

Anti-bullying and harassment

IPA regards bullying and harassment as unacceptable. Children have a right to play in an environment which is free from fear and intimidation. Firm action will be taken whenever it occurs: maintaining a strong stance against bullying helps to create a positive, caring and healthy play environment where individuals are respected and feel secure in a way which enhances personal and social development.

Any allegation of bullying made against a member of IPA's staff will be dealt with via the child protection procedure if it involves inappropriate physical contact with a child and via the line management system otherwise (eg: verbal harassment or intimidation).

Bullying is defined as deliberately hurtful behaviour that is repeated over a period of time, against which it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. It is important to remember that not all conflicts involve bullying; when children with the same power, numbers and strength fight or argue from time to time, this is not bullying. Bullying occurs when a person is made to feel unhappy by one or more people.

Playworkers need to be aware of the many different ways in which a child can be bullied or harassed:

- **Verbal** - name-calling, taunting, teasing, gossiping and humiliating.
- **Physical** - violence: hitting, kicking, pushing, pinching etc.
- **Psychological** - being spoken to in a demeaning way or being pressured to conform or do things.
- **Social** - isolation, rude gestures, exclusion from groups.
- **Material** - having possessions stolen, damaged or extortion taking place.
- **Virtual** - when the harassment is perpetuated through texting, email or other virtual means

The most common form of bullying is name-calling; the next most common is being physically hurt or threatened. Whilst teasing and name-calling can sometimes be intended - at least initially - to be taken as a joke, staff need to be aware of how quickly and easily such behaviour can escalate and cross over the line into bullying. Such behaviour should always be tackled at an early stage.

A failure to challenge bullying behaviour can lead children to see bullying as a quick and easy solution to getting what they want.

Note: Bullying can have a racist, sexist, religious or homophobic focus and in these cases it is important to tackle openly the issues surrounding the bullying as well as the behaviour itself. This same approach should also be taken in instances where the bullying is focused on disability.

Playworkers should aim to raise awareness of IPA's anti-bullying ethos by:

- Opening up discussions: allowing children to talk about their feelings and concerns in a safe environment, and to enable them to share concerns about bullying.
- Helping children to feel comfortable: they are able to tell staff about any concerns they have with regard to bullying.
- Adults leading by example, and always demonstrating basic good manners.

To really help prevent the spread of bullying, there must be support for **all** children involved in any incident. The needs of the bully and the bullied should always be taken into account; it is often the case that a child who bullies in one situation may be a victim in another. The focus must be to solve the problem rather than necessarily to punish the bully.

Staff response to bullying:

- Act firmly - and *be seen* to act firmly - against bullying whenever it occurs.
- Bullying behaviour must be taken seriously, and action needs to be taken as early as possible.
- Make it clear to both parties that you disapprove of what the bully has done.
- Don't make premature assumptions - listen carefully to all accounts, providing a forum so that all parties can express their point of view.
- Offer support to both parties: the needs and problems of all the children involved are important.
- Avoid blame wherever possible, particularly in the early stages of dealing with the situation as it tends to cause defensiveness and a breakdown in communication. Reassure the victim, and do as much as you can to empower them (the child may prefer that this be done confidentially).
- Encourage the bully to see the victim's point of view, and discuss the impact and consequences of their behaviour.
- Encourage children not to be passive and not to accept bullying behaviour, whether they themselves are being bullied or they see someone else being bullied.
- Share information with other members of staff.
- It is important to reinforce the anti-bullying ethos through discussions.
- New children need to be informed about the anti-bullying ethos and be made aware of what they can do if they feel that they or someone else is being bullied or harassed.
- Record the details of any serious incidents and the action that was taken on an incident report form.

When involving parents:

- It is better done constructively rather than as punishment.
- Be careful with the language you use when dealing with sensitive issues: for example, say "it seems your son/daughter and the other child have not been getting on very well lately" rather than "your son/daughter has been bullying the other child".
- An automatic assumption of blame or an accusation is much more likely to make the parent react defensively and make it much harder to reach a solution.
- Confidentiality must be observed when dealing with issues of bullying, as an accusation of harassment can create problems between families and is potentially defamatory. As a general rule, you should avoid naming the bully when discussing the matter with the family of the child who has been bullied.

Lead Workers on IPA sites need to:

- Ensure that staff management procedures prohibit all discrimination and harassment, and investigate any concerns when this is suspected of failing.
- Ensure that all allegations of personal discrimination or harassment are dealt with seriously and swiftly in line with organisational procedures, and evaluate the nature, frequency, and the suitability of actions taken in response to incidents.