



WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others.

Bullying and harassment should be prevented by anticipation of an occurrence and having a planned course of action.

Bullying is behavior that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating and occurs mainly in social environments such as schools, clubs and other organisations working with children and young people. It includes behavior such as teasing, taunting, threatening, and hitting and extortion behavior by one or more children against a victim.

Traditionally bullying would take place where the bully would meet the victim face-to-face, e.g. in a changing room, going to or from school or sports club, travelling on a bus. Unfortunately today the technological advances in methods of communications have meant that people are more accessible through the use of mobile phones, e-mail, social networking sites, etc. This means that a victim can be targeted by a bully without being physically present. Bullying need not be solely physical where a victim is physically harmed. Bullying can be verbal, involve the use of gestures, by exclusion and using extortion.

How would you know if a child is being bullied?

All bullies operate using furtiveness, threats and fear. Bullying can therefore only survive in an environment where the victim does not feel empowered to tell someone who can help or in which it is not safe to do so. The following indicators are warning signs that a young person might be getting bullied:-

- Reluctance to come to a venue or take part in activities.
- Physical signs; unexplained bruises, scratches or damage to belongings.
- Stress-caused illness; headaches and stomach aches which seem unexplained.
- Fearful behavior; fear of walking to an activity, going different routes, asking to be driven.
- Frequent loss or shortage of, money with vague explanations.
- Having few friends.
- Changes in behavior; withdrawn, stammering, moody, irritable, upset, distressed.
- Not eating.
- Attempting suicide or hinting at suicide.
- Anxiety; shown by nail-biting, fearfulness, tics.

This list is not exclusive to a victim of bullying. There may be other reasons for many of the signs above.

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FORMS OF BULLYING

Child to Child	Includes physical aggression, verbal bullying, intimidation or isolation.
Adult to Child	Includes the use of repeated gestures or expressions of a threatening or intimidating nature, or any comment intended to degrade a child.
Adult to Adult	Includes verbal aggression towards other adults in order to achieve a beneficial outcome for own self or own child.
Child to Adult	Includes repeated gestures or expressions of a threatening or intimidating nature by an individual child or a group of children.

How can bullying be prevented?

- Ensure that all members follow the code of conduct, which promotes the rights and dignity of each member.
- Deal with any incidents as they arise.
- Use a whole group policy or 'no-blame approach', i.e. not 'bullying the bully' but working with bullies and the group of young people, helping them to understand the hurt that they are causing, and so make the problem a 'shared concern' of the group.
- Reinforce that there is a 'permission to tell' culture rather than a 'might is right'.
- Encourage young people to negotiate, co-operate and help others, particularly new or different children.
- Offer victim immediate support and put the 'no blame approach' into operation.
- Never tell a young person to ignore bullying, they cannot ignore it, and it hurts too much.
- Never encourage a young person to take the law into their own hands and beat the bully at their own game.
- Tell the victim there is nothing wrong with them and it is not their fault.

WHAT THE BRANCH CAN DO

Each branch should display a statement, in their branch newsletter and or on their branch website, stating that 'bullying is not accepted behavior towards anyone in the branch or organisation in general, whether they are a child, instructor, leader, other volunteer or parent'. Anyone found to be bullying others will be dealt with seriously. The possibility of people being bullied should be discussed openly within the branch and all young people, officials and parents informed of both the organisation's views on bullying and ways in which bullying can be prevented and stopped.



ACTION TO BE TAKEN

All young people should be given time and the opportunity to say how and if they are being bullied and who they are being bullied by and reassured that they were right to tell. The Branch Children's Officer should keep the young person informed of the proposed action and to take the young person's feelings into account.

The child's parents should be informed and guided as to how the bullying will be dealt with. The complaints procedure may be used as a mechanism to deal with the issue.

DEALING WITH BULLYING - CHILDREN

Where bullying is between children there generally is always a reason for a bully to behave in a bullying way. This does not mean the behavior is acceptable. It needs to be dealt with immediately. Bullying is a breach of the Code of Conduct which is a disciplinary offence; however, this may not be the most effective way to deal with the bullying behavior.

