullying policies never work properly, because bullies tend to break the rules they set out.

We heard that the main reason for adults making bullying worse was that the **bullies are worse if they know their victim reported them, or got them into trouble**. As one person put it, bullies are good at bullying in ways that adults don't see, 'coz bullies do it sly so that nobody knows so the person gets bullied worse'. As well as this, **if a victim needs adult help, this can show the bully that they cannot defend themselves**. This in turn makes them an easier target for bullying 'because the bully knows that the victim can't stand up for themselves'.

Some in our discussions thought that the **police are not tough enough** on serious bullying on the streets. They were concerned that if police see you defending yourself against a bully, you may be charged with assault yourself, and that when police do take action this is not likely to be more than giving a warning or a caution. Many thought that more police (rather than community support officers) on foot patrol on the streets would help reduce bullying and attacks on the street.

Children wrote 84 examples of things adults did that in their own experience had worked, and made bullying less of a problem. The most frequent example was of the adult **punishing the bully**; this came from 21 children. The next most frequent example, from 17 children, was where **the adult had told the person in charge of where the bullying was happening** (such as a carer telling a teacher about bullying at school, or a teacher telling a carer about bullying at a home).

We were given 58 examples of what adults did that had failed in the children's own experience, and made bullying worse. Thirty children told us that **the adult talking to the bully had made things worse**. Fourteen said that **adults who ignored bullying helped to make it worse**.

Following this, we asked children to write their advice on what adults should always do about bullying, and what they should never do. We had 111 proposals about what adults should always do, and 97 about what they should never do. Here are the top answers.

What adults should always do about bullying

- Tell the right person to deal with it (26%)
- Support the victim (26%)
- Take action to stop it (19%)
- Take action against the bully (14%)

What adults should never do about bullying

- Ignore it (24%)
- Deal with it in the wrong way (19%)
- Encourage it (15%)
- Confront the bully (12%)

We heard that **adults sometimes make assumptions about what is going on** without getting the whole story. For example, sometimes two people fighting can be fighting as equals. Even a bully in a fight is not necessarily bullying at the time. And sometimes what an adult sees may be the victim fighting back, not a bully bullying. It is also important for staff to deal with bullying when it is happening, and not wait until later.

In our discussion groups, we heard more ideas about what adults might do to reduce bullying. One idea was that adults should spot when and where bullying is likely to happen, and pre-warn people that they are on the look out for it and about the consequences if anyone is suspected of bullying someone else. In one of our discussions, children argued that because people who are different to others tend to get bullied, staff should do more to educate young children to accept others as they are. Another group said that parents should take much more of a role in teaching young children that bullying is wrong, and in dealing with their children if they start bullying others.

Others suggested that staff should **help children to make friends**, and for newcomers 'there needs to be places you can go to get to know people'. Staff could also help children **by giving advice on how not to stand out from others**. They could also work to **build up the self-confidence of someone who is being bullied**. One group thought that **each school should have an anti-bullying visitor or a school counsellor** for children to talk to about bullying problems. Another thought that the same could be done by having **an email link to an anti-bullying adviser**. Another group thought that **staff should be far more ready to believe someone who says they are being bullied**.

Other groups recommended that **all staff working with children need training to deal properly with bullying**: 'should go on courses so they know what to do and what not to do coz some haven't got a clue'. Training should include working out what is actually going on in each bullying situation, not getting anything out of proportion, not treating different bullying situations as the same and not taking action against the wrong person. It should also cover how to encourage children to believe that all are equal, how to create an anti-bullying atmosphere, and how to make bullies feel bad about being bullies.

Some children told us that **at school it helps if older and trusted pupils are given the job of looking out for younger ones**. Many said they would find it easier to speak to a trusted older pupil than to staff. Another suggestion was that **there should be mentors** in schools who would take up the issue of bullying on behalf of the victim. Others told us that adults other than teachers and care staff are important in stopping bullying – people such as school dinner supervisors.

Another idea was that **staff should give someone being bullied the chance to talk the problem through**, either with a teacher or with someone older who they had chosen to speak to. In one group, we heard how a child being bullied had accused someone different from the actual bully when staff asked them what had happened, because they were afraid of what the real bully would do to them if they told the full truth. It was only when they felt really safe talking things through that they said who the actual bully was.

