

What is bullying?

There are many different definitions and theories on what constitutes bullying. respectme understands that it is not always easy to narrow down behaviours into a definitive statement that will cover all actions and situations. It is important, however, to recognise and acknowledge bullying behaviours so you can identify them when they are happening.

Bullying behaviours can include:

- Being called names, teased, put down or threatened
- Being hit, tripped, poked or kicked
- Having belongings stolen or damaged
- Being ignored, left out or having rumours spread
- Receiving abusive text messages or emails
- Behaviour which makes you feel like you are being bullied
- Being targeted because of who you are or who you are perceived to be

This is not an exhaustive list, there may be other behaviours that can be viewed as bullying.

Children and young people can experience bullying for a variety of reasons; where they live, their sexuality, gender, disability, the colour of their skin, what clothes they wear or what team they support.

The one thing that these have in common is difference or **perceived** difference - some children and young people don't see or understand diversity, they still only see difference.

Adults can often find the distinction between these behaviours difficult to establish, but it's every adult's responsibility to ensure that children and young people live in, learn in and play in an environment where bullying behaviour does not take place. We need to recognise that children and young people are, by their very nature, open, giving and loving, emotional and difficult, non compliant - just the same as everyone else - but we need to make sure that they can be all of these things as safely as possible.

What about impact?

It is important to take into account the impact that the behaviour is having on the child or young person. Bullying is behaviour which leaves people feeling helpless, frightened, anxious, depressed, demeaned. Actions can affect people in different ways and this should be taken into consideration. If you are unsure if behaviour is bullying, look at the effect it is having on the child or young person.

Is intent required?

Every bullying incident should be looked at individually. In some cases, children or young people may not be aware that their behaviour is actually bullying. They are perhaps modeling behaviours of other adults or children and young people, not understanding that the behaviour is wrong because they have never been taught otherwise. In these circumstances, the intent to bully may not be present but the impact and effect on the person being bullied will be no less because of this. It must be explained to the person bullying that their behaviour is unacceptable and why.

Does the behaviour have to be persistent?

The issue with persistence is that the behaviour has to take place more than once, when the impacts of bullying can be prevalent after one incident. Bullying does not need to be taking place to have an effect on the mental health and well-being of any child or young person. For those who have been bullied, the fear and anticipation of further bullying can affect a child's ability to be themselves and interact with others in a healthy fashion. The bullying behaviour and potential impacts on the child or young person should be addressed as they arise.

Children will tease, fall in and out with each other, have arguments, stop talking to each other and agree what is cool and what is not. This is a normal part of growing up and should be distinguished from bullying. However, in an environment where this behaviour is left unchecked, it can lead to bullying making those being bullied feel afraid, uncomfortable and unsafe in their environment.

For further information, contact *respectme* on 0844 800 8600 or visit:
www.respectme.org.uk