Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour: (ERTBB) Supplement

Supporting Schools when Dealing with Incidents of Disablist Bullying
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This guide to disablist bullying is designed to link into the original 2013 Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum’s resource entitled “Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour” (ERTBB).

Staff using this supplement are expected to refer to the linked ERTBB page references included in the text.

This document focuses on the considerations which staff need to bear in mind when addressing incidents of disablist bullying behaviour whether the child is experiencing bullying behaviour, displaying bullying behaviour or witnessing bullying behaviour.

CONTEXT

Schools have a responsibility to protect children from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” (Article 19, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also requires the government to adopt immediate and effective means of “fostering at all levels of the education system, including in all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities” (Article 8).

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Addressing Bullying in Schools (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 both provide a legislative framework for anti-bullying work in schools in Northern Ireland in particular.

In addition, all schools are required to promote and sustain an inclusive working environment through implementation of the following:

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO)
- The Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education [CRED] Policy which promotes self-respect and respect for others, equality and the elimination of discrimination
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 which when enacted will ensure that the views of every child are considered as part of the discussion about their needs; and that every child with special educational needs (SEN) has a personal learning plan (PLP)
SAFEGUARDING POLICIES

The Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy forms part of the safeguarding suite of policies which includes the Anti-Bullying and Safeguarding Policies. These policies need to work together to promote an inclusive learning environment where all learners have access to high quality provision and can reach their full potential with support if necessary through the implementation of the school’s Special Educational Needs policy.

Anti-Bullying Policy: Current requirements include consultation with parents/carers, pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff and Governors

All schools are required to:

- Have an Anti-Bullying policy which forms part of the safeguarding suite of policies
- Have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying behaviour among pupils.
- Set out in the agreed Individual Education Plan (IEP)/ Personal Education Plan (PEP) those strategies that will be implemented to strengthen the resilience of the targeted child
- Set out in the agreed IEP/PEP the strategies which will enable the child presenting the bullying behaviour to reduce/change their unacceptable behaviour
- Track, monitor and assess the efficacy of the interventions/strategies used (IEP/PEP outcomes)
- Keep the policy under review on a biannual basis

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (likely to commence in 2018) requires grant aided schools to keep a record of “all incidents of bullying or alleged bullying involving a registered pupil” attending the school. The record must state what, from the circumstances, appear to be the method and motivation for the incident. In the case of a child with special educational needs and/or disabilities, motivation may relate to perceived differences based on their special educational needs and/or disabilities. For further themes see list included in the ‘Bullying Concern Assessment Form’ on Pg. 7 in ERTBB.
DEFINING BULLYING
The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) currently defines bullying as the repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to hurt, harm or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others see ERTBB, Pg. 2. Please note that the definition will change when the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 commences.

Bullying is a form of unacceptable behaviour, but not all unacceptable behaviour can be considered to constitute bullying behaviour. Bullying usually involves four key elements:

- It is intentionally hurtful behaviour
- It is repeated behaviour that happens over a period of time
- It involves an imbalance of power
- It is targeted – individual/group

All unacceptable behaviour must be challenged, whether it is bullying or not.

There are many different ways in which bullying behaviour can be displayed. This could include intentional, repeated, targeted behaviours such as:

- Being called nasty names, teased, made fun of, threatened or put down
- Being hit, kicked, punched, tripped up or knocked over
- Having belongings stolen or damaged
- Having rumours or gossip spread about you or people talking about you behind your back
- Being left-out, excluded or isolated
- Being forced to do something you don’t want to do or know that is wrong

It is also important to know that bullying is not:

- A disagreement or a ‘falling-out’
- A one-off fight or argument
- Someone being ‘nasty’ through an ill thought through word or action
- A ‘relationship’ issue where pupils just need to learn how to get along better
What is Disablist Bullying?

Disablist bullying is bullying behaviour related to special educational needs and/or disabilities which can involve:

- Offensive and discriminatory language
- Verbal abuse and threats
- Public ridicule
- Jokes about disability
- Exclusion from social groups
- Refusal to cooperate with someone because of their impairment
- Refusing to meet a disabled person’s access needs

Disablist bullying can occur:

- In both mainstream and special school contexts
- Both in school and out of school
- Even when there is a perceived rather than an actual special educational need or disability

Whole school proactive strategies to help prevent Disablist Bullying

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Addressing Bullying in Schools (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 both provide a legislative framework for anti-bullying work within schools in Northern Ireland.

The first step towards a whole school response to any form of bullying is its written policy and this should reference disablist bullying. Schools should adopt respectful language (e.g. A person with cerebral palsy) and avoid pejorative terms.

All registered pupils and parents should be consulted in relation to the content of the anti-bullying policy. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities have a profound knowledge of their children and their needs and it is important that schools and parents work together to identify particular vulnerabilities of their children, to pre-empt possible difficulties.

