

Lessons learnt from outside the NHS: **The complexity of bullying ... and what to do about it**

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Aim and Objectives

Aim

- To enhance understanding of the complexity of workplace bullying and develop effective strategies to reduce it.

Objectives

- Recognise what constitutes bullying.
- Learn what strategies can help you if you feel bullied or perceived as a 'bully'.
- Consider how we can help those who are bullied.
- Discuss how you can get involved in advocating for an anti-bullying culture.

Introduction



- Where does bullying exist in children's everyday experiences of school? (EdD)
- Multi-faceted.
- Previously an equalities officer.
- Neglect and bullying witnessed: NHS.
- Entrenched in institutional cultures.

Bullying is Rife



- A wealth of research and interventions.
- Remains a prevalent problem.
- Depression, anxiety and even suicide.
- ***I get bullied because of my voice and my weight, [they] call me “gay” and “fat” [...] I don’t like being different to everybody. I won’t walk around without a coat because I don’t want everybody looking at me; I took an overdose once because it all got on top of me.***

(Peter, year 10, Parklane School)

What is bullying?

- Repeated, intentional, power imbalance (Olweus 1993).
- No universally agreed definition (Chan 2009).
- ‘I didn’t mean it’, ‘only joking’.
- One act: Fear and distress afterwards.
- Friends – where is the power imbalance?
- Characteristics e.g. intimidation, spreading gossip.
- Negative interactions, feelings, perceptions and severities.
- **Is teasing bullying?**

Is teasing bullying?

- Traditional definition.
- ‘Grey’ lightens mood but suicide (Morita 1996).
- Bullying as a spectrum from mild to severe.
- ‘Grey’ areas: Banter, name-calling.
- How can you tell if someone who is being teased is being bullied?
- Complexity: Laughing, ‘it’s not bullying’.
- Feelings.
- What behaviours do we inadvertently encourage through our responses?
- Why do people bully?

Why do people bully?

- Popularity – social power but unstable.
- Boredom (Nassem 2012).
- Because they are bullied – e.g. retaliate.
- Jealousy.
- Overtly aggressive males: ‘Bullies’.
- Reinforce group norms: Functional.
- Individual differences and agency.



The 'Bullying' Label

- Bullying and difference (Sweeting and West 2001).
- Cyber-bullying – anonymity? and widespread.
- Gender and social class.
- Homophobia: Law.
- Sexualised bullying.
- Racism e.g. islamophobia.
- Hierarchies: Managers and staff.



Consider...



- Most bullying is unreported.
- How can you help people who are bullied if they don't tell you?
- What if you think someone is being bullied but they don't?
- Individuals may lose social power if they stop bullying.

Signs of bullying

- Behavioural: e.g. absence, anxiety.
- Ostracised and socially withdraw.
- Underperformance with work.
- Being frequently tormented.
- Being blamed for incidents.
- 'No one likes you'.



What could help?

- Support – colleagues and management.
- Trade unions –representation, forums campaigning.
- ‘Bullying! have your say’, staff associations, equality groups, conferences and investment from senior staff.
- HR clarify staff policies.
- Understand and apply policies and procedures.
- Open and confidential discussions.
- Meetings on work related issues: Staff and managers.
- Clearer roles and communication e.g. clarification.
- Discuss nuanced and challenging cases.
- Generic feedback to HR, improving policies.
- Collective challenging your normalised culture.

Established strategies

- Mediation: work with parties to find solutions.
- Bringing people together who are in conflict.
- Work with individually beforehand.
- Underlying reasons and moving forwards.
- How would you feel having mediation with someone you are having conflict with? Issues?
- Working together to resolve issues.
- Dignity@work advisors.
- Restorative justice: Repairing harm.
- Circles, Perceptions, dialogue.

