



# Bullying: taking action together.

Scouts' Guide to Bullying Prevention  
and Response.



# Scouts has the power to create an environment where bullying isn't acceptable

**This guide is here to help you reduce the chances of bullying happening, and to help young people who may be being bullied.**

Our Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy states: 'It's the policy of Scouts to provide a positive environment, as we know that everyone thrives in safe and supportive surroundings. We're committed to making sure that Scouts is enjoyable and safe for everyone involved.' Everyone has a duty to report safeguarding concerns, and must follow the safeguarding Code of Conduct for Adults (Yellow Card).

This applies to everyone within Scouts – all adults and young people.

At Scouts, we create positive and respectful environments where we value and celebrate our differences. This makes it difficult for bullying to occur. However, at some point, we'll have all come across a situation where bullying's happened, either as a target or a witness. It's important that all adults and young people understand the role they play in addressing and preventing bullying.



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# What is bullying?

## **Young people say that bullying is their biggest concern.**

Bullying can happen anywhere and to anyone. Some may say 'it's just part of growing up', but many young people feel powerless to stop bullying and can carry its effects long into their adult lives.

Bullying can take many different forms, some less obvious than others.

Scouts define bullying as intentional behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone. It can happen anywhere. It's usually repeated over a period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally.

Bullying isn't the same as disputes and squabbles between friends – although this can turn into bullying and should be addressed.

There's no law against bullying as such, but when there's 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a bullying incident should be addressed as a child protection concern under the Children Act 1989'.

Serious incidents are likely to either have involved physical and/or sexual assault, threats of harm, and/or have had a profound impact on a young person's mental health (this could include absence from activities and isolation from the group, depression and anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts). Any serious incidents should be addressed by following the Yellow Card and reporting it to the Safeguarding Team. Contact details are at the end of this guide.

## **Bullying can be**

### **Physical**

Threatening or causing injury to a person or property. It can also be sexual or encouraging someone to physically harm themselves.

### **Verbal**

Teasing, insulting, ridiculing, humiliating or making sexist, racist, homophobic, disablist or transphobic comments to someone.

### **Social**

Excluding others from a group, spreading gossip or rumours about them, rejecting or isolating them, or making them feel inferior.

### **Cyber**

Using digital media to purposefully harm someone. Spreading rumours and hurtful comments through the use of email, mobile phones, social media platforms, gaming platforms and text messaging.

Young people may become targets of bullying for a variety of reasons. Often, they won't know why they're being bullied, but the main message is that it's not their fault. The person or people using bullying behaviour need to recognise the impact of their behaviour and stop.

It's every adult's responsibility to make sure young people can live, learn, and play in a safe environment, where any bullying behaviour is always addressed. At Scouts, we take bullying extremely seriously and will work together to resolve any bullying situations, should they occur.

**At Scouts, we want to keep all young people safe by protecting them from neglect and physical, sexual and emotional harm. This includes all forms of bullying behaviour.**



# Understanding bullying

Bullying hurts. It can make people feel that it's somehow their fault or there's something wrong with them. It can have a negative impact on young people's self-esteem, confidence and concentration.

They may become more withdrawn, insecure and more cautious. It can leave young people feeling lonely, isolated and very unhappy.

Bullying influences everyone, not just those directly involved. Some feel they can only stand on the sidelines and do nothing because if they intervene, they run the risk of being turned on themselves. This makes them feel helpless and guilty.

It's important we can all recognise the signs of bullying behaviour and are prepared to take action to stop it.

## Bullying behaviours

We need to be aware of young people and adults displaying bullying behaviours and attitudes that impact on other young people in a negative way.

For example, using their physical presence to intimidate, influence or impress others or a tendency to relate to others in a negative way, like persistently making negative comments.

We need to address these behaviours and attitudes in an age-appropriate way, directly and consistently with all young people (through conversations and reminders of the code of conduct) and indirectly (through highlighting our expectations and in programme content).

Be particularly aware of the experiences of disabled young people and those with additional needs. We know from research these young people are much more likely to experience bullying. They may need additional support to explain what's happened and what help is available.

Adults can also bully or be the target or witness of bullying behaviour. At Scouts, we have a responsibility to keep everyone safe from bullying and harm, whether that's young people or adults.

## How do I recognise the signs?

Bullying isn't always easy to spot as it often happens away from others. But you can watch for signs that someone may be being bullied. For example, if someone:

- is hesitant to attend meetings or join in with activities.
- asks to change sections, Groups, and so on.
- is last to get picked for a team for no apparent reason or gets teased when people think you're not looking.
- is often the target of jokes.
- is reluctant to go to some places or pair up with specific people.
- has clothing or personal possessions go missing.
- has bruising or other injuries.
- keeps 'losing' their subs or is short of pocket money.
- is quiet and nervous, withdraws from everybody else and becomes quiet and shy (especially if they're usually loud and outgoing).
- refuses to talk about the problem.
- is usually quiet but becomes suddenly prone to lashing out at people, both verbally and physically.

