



One minute guide

Bullying

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What is bullying, and what do we know about bullying in Leeds?

There is no legal definition of bullying. However, it's usually defined as behaviour that is: repeated; intended to hurt someone either emotionally or physically; and/ or often aimed at certain groups, for example due to race, religion, gender or sexuality. Bullying can include: teasing, making threats, name calling, cyberbullying and physical incidents.

Some schools use the useful mnemonic of '**STOP**' (Several Times On Purpose) to distinguish bullying from the one-off or accidental hurting of a child. Bullying can take several forms; some are obvious e.g. name-calling or threats, while others are more subtle and harder to identify immediately e.g. exclusion, or a particular look or sign that conveys meaning. The focus of some bullying can be specific e.g. racist or homophobic, or predicated on any discernible difference e.g. body shape or disability. More detailed descriptions of types of bullying can be found at the websites of the [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#) and [Childline](#).

Leeds runs the [My Health, My School](#) pupil perceptions survey annually, with thousands of responses from children in key stages two, three and four, as well as separate surveys for post-16 and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Questions about bullying elicited the following data for the 2023/24 survey:

- Around 60% (across all key stages) of children reported no bullying over the previous twelve months, with key stage three showing the lowest figure for no bullying (54.5%) and also the highest figure for children reporting being bullied most/ every day (6.4%).
- Between 76% and 83% of respondents (across all key stages) reported knowing where to get help or advice in relation to bullying.

Listening to the voices of children and young people, [Child Friendly Leeds \(CFL\)](#) Wish Four focuses on celebrating differences and diversity and addressing the bullying and discrimination that children and young people face. There is more information available on the [CFL website](#).

What is cyber bullying?

Cyberbullying (also called 'online bullying') is bullying and harassment using digital technology. It occurs when a person or group uses the internet, social media, online games, messaging platforms, or other digital channels to threaten, tease, upset, or humiliate someone.

Cyberbullying is a serious concern, with many children and parents reporting incidents. As digital technology continues to evolve, so do the ways in which cyberbullying can occur, making it essential for schools, families, and communities to promote online safety and digital wellbeing.

What does the law say?

Some forms of bullying are illegal and should be reported to police. These include: violence or assault; theft; repeated harassment or intimidation, such as abusive name-calling, threatening phone calls, emails, or text messages; and hate crimes (targeting specific groups based on characteristics such as race, religion, disability, sexuality, or gender identity)

Under [Section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006](#), all state schools must have a behaviour policy that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. This policy is set by the school, and all teachers, pupils, and parents must be informed of it. While not a legal requirement, good practice suggests that schools should involve staff, pupils, and parents in shaping the policy and its implementation. Additionally, schools must comply with **anti-discrimination laws** under the [Equality Act 2010](#). This means staff have a legal duty to take action to prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation within the school environment.

What should practitioners do if they suspect bullying?

In schools, staff should respond to bullying based on the seriousness of the situation. This may involve handling the matter internally, using the school's behaviour policy, or escalating it to the police and/ or social work services when necessary. Any sanctions applied should take into account any special educational needs or disabilities the pupils involved may have.

If a practitioner is concerned about bullying or if a child reports bullying, they should:

- Discuss the issue with a colleague, line manager, or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL);
- Access the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies to understand the next steps; and
- Ensure the issue is referred to an appropriate manager, and arrange to review the actions and situation in the coming days or weeks.

What support is available for children experiencing bullying?

There are various people children and young people can approach for support:

- A teacher or member of staff, such as a learning mentor or teaching assistant. It can be difficult for a child to approach an adult, as they may worry it could make the bullying worse or because adults may not always be available privately.
- Parents or carers are often able to understand the child better, communicate concerns clearly to those in authority, and oversee any actions taken to address the situation.
- Friends can offer advice, provide protection, and help the student feel less isolated.
- The school council may play a role in upholding school rules and codes of behaviour and can be a supportive avenue for students.

In Leeds, schools have staff who can support children through one-on-one sessions, small group interventions, or [restorative practices](#). These interventions can benefit both victims and those involved in bullying. If further support is needed, schools can refer students to the Cluster's Support and Guidance meeting, where a multi-professional team, including mental health support, can offer guidance.

Other ways to seek support in Leeds include:

- [Time for young people](#) is an emotional wellbeing support space for young people.
- Their GP may be able to refer them for emotional health counselling and support.
- The [MindMate website](#), the dedicated site for emotional wellbeing and mental health support in Leeds, includes a '[worried about bullying](#)' page with advice and helplines. MindMate offers resources for both young people and those supporting them.

Relevant national organisations include the following, which offer advice and support for both children and adults concerned about bullying:

- [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#);
- [National Bullying Helpline](#);
- [Childline](#);
- [The Diana Award](#);
- [Internet Matters](#);
- [Kidscape](#);
- [The UK Safer Internet Centre](#);
- [Childnet](#) - online safety for children and young people; and
- [UK Council for Child Internet Safety \(UKCCIS\)](#)