Recommendations for Managers



- Training.
- Speak to the person/people who are involved.
- Listen.
- Ask the person being bullied – what do you want me to do, what do you want to happen? Clarify how you will move forwards.
- **How can you deal more effectively with conflict in your team?**
- Check bullying has not recurred e.g. regular meetings.
- Holistic approach e.g. nurses and managers.

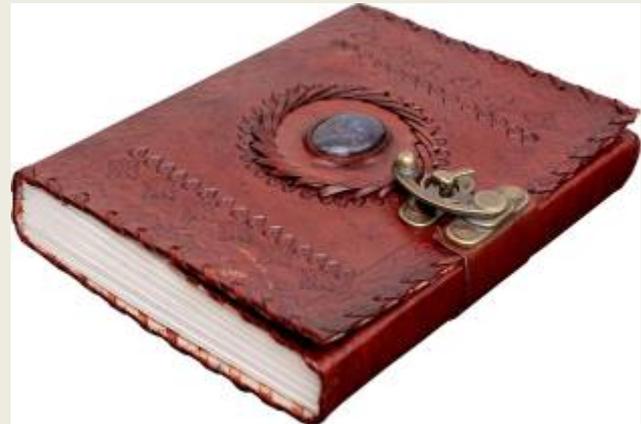
Anti-bullying Interventions



- No 'bullies' (Nassem 2017).
- Mentoring for 'bullies': regular sessions, discuss what has happened, likely consequences, how they can respond more respectfully, alternative scenarios, pro-active rather than reactive (Nassem 2018).
- Do they want to change? Start from behaviour.
- A culture which encourages people to change positively and exercise agency? **How?**
- Change is difficult – negotiation, reflection and relapse.

Getting staff involved

- Discuss and reflect upon the perspectives of those we are in conflict with e.g. why?
- Understand and deal with our feelings e.g. letting go of anger.
- Discussing alternative respectful behaviours.
- Informed decisions.
- Activities: Role-play, discussions, reflection, freeze frame.
- Build self-esteem.
- Diaries: Emotional Outlet.
- Tailored approach.



Issues to consider ...

- Fear of being bullied: Reluctant to help.
- **Are you encouraged to help?**
- Children 'told off' for helping and not.
- Normalised practices and toughening up.
- Sophisticated bullying, power, fear
Implications?
- **What percentage of grievances are generally upheld in the workplace?**
- **How do you think bullying is dealt with in your workplace? Is it effective or ineffective and how?**

Case study

- Sarah lodged a formal a complaint about her manager who belittled her, spread unpleasant gossip about her and made a formal complaint about her work performance based on fabricated information. Sarah's colleagues reinforced her manager's behaviour.
- In the investigation about bullying only the friends of her manager were interviewed, they all state they did not witness Sarah being bullied.
- Her complaint was not upheld.
- Her manager accused Sarah of bullying her.
- How common do you think this outcome is? Why has it happened?
- What can Sarah do? What can she ask to be done in the investigation?
- What would you do if you were accused of being a 'bully?'

Complaining about bullying

- Health and safety law.
- Protected characteristic –equalities.
- Speak to the person bullying you if you feel you can – tell them how they are making you feel, ask them to stop, tell them you may take it further if it carries on.
- Bullying tends to escalate and can reoccur after intervention.

Complaining about bullying

- Seek informal resolution e.g. can you speak to the person who is bullying you?
- As part of a formal grievance procedure you can raise an informal grievance.
- Inform your manager about the bullying.
- If your manager is bullying you, inform their manager.
- Witnesses – Support but fear.
- Negative experiences: Stress, blame, derogatory comments in writing.

Support when you make a complaint

- Counselling – external support understanding and managing emotions, BMA.
- Be involved in making decisions about how the bullying is dealt with.
- Respectful relationships across the hierarchy.
- Moving to another team?
- Trade union representation. Legal support.
- Policies should take into account more the social power and influence/fear over others which people in positions of power can have. **How?**
- **What would be one of the most effective things your employer could do to deal more effectively with bullying?**
- Thank-you for listening. Any questions?

References

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