

BULLYING – PAST AND PRESENT

Who By and Where?

Being bullied is a very distressing experience and can have a lasting impact on a person. It can go on for days, weeks, months or even years and may negatively affect someone emotionally for years to come. It can occur when you are younger; in schools or colleges and be perpetrated by peers or teachers. Bullying may also occur in adulthood; at work from colleagues or bosses, or in university halls/accommodation by housemates. You may also be bullied by parents, siblings, other family members or anyone else who has more power than you.

You may witness bullying behaviour but not feel able to intervene in case you also become a victim and this fear and sense of powerlessness can also cause distress. Bullying can be a private or a very public activity triggering shame and humiliation.

What is Bullying?

- Bullying can be physical acts of violence, hitting, kicking, pinching, physical or even sexual assault
- Destroying or theft of possessions, clothing, food or other belongings
- Verbal attacks, name calling or threats and intimidation
- Psychological attacks like excluding the victim, talking about them as if they aren't present or spreading rumours and lies about them
- Threatening the victim's family, friends or pets
- Cyber-bullying - use of e-mail, texting, chat rooms or ringing someone to distress, threaten or intimidate them - and this may be anonymous
- Inconsistent behaviour, like pretending to be a friend one day and bullying or excluding them the next
- Imitating someone else in order to cause humiliation
- Racist, sexist, homophobic undermining behaviour or harassment which many include 'jokes'
- Abuse of power, with a more powerful person or group/gang attacking a less powerful one
- Telling someone something bad will happen to them if they don't conform with the bully's wishes
- Targeting someone who has a physical or learning disability
- Any behaviour which is intended to do harm, upset or humiliate someone else
- Behaviour which is repeated over time

Bullying may take the form of obvious hurtful behaviour and you may very quickly realise it's happening to you, or it can be more subtle with the victim starting to feel undermined gradually.

The Effects of Bullying

Bullying can cause many distressing long term emotional and psychological effects including:

- Withdrawal
- Low self esteem
- Low confidence
- Negative body image
- Confusion and self questioning
- Believing the negative messages you receive about yourself from the bully
- Insecurity
- Difficulty in going into new situations and meeting people socially
- Difficulty integrating into university or work and making friends
- Suspicion and mistrust of others
- Feelings of worthlessness
- A need to avoid situations, e.g. school, college, work, the local park, bus etc
- Self harm/eating or sleep disorders
- Depression
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Physical illness
- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Shame
- Fear
- Vulnerability
- Giving your own power away easily
- Self blame
- Isolation
- Anger and rage
- Suicidal feelings or attempts
- A need for revenge or to bully others
- Denial that it happened and minimising the effects

What Can I Do About It?

It's important to realise that bullying is not your fault and is the responsibility of the person who chooses to bully you.

If you have been bullied in the past and are now out of the situation, it can really help to talk through your feelings with a friend, family member or trusted other person. Counselling can help too in supporting you to work on your self esteem and assertiveness in addition to helping you move on from painful past experiences. You can talk through the incident/s confidentially with a non judgmental person who will help you to explore how bullying impacted you and any long term difficulties or uncertainties you have been left with.

It's especially important that you think about how you may have come to believe the negative messages about yourself that you have been told. You may feel you are not likeable, are worthless, ugly or no good at anything. It's important that you think about all these beliefs, where they came from and how you started to think them. Ask yourself, are they really true and do they really apply to your life as an adult in the present? You may have got into negative cycles of behaviour as a result of your thought patterns and this may be a good time to try new behaviours and begin to challenge your beliefs about yourself.

If you are being bullied in the present, it's very important not to continue to suffer in silence but to tell someone who can either intervene on your behalf or who can simply listen to you and empower you to take action for yourself. Seek support and understanding from your friends, family or a sympathetic member of staff.

If the bullying is relatively mild and verbal, you may at first simply try ignoring the bully, which sometimes helps as they can get fed up with your lack of reaction, although it's important not to put up with it for long, especially if it's upsetting you. If the bullying is physical or intimidating, it's important to get immediate help and don't be afraid to ring the police.

Many bullies are victims themselves in some way, have their own problems and use bullying as a way of coping with their own difficult feelings. Once you recognise this, it may be helpful to try employing some assertiveness techniques and stand up to them. Don't engage in lengthy dialogue, confrontation or argument, just say 'no' and/or get yourself physically out of the situation if possible. If the bully is a peer or housemate, it may be helpful to let the bully know your limits, how you feel, how their behaviour is unacceptable to you and that you intend to take further action if they don't stop. Bullying can never be justified.

Finally, don't be afraid to cut people off and start relationships with people who make you feel better about yourself. You deserve better than this!

You may also want to consider mediation which is a confidential service that can help students work through their differences.

For further information on the NTU Mediation and Harassment Services, look on the NTU website - ntu.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/index.

Useful Books to Read

- The Bully at Work by Gary Namie
- Bully in Sight by Tim Field
- Adult Bullying: Perpetrators & Victims by Peter Randell
- In Sheep's Clothing, Understanding & Dealing with Manipulative People by George Simon
- How to Stand Up For Yourself by Paul Hauck