



TIME OUT
fostering

valuing individual needs

SECTION NINETEEN **ANTI HARRASSMENT AND BULLYING**

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

2007

CONTENTS

POLICY
PROCEDURE

Time Out Objectives

1. Directors, staff, foster carers and young people should be committed to the prevention of bullying and unacceptable behaviour.
2. All directors, staff, foster carers and young people should have an understanding of bullying behaviour and its consequences.
3. Clear procedures for the reporting of bullying should be understood and followed.
4. Children/young people will be supported by TOF to address and resolve issues of bullying.
5. Clear guidelines for staff, foster carers and young people on how to deal with incidents of bullying should be understood and followed.

Standard 9.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services requires fostering services to ensure that carers are aware of the particular vulnerability of looked after children and their susceptibility to bullying, and put in place procedures to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and to help carers cope with it.

WHAT IS HARRASSMENT AND BULLYING?

Harassment is any form of unwanted and unwelcome behaviour, which may range from mildly unpleasant remarks to physical violence.

Harassment is termed sexual harassment if the unwanted behaviours are linked to your gender or sexual orientation. The European Union (EU) definition of sexual harassment is “unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of men and women at work”.

Racial harassment is when the behaviours are linked to your skin colour, race, cultural background, etc. In countries with sectarian tradition (e.g. as in Ireland) the term sectarian harassment is often used if the behaviours are linked to your religious beliefs or perceived religious origin or inclination. If the harassment is physical, the criminal law of assault may be appropriate, if the harassment comprises regular following, watching, repeated unsolicited contact or gifts, etc, the term stalking may be appropriate.

Bullying is the common denominator of harassment, discrimination, abuse and violence etc. The source of most bullying and harassment can usually be traced to one individual.

The differences between harassment and bullying are, briefly; harassment tends to have a strong physical component and is usually linked to gender, race, disability or physical violence; bullying tends to be a large number of incidents (individually trivial) over a long period comprising constant unjustified and unsubstantiated criticism.

Bullying and harassment (at work, in society, at school and at home) is a major cause of injury to health, both physical and mental. Over time, bullying and harassment result in trauma, which is a psychiatric injury, the collective symptoms of which often constitute Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

Bullying is the use of intentional, aggressive behaviours which have the effect of hurting another person, and which result in pain and distress to the victim. Bullying is unacceptable social behaviour. Bullying can be conducted by an individual or group.

Bullying can be:

Bullying

Bullying is not easy to define and there are as many definitions of it as there are incidents.

Most bullying will include:

- Deliberate hostility and aggression to the victim
- A victim who is weaker and less powerful than the bullies
- Distress and pain for the victim

Bullying is often ongoing but can also be a one off incident and might include:

- Verbal name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent hurtful teasing.
- Physical abuse, including actual or threatened harm for example pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching, biting or any other form of violence.
- Sexual abuse, including unwanted physical contact or verbal abuse including abusive comments on the victim's sexuality.
- Racial abuse, which may be physical, written or verbal.
- Emotional abuse, including tormenting or subjecting the victim to persistent ridicule or humiliation.
- Physical Emotional excluding, tormenting, (e.g. hiding or taking things), threatening, being unfriendly, graffiti, humiliation.
- Sexist taunts using gender to intentionally hurt, tease or insult.

Why foster children are at particular risk

All bullies need victims. These will almost always be someone who is weaker and/or less confident than the bully.

Bullies will target victims by focusing on something about the victim that is different in order to try and justify their behaviour. This may be the victim's appearance — weight, height or other physical features or it may be something else that makes the victim stand out from the majority of their peers — social class, religion or ethnicity.

By definition, children in foster care are different — they do not live at home with their parent(s). Therefore they immediately fit the profile of potential victims for the bully.