The following table outlines all of the essential components that schools should include when developing their anti-bullying strategies.
An Effective Anti-Bullying Policy:

- Which meets current legislative requirements
- Which involves consultation with all stakeholders and active pupil participation in the decision making processes
- Ensures that a record is kept of all bullying incidents, interventions put in place and the outcomes achieved
- Determines, on the basis of evidence, possible method and motivation i.e. identifies the underlying theme which may include special educational needs and/or disabilities

For further details about possible themes see list included in the ‘Bullying Concern Assessment Form’ on Pg. 7 in ERTBB

Empowering Bystanders by:

- Developing their understanding of bullying behaviour and its impact
- Encouraging all pupils to work together to support the target and/or report the behaviour to school staff.
- Enhancing playground supervision by staff and “buddies”

Working collaboratively with Parents/ Carers to:

- Identify particular vulnerabilities
- Pre-empt possible difficulties
- Provide appropriate in-class support
- Ensure the child has access to the curriculum
- Foster pro-social behaviours where possible and where necessary
- Effect a smooth transition when moving from pre-school to primary school, and from primary to post-primary school

See ERTBB Pg. 5 for further guidance

An Inclusive Restorative School Ethos which actively:

- Promotes self-reflection and participation
- Develops positive relationships
- Focuses on restoration
- Celebrates diversity

See ERTBB Pgs. 21 following for restorative practices e.g. The Five Questions, pg.21; Worth a rethink, pg.22
The Incidence of Disablist Bullying

Evidence tells us that disablist bullying

- is considerably higher among children with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities than among other children, including children with mild, moderate and severe learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties, physical disabilities, autism, ADHD, dyslexia and SEBD
- is higher still where there are co-morbid conditions (where children experience combinations of more than one condition)

Choosing an Appropriate Intervention: (ERTBB Pg13)

Interventions are grouped according to the severity level of the bullying behaviour. See ERTBB Pgs.16-19 for intervention details

The main aim of an intervention is to RESPOND to the bullying behaviour that is taking place, RESOLVE the concern and RESTORE the well-being of all those involved. When considering an appropriate intervention schools should take account of:

- A range of matters pertaining to the incident
- The profile of the child involved.
- The need to ensure the active involvement of the child in all aspects of the process including post-incident learning through self-reflection and self-assessment

The ERBTB offers a framework of anti-bullying strategies within four levels of intervention (See ERBTTB page 13) however school staff should bear the following considerations in mind when dealing with an incident of disablist bullying.

Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities:

- Are often more vulnerable than other children
- Are often less capable of defending themselves against bullying behaviour
- Often enjoy spending time on the internet, making them particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying
- Can also engage in bullying behaviours
- May find social interaction and communication difficult, making them especially vulnerable to social exclusion and other forms of bullying
- May have difficulty in understanding the nature of bullying and in identifying the behaviour as ‘bullying’
- May have difficulty in reporting bullying due to speech, language and communication difficulties
Considerations to bear in mind when providing support for the child with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Some children with speech, language and communication difficulties may find it more difficult to report bullying behaviour. School staff should look out for any changes of behaviour, increased anxiety and/or reduced confidence.
- Take seriously the issues raised by the child, responding immediately to reassure the child.
- To reduce stigma and promote empathy it may be helpful to ensure that the particular peer group have a greater understanding of the individual needs of the child.
- Classroom assistants are well placed to spot low-level bullying behaviours.
- The nature of the support provided in mainstream settings (e.g., in-class classroom assistant support and/or withdrawal from class) can actually serve to highlight differences.
- All cases (however minor) of disablist language should be addressed immediately so that the school environment is characterised by understanding and respect for difference.
- Where children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are themselves engaging in bullying behaviour, the inappropriate behaviour must also be dealt with effectively by following the school’s anti-bullying policy.
- Some children with special educational needs and/or disabilities will struggle with social interaction and communication, so peer support strategies may not be the most effective response in all circumstances.
- Some children with special educational needs and/or disabilities may themselves benefit from social skills training to help make them less vulnerable to social exclusion.
- The term bullying is highly emotive, often causing great anxiety, fear and shame to both the children involved and their families. Hence, if a child has been bullying others it is important that we concentrate our disapproval on the behaviour, not the child.

- Use target instead of victim; Use child/young person presenting bullying behaviour instead of bully or perpetrator - see ERTBB Pg. 2.

All schools should ensure that:

- Outcomes are tracked and monitored to assess their effectiveness.

See ‘Bullying Concern Assessment Form’ ERTBB Pgs. 7-10 for recording, tracking and monitoring outcomes.
References

For more information:


KiVa (2016) Homepage. Available at http://www.kivaprogram.net/


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