A useful tool for resolving bullying behavior is the 'No Blame Approach'. This has the advantage of bringing all parties together under adult supervision and affords the bully the chance to understand the destructive nature of their behavior without apportioning blame directly. If there is no resolution through the 'No Blame Approach' advice should be sought from the National Children's Officer and the possibility of resolving the matter through a complaints process must be considered. It is also important to provide support for any child who is a victim of bullying and obtain the co-operation of parents to help with preventative measures. Bullying should never be ignored.

DEALING WITH BULLYING - ADULTS

Where the alleged bully is reported as being an adult the matter may be dealt with through an informal process or a formal complaints procedure. However, the feelings of the young person involved must be considered. The Branch Children's Officer should approach the young person to establish what is happening and how they are being bullied.

An informal approach can be used with the adult concerned where they can reply to the issued raised by the child. It is imperative that the child feels protected in all these actions, especially where the adult is in a position of authority or power over the child. It may be necessary to observe the adult interaction with young people to establish if their behavior is breaching the codes of conduct.

If an informal approach does not resolve the bullying as perceived by the young person the Branch Children's Officer should direct the matter to the complaints process, observing the boundaries of confidentiality.



WHO SHOULD DEAL WITH BULLYING?

Dealing with bullying which occurs in any aspect of Pony Club activities is the responsibility of all leaders within the Irish Pony Club and its branches. The Branch Children's Officer would usually be involved and may act as an intermediary in a resolution. Bullying can also be dealt with formally through the complaints process.

More extreme forms of bullying may be regarded as physical or emotional abuse and should be reported to the HSE or An Garda Síochána. The Designated Liaison Person should consult informally with the statutory authorities if any concerns arise.

The 'No Blame Approach' can be managed with the Branch Children's Officer.

THE 'NO BLAME APPROACH'

Step 1 – Meet with the Victim

If you find that there has been an incident of bullying, first talk to the victim. At this stage find out who was involved and what the victim is now feeling. Try asking the following questions:-

- Was it verbal or physical intimidation?
- How hurt is the victim?
- Was it within his or hers own peer group?
- Reassure him or her that the truth will come out in the investigation.
- Actively listen.
- Advise the victim of the next steps that will be taken.

Step 2 – Meet with all Involved

- Arrange to meet all those involved. This should include some bystanders, those who may have colluded, those who joined in and those who initiated the bullying.
- Have a maximum of six to eight in the group, keep the number controllable.
- Make a point of calling a special meeting.
- Ensure the severity of the meeting is understood by all.
- Speak only of the hurt caused in general terms with no reference to the victim.
- Play on the conscience of all. Ask questions like: How would you feel? Would you like to be done to you?

Step 3 – Explain the Problem

The distress being suffered as a result of the bullying incident is explained. At this stage the details of the incident or the allocation of the blame is not discussed. Explain the feelings of loneliness, feeling left out, rejected, laughed at. Try asking questions:-

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- Would they like if it happened to them?
- Someone here in this group was bullied by someone within the group; what could we do to see it does not happen again?

Listen and watch out for reactions and pick up on any without isolating anyone. This is an opportunity to find out how the others in the group feel about bullying.

Step 4 – Share the Responsibility

Explain what steps or controls may have to be introduced to prevent further incidents and how everyone will lose out as a result. This could range from:- less free time or social activities, i.e. less opportunity to interact individually allowing the bullying behavior to continue, to removal of the means, e.g. if involved, mobile phones removed for certain periods. Any steps introduced must be in the ethos of prevention and not punishment. Parents of the children involved should be informed.

Step 5 – Ask the group for their ideas

At this stage the group is encouraged to suggest ways that would make a victim feel happier. All positive responses are noted. Use phrases like: “If I were you” to encourage response. Listen to all suggestions and note them.

Step 6 – Leave it to them

Now that the problem has been identified, solutions suggested, the problem is now handed over to the group to solve. Arrange to meet again in a week’s time. Pass responsibility over to the group and give a time frame within which something must be done.

Step 7 – Meet them again

Meet everyone, including the bully. Discuss who things are going, who is doing what and has there been other incidents. This allows for continual monitoring and also keeps all involved in the process.

Again enforce the idea of the team looking after each other at regular intervals.