

**stop sexual  
bullying**

**Preventing violence, Promoting equality  
Act now**





## What are ‘gender equality’ and ‘sexual bullying’?

**What is gender?** It is important to understand that ‘gender’ is more than just biology: it is something we learn from those around us, who present us with their understanding of what it means to be a girl or a boy. Most of us see the following as stereotypes but, at the same time, find ourselves accepting them and rarely challenge them:

- ‘Boys are just more aggressive than girls’
- ‘Girls like to shop and boys like to play football’
- ‘Boys are better at science and girls are better at English’
- ‘Boys don’t cry and girls are bitchy’
- ‘Women are better at looking after children than men’

Many young men feel they have to be good at sport and should not show or talk about their feelings. While

many young women feel they are judged mainly by how they look, and feel they should be very girly or feminine to be attractive. People assume girls and boys think and act like this because of their biological differences. However, these biological differences do not mean that these stereotypes are true! It is the way the media and others around us talk about what it is to be male or female that makes us think these differences in abilities and characteristics are true.

**What is gender inequality?** Although many of us are told we can achieve anything and be anything we want, being male or female will affect many of the choices we are offered and the decisions we take about our lives. Today, men and women are still not equal.

- Women’s average pay is 21% less than men’s<sup>1</sup>
- White British, working class young men are least likely to do well at school<sup>2</sup>
- Girls and young women are more likely to be physically, emotionally or sexually hurt.<sup>3</sup>



# Introduction

**This guide aims to explain what sexual bullying means and why sexual bullying happens — because of gender inequality. The guide also hopes to support young people to play an active role in making their school a safer, more equal place.**

You might be a peer mentor, a Prefect, class rep, on your School Council, or interested in this issue. Whether you have a formal responsibility within your school or simply want to get involved in some way, you can use this guide, which was developed with young people who are already challenging bullying and violence in their schools and communities, to:

- E**xhibit a statement that you write about sexual bullying round the school — see page 9
- Q**uestion what others think about, and their experiences of, sexual bullying using the survey on pages 6-7
- U**nderstand and help others to learn about what the terms ‘gender inequality’ and ‘sexual bullying’ mean — see pages 2-3
- A**sk a member of staff what is already happening to stop sexual bullying in your school — see page 7
- L**ead a peer mentor group to support students experiencing sexual bullying — see the examples on page 10
- I**nspire staff and students to do something about sexual bullying
- T**each a lesson (with support from peers and staff) about sexual bullying for other students — see page 8
- Y**ou can make a difference, for other ideas — see page 5

**What is sexual bullying?** It includes a range of behaviours such as sexualised name-calling and verbal abuse, rubbishing sexual performance, ridiculing physical appearance, criticising sexual behaviour, spreading rumours about someone’s sexuality or sexual experiences they have had or not had, unwanted touching and physical assault.<sup>4</sup> Sexual bullying is behaviour which is repeated over time and intends to hurt someone by using that person’s gender, sexuality or sexual (in)experience to hurt them.

Research suggests girls and young women are more likely to experience sexual bullying, but many young men also report being judged and ridiculed for being ‘gay’, a ‘sissy’, not ‘hard’ enough, not sexually active.<sup>5</sup>

***‘You have to show how masculine you are; you can’t show sensitivity — it is difficult to be different — you need to look and act a certain way’  
(young man, Year 11)***

## **GROUND RULES**

**Remember — when talking about bullying, violence, discrimination or other experiences which people might find upsetting or make them feel uncomfortable — you should lay down some ground rules!**

- *Treat people the way that you would want to be treated — with respect.*
- *Don’t promise to keep something someone tells you confidential — if you are concerned that someone in your school may be being hurt or is at risk of being hurt — you need to tell a member of staff.*
- *Listen — give others the space and time to tell you what they think and about their experiences.*
- *At the back of this guide there is a list of good support services — if you or someone else needs to talk to someone about their experiences or any concerns they have about someone else — they can help.*

# What we know

4 Many young women tell us that they experience sexist name-calling — or are inappropriately touched (sometimes every day!):

*The problem with boys, yeah, is that they always want hugs — but when they hug you they feel you* (Young woman, Yr 8)

*Some boys talk about rude things: 'Oh, would you do this to me'...or they text you, maybe when you're at home — or in class* (Young woman, Yr 9)