# How can I help?

## Creating a positive culture

Help to create a safe, respectful and friendly environment in your section or Group where bullying isn't acceptable.

### Respectful environment

Help to develop a friendly and inclusive environment where young people respect one another. This allows everyone to work together on the programme and activities while preventing bullying.

### Be a role model

Young people often learn by example, so make sure you act as a role model and display friendly, respectful and positive behaviours that reflect our values. Talk, listen and show respect to young people and they should then do the same.

### Build positive relationships

Building positive relationships based on respect and embracing differences is essential to prevent bullying.

Teaching young people to negotiate, socialise appropriately and find non-bullying strategies to deal with conflict will create an environment where bullying isn't accepted.

### Programme activities

Openly talk about bullying, positive relationships, and celebrations of differences with young people. This might be through programme activities or making use of celebratory weeks and months such as Anti-Bullying Week in November and Safer Internet Day in February.

There are plenty of resources available online to support with activities (check out [kidscape.org.uk](http://kidscape.org.uk) or [anti-bullying-alliance.org.uk](http://anti-bullying-alliance.org.uk)).

## Putting it into practice

Continue to emphasise that bullying is never acceptable at Scouts.

### Communication

Make sure all adult volunteers are aware of our anti-bullying policy, as well as young people and their parents/carers.

Let young people know you're always there to help and explain how they can share any concerns about bullying.

### Observe

Work on your observational and listening skills so you can pick up on any subtle signs of bullying. Look out for any early changes in behaviour that a possible target may be displaying.

### Environmental factors

Managing an environment well can help reduce bullying. Chat with young people to create safe spaces together. This could include rearranging equipment or supervision patterns. Provide quiet spaces where young people are guaranteed time to themselves. Some noisy environments can be overwhelming, so it's helpful to have chill out zones.

### Act

Address all forms of bullying behaviour, no matter how small they seem. Monitor and record any bullying and the actions you've taken to resolve the situation. Remember, serious bullying incidents need to be dealt with as a child protection concern. Make sure you follow our safeguarding procedures.

# Creating an anti-bullying code

Anti-bullying codes are a great way for young people to focus on how they interact with each other and what they'll do if they experience bullying.

All Groups and sections should have a clear code for dealing with bullying and helping those who've been bullied.

The definition of bullying that we use is taken from the NSPCC and is: 'Bullying is intentional behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone. It can happen anywhere. It's usually repeated over a period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally'.

Explain this to young people and use it in your code so everyone's clear about what bullying means.

## Involve young people in anti-bullying work

Ask young people what they feel counts as bullying - you could relate bullying to the Scout Promise and Law. Discussions about what is and isn't bullying can help form the basis for an anti-bullying code for your group. Make sure you create it in partnership with young people.

Your code may include statements such as:

'We'll respect each other and our differences'

'We won't hurt each other or use unkind words or language'

'When we see someone being bullied, we'll try to help. This means telling a trusted adult what we've seen to keep that person safe'

## There are normally five main goals for an anti-bullying code

- To be clear on what we mean by bullying behaviour and how it'll be addressed.
- To empower young people to take the lead in bullying prevention.
- To create a safe, respectful and inclusive environment, a place where bullying is less likely to happen.
- To explain actions we can all take in a bullying situation.
- To make sure everyone knows how to get help in a bullying situation.

### Make sure it can be seen

Anti-bullying codes should be clearly accessible to all. For example, display it so everyone can see and share it with all new young people and their parents/carers.

### Use the code

Remind young people of their code if bullying occurs or there seems to be lots of conflict.

Young people often have the best approaches to solving problems within their peer groups. If young people create their own codes, they'll become more responsible and aware of other people's needs.



**I don't want to tell mum and dad, it would upset them too much – Sunita, 16**





# Responding to bullying

Your response when dealing with young people who are involved in bullying situations is important. Your priority is listening to the young person being bullied, finding out what's happened, and the impact it's had on them. Do all you can to help them feel safe, and to stop the bullying behaviour. This includes addressing all bullying behaviour fairly and consistently and following safeguarding procedures should there be a serious incident.

Young people often don't report bullying because they're worried about what might happen, or the situation becoming worse. Make it clear that you'll address any bullying behaviour you see whether it's reported to you or not. Explain to young people that you're there to listen, and to work with them to resolve the situation.

## Support the young person being bullied

If a young person tells you they're being bullied, the first and most important step is to listen. As a sympathetic adult they can trust and talk to, you can support by letting them discuss their feelings and listening.

