

Let's stamp out bullying together

Dealing with bullying can be one of a leader's most difficult tasks, and is also one of the Association's key policies. But sometimes the problem can be prevented by positive action at Group level, says **Heather Friend** from the HQ Safeguarding Team

Bullying hurts. No matter how old the person is on the other end of the taunts, teasing, isolation, punches, kicks or abusive text messages, bullying hurts. It can have a devastating effect on a young person's self esteem, destroy their confidence and concentration, and have long-term effects well into their adult lives.

Bullying is deliberately hurtful, intimidating or harassing behaviour. It might be repeated over a period of time, or the person being bullied might be fearful of repetition.

The Scout Association has an Anti-Bullying Policy and free resources to help adults deal with bullying issues.

Specific bullying issues

These need to be addressed with the individuals concerned. A good place for section leaders to start is just by listening to the young person who is being bullied. They should discuss the Scout's feelings and ask them how they want them to address the issue. Many young people worry about reporting such issues because they think adults will take over and they won't have any control, so it's important to let them know what you are going to do and to get their agreement.

Of course, adults should always be sure to follow The

Some of the types of bullying that young people experience are...

- Cyberbullying – bullying another person using technology such as text messages, emails, MSN and social networking sites such as Facebook.
- Sexual bullying – bullying, whether physical or non-physical, that is based on a person's sexuality or gender.
- Physical bullying – being hit, punched or pushed.
- Verbal/social bullying – being ignored, called names or teased because of class, religion, gender, disability, appearance or sexuality.

Scout Association's Code of Good Practice (the yellow card) when dealing with sensitive issues.

Working with parents

We should always aim to work in partnership with parents, and if a young person is being bullied, their parents should be made aware. Leaders may want to think about talking to the parents of bullies, and trying to get their support in encouraging the young person to change

their behaviour. Whatever they do, it's important for leaders to deal with the matter sensitively, discreetly and with the support of their fellow adults within the Group.

Creating an anti-bullying code

To try and prevent bullying from happening in the first place, leaders across a Group should work with the young people in their sections to create an anti-bullying code, or code of conduct. This will help promote a friendly and respectful environment, where hopefully bullying won't be welcome. More guidance and advice on how to create a code can be found in the free 'Let's Stamp Out Bullying Together' leaflet.

Programmes online

Section leaders can find some great programme activities at www.scouts.org.uk/pol to encourage young people to think about friendship, respect and why bullying is unacceptable. Activities or games could be a good way of introducing the idea of a code to each section.

As a word of warning, it's important that section leaders don't try and resolve specific bullying issues by playing a game – this will only highlight the issue and may make matters much worse. Specific bullying issues need to be addressed sensitively with the individuals concerned.

Final thoughts...

Bullying carries on because of the fear it creates – not just for those who are bullied, but also for others who witness the bullying. Young people should be able to take part in Scouting without the fear of being bullied, and as adults in Scouting at every level, it's up to us to ensure that we are equipped to deal with bullying the moment it starts. Even better, we should be taking preventative action to ensure our Groups form friendly and respectful environments where bullying isn't welcome in the first place.

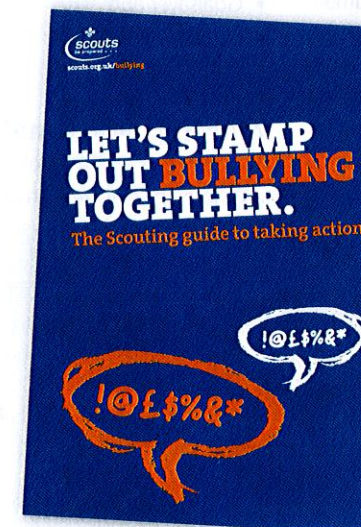
Creating a code

Helen is a Scout Leader. Three years ago she and her fellow leaders worked with their young people to create a code for their Group. Each section had a discussion about what they thought was and wasn't acceptable behaviour.

A code was agreed and signed by all of the young people and adults and it is now distributed to parents on a regular basis, displayed clearly in the meeting place, and reviewed regularly to make sure it's still relevant and useful. Some of the points the young people included in the code were:

- We will not bully, harass or pick on others.
- We will listen to each other, showing everyone respect.
- We will not use electronic devices such as mobile phones or MP3 players, or toys or games during weekly meetings.

Helen's really pleased with the effect the code has had on her Scout Troop. If any problems arise, the code is referred to straight away and because the young people helped to create it, they tend to stick to it. Helen is sure that having and using the code makes the lives of the adults who help much easier. It's a useful tool in managing occasional episodes of challenging behaviour – there's no debate on what is and isn't acceptable. But more importantly, Helen feels that many minor issues are managed by the Scouts themselves, as they will refer a peer to the code if they feel it isn't being adhered to.



Heather Friend is a member of the HQ Safeguarding Team

find out more

Much more advice and support on dealing with bullying can be found at www.scouts.org.uk/bullying

You can also order your free copies of the 'Let's Stamp Out Bullying Together' resources online at www.scouts.org.uk/shop by calling the Scout Information Centre on 0845 300 1818, or emailing them at info.centre@scouts.org.uk

Information on The Scout Association's 'Young People First' Code of Good Practice (the yellow card) can be found at www.scouts.org.uk/safeguarding