*I had to sit next to [this boy] in my lessons — he was touching up my leg* (Young woman, Yr 10)

*I have seen groups of boys call a girl a 'dog' as they walk past* (Young woman, Yr 11)

**Young men experience a lot of pressure to be 'masculine':**

*You have to show how masculine you are; you can't show sensitivity — it is difficult to be different — you need to look and act a certain way* (Young man, Yr 11)

*Some boys do have a positive side — they are friendly with you but when they go with their boys...they want to be bad boys and that — they say 'boys before ho's'.* (Young woman, Yr 10)

**Not all young people understand what gender inequality and sexual bullying is or understands how upsetting, harmful and serious it is:**

*[The boys] mean it as a joke, but they don't understand how it affects us.* (Young woman, Yr 10)

*You do hear the word slut — it's used as a joke but sometimes it's used to hurt.* (Young man, Yr 11)

**Some young people say they feel able to say 'stop' when someone tries to (sexually) touch them or calls them names. Others say they might slap someone to make them stop. But a significant number of young people say they do not have the confidence to challenge this kind of behaviour. And many young people say they would be seen as 'grassing' if they told an adult — or that they would be made fun of for taking things too seriously.**

*Young woman: You are scared of saying things... can't trust teachers*  
*Young woman: My Form Tutors are friends — they will sit in the staff-room and talk about it coz all teachers are like that*  
*Young woman: It's never going to stop [the way the boys treat you]; but if you told the teachers — [the boys] might, like, get more vicious over it, might do it more to wind you up*  
(Yr 9, single-sex group discussion)

## Make a difference

- ✓ **Challenge or report any incidents of sexual bullying that you see** – BUT make sure that you feel safe to do so, and tell someone at school whom you trust.
- ✓ **Challenge statements that stereotype** young men and women.
- ✓ **Develop your understanding** of sexual bullying and gender inequality by reading this guide and looking at some of the suggested resources.
- ✓ **Use the school statement** on page 9 to let all students know what sexual bullying is. Ask the school to display it prominently in places like the canteen, the toilets, the reception area, the main notice board, the school newsletter and website – and even in all classrooms at your school.
- ✓ **Talk to other people about sexual bullying:** what it is, how often it happens in the school – and explain that it is a serious issue that needs to be discussed and acted on.

- ✓ **Fill out a short questionnaire** with others in your school/class/Year and present the findings to the School Council, Head of Year, PSHE Co-ordinator (use the questionnaire on pages 6-7 of this guide).
- ✓ Ask to talk about the **'This is abuse' website** in PSHE or Form time (<http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk/>)
- ✓ Ask your **School Council** to discuss whether challenging sexual bullying – and making the school a more equal place – should become a priority for them. Perhaps suggest they form a sub-group to lead the work?
- ✓ Get your **peer mentors** to think about whether they need training on sexual bullying. Could they add this to their responsibilities?
- ✓ Run a **school campaign** to stop sexual bullying.

**Do you and your peers have any other ideas which you could act on?**

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# What about sexual bullying and gender inequality in your school?

You could complete one of the following questionnaires on your own or with a group of other students.

## About this questionnaire

When answering these questions think about any experiences you've had of sexual bullying and gender discrimination and/or how you feel about them.

THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS & CONFIDENTIAL, so don't write your name on it. No one will find out what you've put down. Only answer those questions you feel comfortable answering.

## The questions

**1. Are you female or male?**

Female

Male

**2. Do you feel that you need to conform to particular ways of acting like and being a girl or a boy?**

(tick 'yes' or 'no' for each option below)

YES

NO

People think it is a bit strange if you play football & you are a girl

Boys feel pressure to act 'hard' and not show their true selves

Boys who have sex with different girls are called players and pimps

But, if girls act in the same way they get called sluts

Boys who are quiet, work hard and don't get into fights are seen as 'poofs'

**3. Are boys and girls treated equally?** (tick 'yes' or 'no' for each option below)

At school – by teachers?

At school – by each other?

At home?

**4. How often have you been called any of the following?** (tick one option only)

Never   hardly ever   sometimes   often   all the time

Boys – Gay (meant in a derogatory way)?

Girls - A slut or slag?

