



Be Prepared...
for new adventure!

BULLYING

This guide has been written to help you deal with bullying and take steps to reduce the chances of it happening in your group or section. The Scout Association of Australia has an anti-bullying policy that reminds us all that 'It is the responsibility of all adults in Scouting to help develop a caring and supportive atmosphere, where bullying in any form is unacceptable.'

This applies to all sections within Scouting. Ensuring that Scouting activities take place in a caring and supportive environment means maintaining morale and being aware of any changes. In the main we are a happy lot. Regrettably, at some time we will all have experienced bullying, either as a victim or observer of someone else's misery. Maybe we have unwittingly caused someone else to be miserable?

What is bullying?

Bullying is a social problem found in all walks of life. Some may say 'it's just part of growing up', but many will be aware of the misery that bullying causes. It's all too easy to ignore an instance of bullying and assume it is a one-off, or that young people will sort out their differences. Often this is not the case. Young people feel powerless to stop bullying and may carry its effects long into their adult lives.

Bullying can take many different forms, some less obvious than others. Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour that may be repeated over a period of time. It doesn't have to be a long-running series of incidents – it can be any occasion where someone deliberately intimidates or harasses another. Half of primary school age children and more than one in four secondary school students say that they have been bullied within the last

year. These are some of the types of bullying they describe:

- **Being called names**
- **Being teased**
- **Having money, mobile phones or other possessions taken**
- **Being hit, pushed, pulled, pinched or kicked**
- **Receiving abusive or threatening text messages or emails**
- **Being ignored or left out**
- **Being attacked or abused because of their religion, gender, sexuality, disability or appearance**

Name-calling is the most common form of bullying that is reported. It can include calling someone names because of their appearance, their accent, because they're not good at something, because their parents are rich, for any reason or even for no reason at all.

Where and when do you draw the line between bullying and simply having some good-natured fun? Well, if the person who it's aimed at doesn't see it as fun, if the teasing becomes nasty, hurtful or vicious, it becomes bullying.

Who can be bullied?

Anyone.

Some individuals may be picked on because of differences of race, class, gender or disability. Others are bullied for no obvious reason. For nearly 20% of the young people who call helplines about bullying, their current tormentor is a former friend. Bullies and the bullied are not always distinct groups. In a survey of primary school children, 15% said

they had both bullied and been bullied in the last year. Some describe bullying as a bad habit they were trying, but failing, to break. Like adults, young people can act more cruelly when in larger numbers. Of those calling a help line, almost three out of four reported being bullied by a group rather than just one person.

What are the effects of bullying?

Bullying hurts. It can make people feel that it's somehow their fault or that there is something wrong with them. It can have a devastating effect on young people's self-esteem and destroy their confidence and concentration. They may become more withdrawn and insecure, more cautious and less willing to take any sort of risk. It can leave young people feeling lonely, isolated and very unhappy.

Bullying has an effect on everyone, not just those directly involved. Some feel they can only stand on the sidelines and do nothing because if they intervene they run the risk of being turned on themselves. This makes them feel helpless and guilty.

How can I help?

Bullying can only work if victims and their friends remain silent. Finding an adult they can trust and talk to can help in many ways. If a young person tells you that they are being bullied, the first and most important step is to listen. A sympathetic adult can give support just by listening to them discuss their feelings. Talk to the young person about how they want you to address the issue. They may not be ready to do anything other than talk about the bullying, or they may have some very clear ideas and want to talk them through to try to sort them out.

Remember to observe the Association's Code of Conduct when dealing with sensitive issues. Young people often don't report bullying because they fear adults taking over and acting unilaterally without their permission.

Therefore, make sure you discuss what you are going to do with the young person first

and get their agreement. Young people are less likely to be bullied or suffer from the long-term effects of bullying if they feel good about themselves. Remind them that instead of feeling small or left out, because they don't have the 'right' clothes or aren't good at sport, that we are all different. If someone doesn't like them because they are different, that's the other person's problem – not theirs.

The most effective way for a young person to deal with verbal bullying is to stay calm, don't react and look confident. If they don't get angry or upset, the bully won't think they're worth picking on.

Don't encourage aggressive responses to bullying. If violence is involved, encourage them not to hit back as this will only make matters worse. Advise them to refuse to rise to the bait and walk away. Any form of training to improve confidence and assertiveness can help.

For example, going to a self-defence class might be a good idea, not to turn them into an 'ace fighter', but to teach them how to get out of tricky situations without violence. If they learn to protect themselves, they'll be less frightened of aggression. Also their confidence will increase, which will decrease their chances of being bullied.

Involving parents

We should always aim to work in partnership with parents. If a young person is being bullied parents should be made aware of the situation. Talk to the young person and their parents about actions you are proposing. Where appropriate, suggest other sources of advice and help. Where a young person is responsible for bullying others, think about whether it would be appropriate to talk to the parents to help resolve the situation.

You might want to think about talking to parents alone first to ensure you give the same messages to the young person about their behaviour. It may be that their parents have encouraged their behaviour e.g. told them to stand up for themselves. If the parents disagree with you, this will give mixed

messages to the bully and is more likely to make the situation worse. Seek parents' help and support in getting the young person's commitment to change their behaviour. A good start could be your group/section's anti-bullying code. Use this to establish what acceptable behaviour is and is not. Help the young person understand the consequences and effects of bullying. Get their agreement to put the code into practice at all times. Deal firmly and fairly with any breaches of the code. If all else fails, you may have to consider further action to avoid more unpleasantness and prevent further bullying. In this situation, seek guidance from your District, Region and or Branch Commissioner.

All groups and sections should have a clear policy or charter for dealing with bullying and for helping those who have been bullied.

There are normally five main goals:

- **To improve Members' self confidence**
- **To promote good behaviour in the group or section**
- **To improve the group environment and make it a place where bullying is less likely to happen**
- **To improve everyone's awareness of bullying and its consequences**
- **To make sure everyone is aware of the action that may be taken if bullying takes place**

DO involve young people in anti-bullying work, as this is far more likely to succeed than if ideas are imposed on them

Ask young people what they feel constitutes bullying - you can relate bullying to the Promise and Law. Discussions about what is and is not bullying can help form the basis for your group/section's anti-bullying code.

If strategies and codes are created with and supported by young people they are more likely to stick to them and they will become more responsible and more aware of other people's needs. Young people often have the best approaches to solving problems within their peer groups.

DO consider how your group's anti-bullying code should be publicised, including making it known to parents and carers.

DO regularly review the code with the youth Members of your group or section.

DO also refer to the Association's factsheets on Managing Behaviour available on the Branch website.

Adapted with permission from The Scout Association (UK)