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How bullying can affect mental health and well-being?

This leaflet will focus on how bullying can affect mental health and well-being and contains sources available to those that suffer any of the above.

What is mental health?

Everyone has mental health in the same way they have physical health, which make mental health issues common amongst the population.

Defining mental health includes your psychological, emotional and social well-being which affects how you feel, act and think, which also determines how you make choices, handle stress and how you relate to others.

Sources of Support for bullying:

For children and young people, help can be provided by calling Childline on 0800 1111 or at their website <https://www.childline.org.uk/> (Childline, No date).

For adults concerned about a child, help can be provided by calling 0808 800 5000 or at their website <https://www.nspcc.org.uk> (NSPCC, No date b).

For children aged between 9 and 16, Kidscape is available at 020 7730 3300 or at their website <https://www.kidscape.org.uk/> (Kidscape, No date).

MIND is a registered charity supporting mental health, available at <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Therefore, mental health will be important at every stage of your life, within childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Contributing factors to mental health issues could include:

- * Family history of mental health issues, for example, bipolar, depression, dementia
- * Life experiences, for example, abuse, neglect or trauma
- * Biological factors, for example, brain chemistry or genes

Signs of mental health issues could include a change in behaviours and feelings, such as:

- * Having little or no energy
- * Feeling numb, hopeless, helpless and as if nothing matters
- * Overeating or undereating, and oversleeping or under-sleeping
- * Feeling alone, unable to perform normal tasks (MentalHealth.gov, 2017).

What is well-being?

Well-being can be defined in several ways which is seen by different dictionaries and organisations. The Collins Dictionary states it is *'the condition of being contented, healthy or successful'* (HarperCollins Publishers, No date), and the English Oxford Living Dictionary states it is *'the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Additionally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) have revealed that mental health can be a state of well-being as mental health is often defined as:

'A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community' (WHO, 2014). Therefore, being unable

to have a positive concept of mental health, can negatively affect well-being.

What is bullying?

Although there is no legal existing definition of bullying, bullying can occur at any time in an individual's life, whether they are in school, work, or on social media, causing short or long-term effects on an individual. Bullying however is defined as:

'behaviour that is repeated, intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally, and often aimed at certain groups, for example because of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation' (GOV.UK, No date).

How are people bullied?

Bullying is also considered as any form of *'physical assault, teasing, making threats, name calling, cyberbullying – bullying via mobile phone or online (for example email, social networks and instant messenger)'* (GOV.UK, 2017).

Cyberbullying:

The increase in social media over the past decade, has made it easier for people to be bullied over the internet, known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can cause an individual to feel distressed, alone and isolated in their own home, somewhere they should feel safe. Depending on the reason someone is being bullied, for example, their appearance, it can make them feel embarrassed and unable to confide in someone, in fear of being judged.

Some signs of being cyberbullied can be:

- * Personality change such as depression, anger and upset
- * Low self-esteem and self-confidence
- * A change in appearance, for example, sudden weight loss to fit in
- * Being alone majority of the time and withdrawing from family and friends

- * Hesitant in allowing family members to use their electronical devices (BullyingUK, No date).

Cyberbullying can occur publicly or privately, including abusive texts, videos, images and post indented to deliberately exclude and cause harm to others online by spreading rumours or gossip (NCAB, No date).

Verbal bullying

Verbal bullying could include anything from insulting, intimidating, teasing, name calling or verbally abusing someone, and racist or homophobic comments towards another individual. Although to the person commenting it may be in a joking manner, it is not always received in that way, for example, something that started as harmless fun, can escalate to affecting an individual's mental health and state of well-being (NCAB, No date).

Physical bullying

Physical could include anything from kicking, pushing or shoving, hitting, pinching, punching, or purposely damaging someone's property (NCAB, No date).

Social bullying

Social bullying can be harder to recognised as it could occur behind someone's back because the sole purpose is to harm, target and humiliate an individual's social reputation. Types of social bullying could include:

- * Spreading malicious rumours
- * Making embarrassing jokes intending to humiliate someone
- * Social excluding someone and encouraging others to participate
- * Negatively affecting an individual's social reputation (NCAB, No date).

How many people suffer from bullying?