Because bullying can become serious enough to involve weapons, one group thought **it is important to have much stronger controls on having weapons** on the streets and in school.

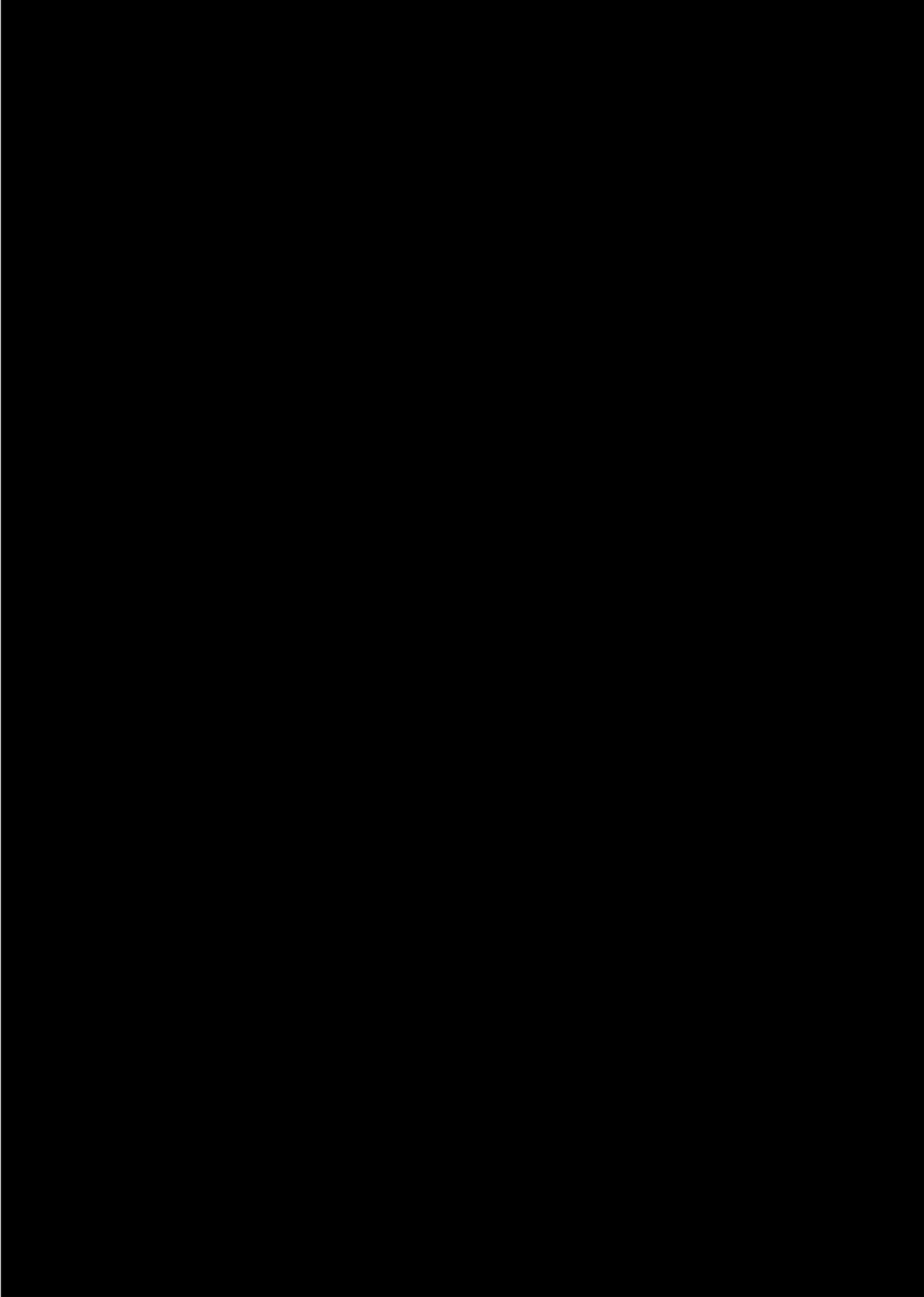
Some groups told us how important it is to ‘help the bully not just the person being bullied’ if it is going to stop. **Anger management training could reduce bullying** by helping both bullies and their victims. **Self defence training could help victims** to stand up to bullies. One group discussed how bullying is rarely straightforward, and **it is important to listen to the bully’s point of view as well as the victim’s**. Both sides might be in the wrong. As one person in a group put it, ‘the victim’s side is taken more seriously and they’re believed more. Perhaps they’re listened to more than the defendant’.