**5. Have you ever experienced the following at school?** (tick 'yes' or 'no' for each statement below)

For boys to answer:

A girl slapping you on the head or face

A girl punching you on the arm or poking you in the ribs

- |   | <b>YES</b>               | <b>NO</b>                |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>For girls to answer:</i>   |                          |                          |
| A boy coming up behind you and putting his arms around your waist                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A boy touching you sexually when you don't want him to  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A boy slapping your backside  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A boy touching your breasts   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>6. Is it ever acceptable for a boy to expect to have sex with a girl if she 'comes on to him'?</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>7. Do you know anyone who has been hit by their girlfriend or boyfriend?</b>                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>8. Do you know anyone who has been pressurised to have sex with his or her boyfriend/girlfriend?</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>9. What could your school do to make it a fairer, safer and more equal place for boys and girls?</b> |                          |                          |

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FILL OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

## Ask the staff at your school...

1. Is sexual bullying mentioned and defined in the school anti-bullying policy?  
Or do we have a separate anti-sexual-bullying policy?
2. How is an incident of sexual bullying dealt with at the school?
  - Do students know when and how to report an incident?
  - Is there a shared understanding of what behaviours might be sexual bullying?
  - Are incidents of sexual bullying managed in the same way by all staff?
3. Do school students learn about respectful relationships through PSHE or in other lessons?
4. Does the school celebrate International Women's Day (8 March) or the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November)?
5. What training have the staff had about violence in intimate relationships – spotting the signs; supporting young people experiencing/affected by violence; talking to young people about the issues?
6. Is there equal attention paid to young men and women who are not achieving, or are young men the focus of such initiatives? If so, why?
7. Does the school have a Gender Equality scheme? Were students consulted on it? If not – why?
8. Could the school run some self-defence classes for girls and women?

## Is this sexual bullying?

People have different ideas about bullying, especially sexual bullying. We hear young people saying that it is just a joke. Take some time to think through the scenarios below and decide if they are always, sometimes or never sexual bullying. This will help you think of other scenarios where sexual bullying is a serious and harmful issue. For example:

- Is commenting on someone's body **never** sexual bullying?
- Is trying to look up a girl's skirt — or even taking a photo up a girl's skirt — **always** sexual bullying?

|  | Sexual bullying |           |       |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-------|
|  | Always          | Sometimes | Never |
| 1 Commenting on someone's body   |                 |           |       |
| 2 Commenting on the way someone dresses/their personal appearance                  |                 |           |       |
| 3 Making fun of a young man who wants to take 'Textiles' as a subject              |                 |           |       |
| 4 Making jokes about sex   |                 |           |       |
| 5 Making remarks about someone's sexual behaviour                                  |                 |           |       |
| 6 Calling someone a slag   |                 |           |       |
| 7 Calling someone gay  |                 |           |       |
| 8 Boys' teams having better facilities/opportunities to participate in tournaments |                 |           |       |
| 9 Looking at page 3 of The Sun   |                 |           |       |
| 10 Trying to look up or take a photo up a girl's skirt                             |                 |           |       |
| 11 Graffiti about other students in the toilets                                    |                 |           |       |
| 12 Spreading round pornographic photos of someone                                  |                 |           |       |

## Run a session on how to stop sexual bullying

You could work with a teacher and a small group of students to deliver a session on sexual bullying. Make sure that you spend time with the teacher beforehand to talk through the exercise and be prepared for all sorts of questions! This is our suggested outline for how to run a session. Using the scenarios and questions listed above, you should be able to get people to talk about which behaviours might be seen as sexual bullying. You will find that people have different opinions — this should stimulate discussion.

1. Divide the room into three areas: 'Always', 'Sometimes', 'Never'.
2. Read out each of the behaviours listed on the sheet, one at a time, and ask the students to move to the part of the room which best matches their view.
3. You will probably find that most students congregate in the 'sometimes' area. So get them to discuss why this is, and to suggest additional details that might make them move into another part of the room.
4. They should (eventually!) agree that how you understand a behaviour depends on the intention of the person doing it — and on the impact it has on the person it is directed at.
5. After this exercise ask the class to define sexual bullying. Write this on the board. You could also ask them to discuss whether there is equality between men and women, and how this might be linked to sexual bullying.
6. Then give everybody a copy of the official school statement on sexual bullying. If there isn't one, why not write one together (using the example on page 9 to help you).