Statistics within the UK:

The recent 2016 Bullying Survey,

that questioned 8,850 young people across the country aged between 12 and 20 who attend school and college, found that 1.5 million young people had experienced being bullied within that year, with 145,800 of these experiencing daily bullying. The survey revealed that those who have been bullied are almost twice as likely to be a perpetrator of bullying others, along with twice the number of boys as girls are bullies which is the equivalent of 66% of boys and 31% of girls. Additionally, the percentage of respondents revealing to being bullied were 57% of females and 44% of males, along with 59% of those who identify within the trans community, with 24% of these admitting to bullying another individual. The survey further revealed that 20% of young people have physically attacked another individual, 44% who have suffered from bullying experience depression, 41% experience social anxiety, and 33% experience

suicidal thoughts (Ditch the Label, 2016).

How many people who are bullied suffer mental health issues?

With around one in four, the equivalent to around 450 million people suffering mental health or neurological disorders in their life, declaring mental health disorders as one of the leading causes of disability and ill-health worldwide, bullying could be a contributing factor (WHO, 2001). Studies have connected bullying with higher risk of mental health issues in childhood causing poor school performance and low self-esteem. Evidence has shown that children who have been bullied within their childhood can make them more prone to suffer from depression and other mental health related issues within adulthood. Researchers from King's College in London followed 7,771 children from aged seven until aged 50 who were born in 1958 and revealed that those who were bullied as children were at a higher risk

of suffering health issues as anxiety and depression and suffered a lower quality of life at aged 50 (BBC News, 2014).

Another study of 1,400 participants between the ages of nine and 26 by Warwick University, revealed that bullying had negative long-term affects on their relationships, health and job prospects. They revealed that more than a quarter of children aged seven and eleven had experienced occasional bullying and 15% admitted to being frequently bullied.

Further tests later in life revealed that children who experienced bullying as a child would experience poorer mental and physical health and cognitive functioning at aged 50 (BBC News, 2014).

It is sometimes easy for people to question why someone has not spoken out about being bullied, but a survey by Statista, shown in the graph below, revealed reasons for not doing so. For example, feeling embarrassed, feeling like nobody would care or

would not be taken seriously, or are in fear of making the situation worse. Therefore, having the adequate support in place, could potentially make individuals who suffer from bullying feel more confident in sharing their concerns.

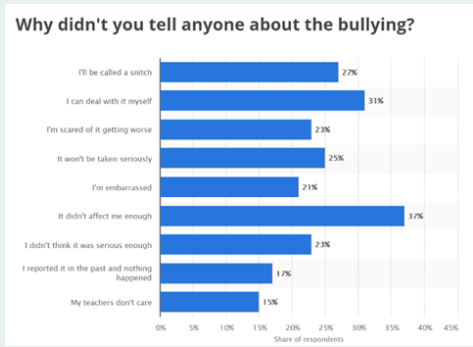


Figure.1: Why didn't you tell anyone about the bullying? (Statista, 2017).

Policy:

The Welsh Government acknowledged that governing bodies, by law, must have policies in place to prevent all forms of bullying within schools, to improve the happiness and safety of the pupils, emphasising that aggressive and bullying behaviour is unacceptable. Having a primary focus on changing

the mentality of bullies will be beneficial by having positive effects within and outside of school. They have recognised that parental support is key in having successful impacts regarding anti-bullying approaches, which could include:

- * Having school concerts or drama's that parents are welcome to attend, that demonstrating possible consequences of how bullying can affect someone
- * Providing accurate information about the long-term effects of bullying
- * Effective communication between pupils, parents and members of staff (Welsh Government, 2017).

What services / organisations are available for those who suffer from being bullied or suffer mental health illness?

The National Bullying helpline is the UK's 'only charitable organisation addressing Adult Bullying and Child Bullying' (NBH, No date).

This helpline was established in 2003 and became the first UK helpline providing support by qualified professionals to children and adults suffering from bullying. This helpline became a registered Charity after being launched between 2007 and 2011, and since 2012 has become a Voluntary Organisation, and a member of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NBH, No date).

The NSPCC are a charity to prevent child cruelty and have researched into the effects of bullying on children. They have collected data which revealed that 'there were over 24,000 Childline counselling sessions with children about bullying in 2016/17' (NSPCC, No date a), 'more than 16,000 young people are absent from school due to bullying' (NSPCC, No date a), and 'nearly half of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people have been bullied for being LGBT at school' (NSPCC, No date a), indicating that bullying is an ongoing issue.

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