

Responding to Bullying

First steps for teachers



Coláiste
Bhaile Chláir

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Amended from HSE Cool Schools Anti-Bullying Programme and in accordance with Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Introduction

The Cool School Programme is an Anti-Bullying Initiative for Post-Primary schools developed within the North Eastern Health Board's Child Psychiatric

Service. It is supported by assistance from the N.E.H.B. Health Promotion Unit, and the In-Career Development service of the Department of Education and Skills.

The impetus for partnership between Health and Education in this initiative arose from the significant effects bullying has on the wellbeing of young people, and on their progress in school. Significantly, these effects can also last into adulthood, causing depression and poor social development.

They include:

physical injury, headaches, stomach aches, stress symptoms such as sleep problems, eating disorders, anxiety or panic attacks, and loss of confidence and self-esteem.

In very extreme circumstances some young people even consider suicide.

In school terms the effects are likely to include: drop-out, truancy, school refusal, low academic achievement or complete failure, exclusion and isolation.

The Programme aims to provide a support service for schools to facilitate implementation of the Department of Education's Guidelines on Anti-Bullying procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

This booklet offers advice for teachers on how to proceed if a young person takes the very brave step of asking for help.

Given the atmosphere of fear and secrecy which surrounds bullying, and the fact that adult intervention is almost always necessary to stop it, it is crucial that the confidence placed in a teacher by a pupil is reciprocated by an unequivocal response.

The guidelines therefore, offer a structured way of providing support which is teacher friendly, while at the same time covering the main issues involved.

Why Pupils don't talk about bullying

The following are some of the fears, feelings, and beliefs of young people in relation to talking about bullying:

- That the bullying will get worse and spread to a wider group because they have told. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to the ridicule and ostracism inflicted on people who have "ratted". Many pupils find it difficult to distinguish between telling to keep safe, and "ratting".
- Physical threats may have already been made, and they are anxious about retaliation. They will feel even more intimidated if there is a gang involved.
- They may be worried about an adverse reaction from their parents, and feel shame that they can't "stand up for themselves". They don't want to be seen as somehow failing their parents, or admit that they are unable to cope with school. A feeling that they deserve the bullying, and the guilt accompanying this, is often a factor.
- Many victims simply lack the social skills and confidence to come forward. Sometimes approaching an adult about a problem, especially a teacher, may seem too daunting a prospect for a timid or anxious pupil.
- Many victims believe that nothing can be done about the bullying, and in schools where the anti-bullying ethos is weak, they may believe that nothing will be done. If they are unaware of previous successes of staff in relation to handling bullying incidents, they may not feel confident about the school's ability to intervene.

Given the reluctance to talk, it is important that teachers take a pro-active role in investigating whether bullying occurs within their classes.

When Pupils Talk

Any pupil who discloses bullying is expressing a cry for help which needs a robust response from the teacher they have chosen to tell. A bullied pupil may pick any teacher to be their first confidant, so it is worthwhile for all staff members to be familiar with the basic steps for providing support.

In schools where active Anti-Bullying measures and procedures are well established, young people will be more likely to come forward and ask for help. In certain cases, pupils will disclose bullying to a teacher simply to relieve the pressure and for moral support.

What can you do if a pupil tells you that he/she is being bullied?

Listen

The very act of telling someone about bullying can be therapeutic in itself, so being **available to listen** is the first step in supporting the victim. Allow the bullied student **time to tell their story in their own words**.

Be **calm and objective, avoid displaying shock or disbelief, and accept what is said**. The privacy of an office will allow the young person to de-stress, and encourage them to be more forthcoming with details. Alternatively, an empty classroom could be used. Having a colleague present is usually recommended if possible, although some pupils may insist on talking to a teacher alone. A useful strategy in this case would be to leave the door open so that the teacher can be seen by passers-by, while the victim of bullying remains unseen inside the room.



Take notes

These will form the basis of a report for dealing with the incident, and can be kept on file as part of the School's Bullying records. (*Appendix A*). Include details such: nature of the incident, date, time, location, names of those involved, names of witnesses, any other relevant history and the teacher's response.

Reassure

The young person needs to be told that:

- Help is available.
- Action will be taken to stop the bullying.
- Talking to someone about the bullying is praiseworthy, because this is the most important step in getting the bullying stopped.
- Bullying can happen to anyone, and nobody should have to put up with it.
- 'It is not your fault'.
- 'There is nothing wrong with you'.
- 'You do not have to face this on your own'.

Ensure the pupil's safety

Satisfy yourself that the pupil is not in immediate danger of physical assault. If there is a risk, parents can be asked to collect the pupil from school, or arrangements can be made to keep the potential assailant from carrying out an attack. Schools would also need to ensure supervision if the young person's safety has been compromised.

Negotiate confidentiality

Explain that you will have to pass the report of the the meeting to the Year Ceannaire or Pastoral Care Officer for further investigation, but explain that the Year Ceannaire or Pastoral Care Officer will speak to them before any further steps are taken.

Discuss that in certain circumstances the Year Ceannaire or Pastoral Care Officer might need to talk to the pupil's involved in the bullying as well as parents, witnesses, other teachers, or the school management, as appropriate.

Explain that you will tell only the people who need to know, and give a reason why they have to be told. Be clear about how you will build in safeguards for the victim's safety and privacy where possible. For example, the young person can be told that persons interviewed about their involvement can be warned not to retaliate, or spread gossip, and that you will be checking up on this.

Tell the young person that you will keep them informed

Make an intervention

N.B. Very serious cases should be referred to the Principal straight away. For example pupils who are being bullied on a regular basis, pupils who are very badly distressed or despairing, or pupils who have been assaulted.

Appendix A

BULLYING INCIDENT REPORT FORM COLAISTE BHAILE CHLAIR

DATE: _____

TEACHER: _____

NAME OF STUDENT MAKING ALLEGATION: _____ **CLASS:** _____

NAME OF STUDENT ALLEGATION MADE AGAINST: _____ **CLASS:** _____

DETAILS: Include time, place, names of alleged perpetrators, names of bystanders. Detail here both sides of the event

ACTION TAKEN eg referral, mediation, agreement, warning, sanction etc

SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW – UP