There are a number of additional common characteristics of foster children that increase their potential for being targeted:

- Many will already have been targeted and abused by others, including their primary carers
- Many will be developmentally immature
- Many will be lacking in self-confidence
- Some may have experienced prior abuse or victimisation as the only time they have received attention
- Foster children are frequently isolated from their family, peers and other support systems when they become looked after, maybe including perhaps a change of school
- Frequent moves may have led to a sense of insecurity and a fear or inability in developing positive relationships with peers
- A prior lack of positive attachments

Children with special needs and children from ethnic minority groups are twice as likely to be called names as other children.

Why do children and young people bully?

There are many reasons why children bully. Some may do it to cope with a difficult situation in their own life such the separation of their parents. Others will see it as a way of gaining kudos from their peers. Some are just used to getting their own way and may not even recognise the effect of their actions on their victims.

Some children will become bullies as a result of being a victim themselves. It therefore needs to be recognized that the reasons for some foster children becoming victims are also reasons for others becoming bullies.

This will have potential implications for carers fostering more than one child and needs to be borne in mind if it is suspected that a foster child is being bullied.

Possible signs of bullying

Any of the following behaviours may indicate that a child is the victim of bullying. There may equally be other explanations that should also be considered by carers and social workers.

“A child may indicate by their behaviour that he or she is being bullied. If your child shows some of the following signs, bullying may be responsible and you might want to ask if someone is bullying or threatening them.

Children may:

- be frightened of walking to or from school
- change their usual route
- not want to go on the school bus
- beg you to drive them to school
- be unwilling to go to school (or be school phobic)
- feel ill in the mornings
- begin truanting
- begin doing poorly in their school work
- come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed
- come home starving (bully has taken dinner money)
- become withdrawn, start stammering, and lack confidence
- become distressed and anxious, stop eating
- attempt or threaten suicide

- cry themselves to sleep; have nightmares
- have their possessions 'go missing'
- ask for money or start stealing money (to pay the bully)
- continually 'lose' their pocket money
- refuse to say what's wrong (too frightened of the bully)
- have unexplained bruises, scratches, cuts
- begin to bully other children or siblings
- become aggressive and unreasonable
- give improbable excuses to explain any of the above"

(Taken from 'What is bullying' by Kidscape 2001)

Responding to suspicions or incidents of bullying

We will take all suspected or actual incidents of bullying seriously. They will be fully investigated and support will be provided to the victim as well as their carers.

Children should be encouraged to report all incidents of bullying to their foster carer's or SSW.

All incidents of bullying should be investigated, reported to, and recorded by the supervising social worker.

Each case will be treated and judged separately and the appropriate action or sanction will be applied.

Foster carers should ensure that they record all suspected or actual incidents and report these to the child's social worker as soon as possible.

The carer and social worker should formulate a plan to address the concerns and this should include:

- who should talk to the child
- who else needs to be notified (e.g. schools, birth parents)
- whether any immediate action is needed to safeguard the child.

After the concerns have been discussed with the child, and if bullying is confirmed or continues to be suspected, a protection plan should be drawn up to attempt to ensure the bullying ceases and does not re-occur.

The carer and the social worker should draw up the plan with the involvement of relevant others who may include:

- the foster child
- other children in the household
- the foster child's birth parent(s)

- the bully
- the social workers and parents of other children in the foster home
- other relevant professionals such as teachers and therapists

If the bullying is being carried out by someone outside of the foster home then attempts should be made to engage the child's parents in helping to put an end to the bullying. The social worker rather than the carer should normally undertake any contact with parents in such circumstances.

If appropriate the bully will need to understand his/her wrongdoings and be helped to appreciate any distress caused. He/she should apologise and attempt to reconcile the problem. The concept of empathy with another child's feelings is an important issue.

In serious or persistent cases, where corrective action and other staff involvement does not change the pattern of behaviour, a case conference would be arranged to take appropriate action.

Recording

Foster carers should record all suspected and actual incidents of bullying against or by any foster child in their care. These should be reported to the child's social worker as soon as possible, as well as the carer's supervising social worker. TOF will keep a central record of all reported incidents and the action taken to deal with them.