One group suggested that **people who don’t bully others should be rewarded**. The same group though thought that this would mean that some victims of bullies would be rewarded, which could make their bullies jealous and more likely to bully them. As in so many of the possible ways of dealing with bullying, things could work both ways.

Some discussion groups said that **staff should make sure they supervise times and places where bullying is most likely to happen**. In one group, there was disagreement on whether more staff around actually stopped bullying or simply made bullies more likely to get caught and so likely to choose somewhere else to bully people: ‘if someone is going to bully they will. More staff means they are more likely to get caught’.

‘help the bully not just the person being bullied’

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There was also a clear message that adults need to take care that they are not ignoring or even encouraging bullying by the way they react when they hear about it: ‘sometimes teachers don’t really pay attention’; ‘they should do something but can never do enough’. Children said that some adults believe that particular children who are bullying others are good children who wouldn’t do that, and so don’t believe the victims. We heard that it is especially important that an adult doesn’t simply tell the bully what has been said by their victim, but tries to find out in confidence what is going on: ‘never tell anyone what was said’.

Some in the groups thought that **adults need to give advice and information to children, but should not always think they know best**. One group described to us how going to a teacher at school can be a big risk if they think you are making too much fuss about being bullied: ‘if you go to a teacher or the headmaster they say you are over-reacting then the whole school gets to know and you are called a chicken’.

Anti-bullying projects

We asked children through our question cards whether they had been included in any sort of anti-bullying project, either at home or at school. Thirty-nine children told us what sort of project they had taken part in. Most projects involved visual work, such as producing anti-bullying posters or sometimes seeing a film or doing drama work about bullying. Ten children told us about these sorts of projects. Nine children had been involved in group discussions about bullying, four had taken part in an anti-bullying week at school, and three had been involved in drawing up an anti-bullying charter. In one discussion group, we heard that younger children have lessons about bullying, then sometimes a reminder video is shown. Another group told us about a website diary and text number for people to use if they were being bullied.

Some in discussion groups thought that **simply having anti-bullying policies and projects isn’t enough**, and suggested that **schools should have special teachers with the job of stopping bullying** and fighting. Others said that in some schools, people just do not accept bullying and it is less of a problem, while in other schools bullying is accepted as something that will always happen. This is part of how the school is: ‘never talked about, people just know’.

Some in discussion groups told us that **big schools were more likely than small ones to accept bullying**. Others thought that in any school, **bullying is more likely in bigger class groups than in smaller ones**, as the teacher’s attention is less focused on each child. Also, as one group told us, ‘some teachers don’t have full control over larger classes and some pupils take advantage of that’.

Forty-three children told us whether anti-bullying projects they had been in had worked. Nineteen (just over four out of 10) told us they had been in a project that had worked, just over a third said it had worked ‘a bit’, and just over one in five told us that it had not worked. They told us that **anti-bullying projects worked if people took them seriously**, but not if people were generally not bothered about them. Posters often didn’t work because ‘young people don’t pay attention to posters’. Projects worked well if as a result ‘staff are more aware and the victim knows what to do’.

One example of a project that had not worked was where people who were being bullied were allowed to have some lessons by themselves. This isolated people and marked them out as different, and some had stopped going to school altogether. Another example that had not worked was the idea of a ‘buddy bench – if you have no-one to play with you sit on the bench and others come and join you’. It had failed, in the opinion of the child who wrote to us about it, ‘because no-one wanted to sit on the bench. It was a stupid idea.’

Last words

The last words about bullying go to some of the children themselves:

‘you can’t stop it’

‘its natural really – even animals bully’

‘there will always be a way for bullies to get to you’

‘it can never be actually stopped, but you should try before it goes too far’

‘I don’t think anything will stop it but you should make people aware of it’

‘you should not have to cope with it’.

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