Talk to the young person. Find out what's happened and agree a way to address the issue. They may not be ready to do anything other than talk about the bullying, or they may have some clear ideas and want to talk them through.

Let the young person lead and only share information with others if you're worried about their safety or wellbeing. Agree an action plan together and a time and place to check in to make sure the bullying situation has been resolved.

## Addressing bullying behaviour

If the bullying is taking place at Scouts, talk to the young person displaying bullying behaviour to help them understand their actions and the impact on others. All young people are capable of bullying behaviour.

Bullying levels tend to peak in early teens as young people experience lots of social, emotional, and physical change. Part of your role in Scouts is to create a safe, respectful environment where all young people understand our anti-bullying code and its expectations.

## How to respond to an incident

- 1. Listen.** Ask them to explain in their own words what happened. Include the who, where, and why.
- 2. Reflect.** Encourage them to reflect on how they were feeling before, during and after the incident. How do they think the young person(s) on the receiving end may be feeling?
- 3. Reinforce.** Explain why their behaviour could be considered as bullying and how it goes against our anti-bullying code. Remind them of the expectations. Help them consider how to make amends and whether there's anything they need from you going forward.
- 4. Review.** Agree an action plan together. This should include how you'll make sure there aren't any further incidents, what they can do to help the target feel safe, and any additional support you've agreed. Share with the young person and their parent/carer depending on the severity of the incident.
- 5. Revisit.** Agree a time and place to check in. If another incident occurs, work through the steps again. If the situation has improved, thank them for making a positive change.
- 6. Record.** Make sure you keep a record of the incident so you remember what you've agreed to and any actions taken for safeguarding purposes. This information should be stored securely and only shared on a need-to-know basis.
- 7. Wider learning.** Keeping a record of incidents can help you consider whether there are wider cultural issues you need to address in your section or Group and whether you require any additional support.

# Involving Parents and Carers...

We should always aim to work in partnership with parents/carers. If a young person is being bullied, we should make their parents/carers aware of the situation. This depends on the young person's age and severity of the situation. It may be done locally by the Lead Volunteer or by the Safeguarding Team. If you're unsure, please check with your District Lead Volunteer.

Find out whether the young person has spoken to their parents/carers or if they'd like support sharing what's happened. Where appropriate, suggest other sources of advice and help. If the situation is severe, you'll need to pass on the information anyway so we can work together to get them help.

## Addressing bullying behaviour with parents and carers

Share our anti-bullying code with parents and carers so they can support young people to understand and follow it.

Ask parents and carers to encourage the young person to change their behaviour.

Parents and carers might've also influenced the behaviour, for example by telling them to stand up for themselves. Make sure you're not sharing mixed messages with the bully as this may make the situation worse.

## Responding to serious or persistent bullying

Sometimes bullying may involve a serious incident, such as a severe physical or sexual assault. Bullying might persist despite attempts to stop it. In these situations, you need to take a different approach. However, the goals still remain the same: to make the targeted young person safe and stop the bullying behaviour.

At this point, you should treat it as a safeguarding concern and follow the Yellow Card by contacting the Safeguarding Team.

### Tip:

Programme activities may help prevent bullying. They won't resolve specific bullying instances - this needs to be addressed with the young people involved.



**It took me a long time to get my confidence back – Years really. I still think about it.**  
– Darren, 26



# Cyberbullying

**Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person.**

Cyberbullying takes different forms, which can be harder to detect or less obviously associated with bullying than others.

## It can include

### Threats and intimidation

Through comments on websites, gaming platforms, social media sites or message boards, emails, mobile phones and so on.

### Insults and remarks

Sending inappropriate or hurtful text messages, emails, instant messages, or posting personal information or videos designed to hurt or embarrass someone else.

### Public posts

Includes photos, messages, or pages that don't get taken down, even after being asked to do so. This might include resharing the target's posts.

### Harassment or stalking

Repeated and unwanted texting, messaging or online stalking, which may be an extension of offline harassment.

### Exclusion

Online exclusion may be harder to detect but can include not being friends with someone on a social networking site. It could also be young people arranging to meet and then changing plans at the last minute.

### Identify thefts

Hacking into someone's accounts to copy files, steal information, harass or humiliate. They may set up fake identities, delete information or impersonate someone.

### Manipulation

Putting pressure on someone to share private information or pushing for physical meetings.

Cyberbullying is anything that gets posted online and is deliberately intended to hurt.

## Anytime, anywhere and anonymous

Cyberbullying can be fast-paced and involve lots of young people. It can take place at any time and be introduced into spaces that might've previously seemed personal and safe. Cyberbullying sometimes means the bully remains anonymous too.