## Exhibit a ‘school statement’

Why don't you develop a 'statement' about making your school a safe and equal place? Work with staff and students to agree a statement to be displayed prominently in the school. This statement could also be incorporated into an updated anti-bullying, equality or behaviour policy. This will make students and staff take sexual bullying and gender inequality seriously.

**We will work together to create a school where girls and boys, men and women are equal. One of the first steps towards achieving this is to say ‘no’ to sexual bullying.**

At ..... school (insert the name of your school) we do not tolerate sexual bullying.

### We define sexual bullying as:

Any bullying behaviour, whether physical or non-physical, that is based on a person's sexuality or gender. It is when sexuality or gender is used as a weapon by boys or girls. It can be carried out to a person's face, behind their back, or by use of technology. Some examples of sexual bullying include:

- Using words that refer to someone's sexuality as a general put-down (like calling something ‘gay’ to mean that it is not very good)
- Using sexual words to put someone down (like calling someone a ‘slut’)
- Making threats or jokes about serious and frightening subjects like rape
- Gossiping and spreading rumours about someone's sexuality and sex life – including graffiti
- Touching someone in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable
- Touching parts of someone's body that they don't want you to touch
- Forcing someone to act in a sexual way. (This is very serious – and illegal)

### WE KNOW IT'S IMPORTANT TO:

- **Define what sexual bullying is** so that people can name it when it happens
- Have **clear reporting structures** in the school so that people know where to seek support – and feel confident that sexual bullying or discrimination will be consistently challenged
- Ensure that **sexual bullying is understood** as a gender-equality issue that impacts on boys and girls, women and men



## Lead a peer-mentoring group

By leading a peer-mentoring group at school you can provide practical support to students who experience sexual bullying. Here are some examples of what students at two schools in England have been doing.

### **Anti-sexual-bullying peer mentors**

- At a school in the North West, around 20 peer mentors are recruited every year – at the end of Year 9.
- They apply by writing a statement explaining why they'd be good at peer mentoring.
- They receive training in dealing with sexual bullying, and peer mentoring. They wear 'peer mentor' badges and their photographs are displayed on a notice board.
- Their work includes:
  - asking fellow students to fill out questionnaires on their attitudes to and experiences of sexual bullying;
  - putting on assemblies and PSHE sessions on sexual bullying; and
  - mediating between pupils when there is an incident.

**These two examples show just what a valuable role anti-sexual-bullying peer mentors can play:**

- 1. A young man in Year 8 was calling two girls in his year 'lesbos', so two of the mentors held a session with him about appropriate/inappropriate language and behaviour.**
- 2. A young man and woman were found together in a school toilet – two mentors did a session with them on appropriate/inappropriate behaviour at school.**

### **Young women peer-mentoring team and young women-only groups**

- In a North London school a group of young women from Years 8-10 are recruited every year to become peer mentors.
- The group receives training from an expert in sexual bullying and violence against women and girls.
- The young women peer mentors get special sweatshirts and make themselves available to mediate in incidents that they observe, or are reported to them in person or via the school's bullying-logging system.
- They deliver their own PowerPoint presentation on abusive relationships as part of their Year's PSHE programme.
- Once a week the young women come together to have lunch and discuss issues with a group facilitator.



*As one young woman explained,  
sexual bullying is:  
'Groping, grabbing, insults, swear words,  
stereotypical gender roles,  
when appearance and sexuality  
are demonised.'*

## Support services

**Childline** 0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Free 24-hour domestic-violence helpline**

T: 0808 2000 247

**National Rape Crisis helpline**

T: 0808 802 9999

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

**National Victim Support Helpline**

T: 0845 30 30 900

[www.victimsupport.org](http://www.victimsupport.org)

**Respect helpline** for those who inflict domestic violence. T: 0845 122 8609

[www.respectphonenumber.org.uk](http://www.respectphonenumber.org.uk)

**Men's Advice Line** for male victims of domestic violence. T: 0808 801 0327

[www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)

**Broken Rainbow** for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people experiencing abuse.

T: 0300 999 LGBT (5428)

[www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)

## Useful websites

<http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk>

[www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

[www.hideout.org.uk](http://www.hideout.org.uk)

[www.respect4us.org.uk](http://www.respect4us.org.uk)

[www.beatbullying.org](http://www.beatbullying.org)

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