

Ending the Torment: Tackling Bullying from the Schoolyard to Cyberspace

End Violence Against Children Publication Series

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Preface by the SRSG on Violence Against Children

Bullying, including cyberbullying, affects a high percentage of children at different stages of their development, often severely undermining their health, emotional wellbeing and school performance. Victims may suffer sleep disorders, headaches, stomach pain, poor appetite and fatigue as well as feelings of low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, shame and at times suicidal thoughts. These are psychological and emotional scars that may persist into adult life.

Bullying is a key concern for children. It is one of the most frequent reasons why children call a helpline. It gains huge media attention when tragic cases of children who have been driven to suicide are brought to light. And it is increasingly becoming a problem in cyberspace, where children can be reached at any time, even in what should be the safe haven of their homes.

This publication brings together the evidence and good practices that can guide national action to tackle bullying effectively.

Chapter 1: The Scale of the Problem

Bullying is one of the most prevalent forms of violence experienced by children in schools worldwide. Research consistently shows that between 20% and 56% of young people report being bullied at school. Cyberbullying affects an estimated 10% to 40% of young people, with girls disproportionately experiencing online sexual harassment.

- * Physical bullying: hitting, kicking, and physical intimidation
- * Verbal bullying: name-calling, insults, and threats
- * Social bullying: exclusion, rumour-spreading, and social manipulation
- * Cyberbullying: harassment, threats, and humiliation through digital means
- * Sexual bullying: unwanted sexual comments, gestures, or touching

Chapter 2: Impact on Children

The consequences of bullying are profound and far-reaching. Children who are bullied are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and psychosomatic complaints. Academic performance suffers as children avoid school or are unable to concentrate. In severe cases, bullying has been associated with self-harm and suicide.

- * Mental health: depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress
- * Physical health: sleep disturbances, headaches, stomach aches, fatigue
- * Academic outcomes: school avoidance, poor concentration, lower attainment
- * Social development: difficulty forming trusting relationships
- * Long-term consequences: effects can persist into adulthood

Chapter 3: Prevention and Response

Evidence shows that whole-school approaches to bullying prevention are the most effective. These combine school-wide policies, classroom interventions, parent engagement, and individual support for victims and perpetrators. Punitive approaches alone are insufficient; restorative approaches that address the underlying dynamics of bullying tend to produce better outcomes.

- * Adopt clear school policies that define bullying and set out consequences
- * Implement evidence-based social-emotional learning programmes
- * Train teachers and school staff to identify and respond to bullying
- * Establish safe, confidential reporting mechanisms for students
- * Engage parents and families as partners in prevention
- * Provide targeted support to victims and children who bully

Chapter 4: Cyberbullying -- A Growing Challenge

The rapid spread of digital technologies has significantly expanded the scope and impact of bullying. Cyberbullying can reach children around the clock, including in their homes. The permanence of digital content and the potentially wide audience amplify the harm. Industry, governments, schools, and families all have a role to play in creating safer online environments for children.

- * Require technology companies to implement child safety by design
- * Establish effective reporting and content removal mechanisms
- * Invest in digital literacy education for children and parents
- * Develop age-appropriate online safety resources
- * Strengthen international cooperation on cross-border cyberbullying

Chapter 5: The Legal and Policy Framework

An increasing number of countries have enacted legislation specifically addressing bullying and cyberbullying. However, legal reform alone is insufficient without adequate implementation, enforcement, and accompanying prevention programmes. Schools must be explicitly required to adopt anti-bullying policies.

- * Enact or update legislation to explicitly address bullying and cyberbullying
- * Require schools to adopt and implement anti-bullying policies
- * Establish clear accountability frameworks for schools and local authorities
- * Allocate dedicated funding for bullying prevention programmes
- * Collect and publish data on bullying disaggregated by age, sex, and type

Conclusions and Recommendations

Ending bullying requires a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder response. The evidence is clear: with the right policies, programmes, and support, bullying can be significantly reduced. Every child has the right to grow up free from fear and violence, including in schools and online.

- * States should adopt comprehensive anti-bullying legislation and policies
 - * Schools should implement whole-school prevention programmes
 - * Industry should adopt and enforce child online safety standards
 - * UN agencies should provide technical assistance and share good practices
 - * Children should be empowered to report bullying without fear
 - * Research and data collection on bullying should be strengthened globally
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