Those involved in cyberbullying usually know each other, and it's often an extension of bullying that's happening in school or other places. It's becoming more common for young people to experience cyberbullying as they now have access to mobile phones and other technology at a younger age and may not always know how to behave appropriately or safely online.

Sometimes cyberbullying can be unintentional. It may be a shared photo or video that someone's embarrassed by, or a joke that's actually quite offensive. But if it still hurts someone, then it'll need to be addressed.

## What to do if a young person shares they're being bullied in school, online or in the wider community

Your role is to listen, help them consider their options including who might be able to help, and raise any concerns to the relevant people. For example, if the young person's been harmed or is at risk of harm, you should follow the Yellow Card and report this to the Safeguarding Team.

You can also give them and/or their parents and carers details of organisations who can offer additional support (see page 13).

# Cyberbullying help: Advice to give young people

Always report bullying, whether it's happening online or face-to-face. You can report bullying online through social networking sites using their report buttons and safety centres. If you're being bullied at school, or Scouts, talk to a trusted adult like a teacher or volunteer.

## Things to remember when dealing with cyberbullying

- It's not your fault. Anyone can be a target of cyberbullying.
- Get help. Talk to someone you trust and report harmful behaviour through the social network or gaming site.
- Avoid reacting. It's more likely to blow over quicker if you don't respond. You may want to block or mute those who are causing you harm.
- Take a break. This may be hard, but taking some time out and doing something else you enjoy will make you feel better.
- Recognise when you may be involved in a bullying situation. Think before you share or like content that's harmful to others. Stop and think and encourage others to do the same.

## Speak out

There are lots of different ways to cope with bullying, but the important first step is to tell someone. You might not feel ready to talk to an adult, but you could speak to a friend. They could then support you to:

1. Tell an adult you trust
2. Contact ChildLine and share with them
3. Block the bullies
4. Keep the evidence
5. Report any videos, pictures, comments or pages to the website you found them on.

## Some final thoughts...

All adults at Scouts have a vital role to play in creating safe and respectful environments, role modelling behaviour, and supporting young people to have positive relationships with each another.

Remember, you may be the one person they can turn to, whether in Scouts, school or the wider community. Young people should feel confident about talking to any adults in Scouts about anything that's causing them concern. We'll make sure they're heard and deal with the situation fairly and consistently.

# Where can I find help?

## UK HQ Safeguarding Team

In Scouts, the welfare of children and young people is our priority. Everyone has a duty to report safeguarding concerns to the UK HQ Safeguarding Team. Use the reporting form on the Scouts website to report the concern to the Safeguarding Team. Include as much information as possible.

You can also call +44(0)20 8433 7164 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday) or email [safeguarding@scouts.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@scouts.org.uk). In an emergency outside 9am to 5pm, you can contact the Safeguarding Team by calling the Scouts Support Centre on +44(0)345 300 1818.

[scouts.org.uk](https://scouts.org.uk)

## ChildLine

Young people can call free, at any time, for information and confidential advice about all problems, including bullying on 0800 1111. [childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk) offers information, advice and true stories about bullying and 1-to-1 live online chats with a counsellor.

[childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk)

## Kidscape

Advice and support on bullying. This includes a Parent Advice Line and free workshops for 9-16 year olds who are experiencing bullying.

[kidscape.org.uk](https://kidscape.org.uk)

## NSPCC

Adults who need advice and support about a child or young person can call the NSPCC helpline free on 0808 800 5000. There's also information and advice about bullying on:

[learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/bullying](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/bullying)

## Bullying UK (part of Family Lives)

Advice and support for bullying.  
Helpline: 0808 800 2222

[familylives.org.uk/advice/bullying](https://familylives.org.uk/advice/bullying)

## Ditch the Label

Advice and support for 12–25 year olds on mental health, bullying, identity and relationships.

[ditchthelabel.org](https://ditchthelabel.org)

## Thinkuknow

Thinkuknow has resources for young people, adults and parents/carers about staying safe online. There's also a place which anyone can use to report if they feel uncomfortable or worried about someone they're chatting with online.

[thinkuknow.co.uk](https://thinkuknow.co.uk)

## Internet Matters

Helping parents/carers keep young people safe online.

[internetmatters.org](https://internetmatters.org)

## Report Harmful Content

Supporting under 18s to report harmful content online.

[reportharmfulcontent.com](https://reportharmfulcontent.com)



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County: Although in some parts of the British Isles Scout Counties are known as Areas or Islands - and in one case Bailiwick - for ease of reading this publication simply refers to County/ Counties. In Scotland there is no direct equivalent to County or Area.

In Scotland, Scouting is organised into Districts and Regions, each with distinct responsibilities. Some 'County' functions are the responsibility of Scottish Regions, whilst others lie with Scottish Districts. The focus of responsibility is outlined in Scottish variations from POR.