Protecting deaf children from bullying

For primary and secondary schools

National Deaf Children's Society

Anti-Bullying Alliance

Contents

❗ A note about terms

We use the term 'deaf' to refer to all types of hearing loss, from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary deafness such as glue ear. We include pupils the school may identify as having a 'hearing impairment' in the school census.

We use the term 'parent' to refer to all parents and carers of children.

In different parts of the UK, the terms 'special educational needs coordinator' or 'additional learning needs coordinator' are used. For simplicity, this resource uses 'SENCO' throughout.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who have contributed to this resource, including the Anti-Bullying Alliance All Together programme.

> 🖳 Parents of deaf children can find out about how to prevent bullying on our website at **www.ndcs.org.uk/bullyinganddeafchildren.**

1. Introduction

This resource is for mainstream teachers, SENCOs, Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs), teaching assistants, communication support workers or any other education professional working to support deaf pupils in primary and secondary schools. It explains how you can adapt your existing arrangements for preventing bullying and handling bullying incidents to meet the needs of deaf pupils. Many of the suggestions set out in this resource will benefit all pupils in your school.

How schools should protect deaf children

All schools should have their own definition of bullying, and their own anti-bullying policy which should include procedures for reporting and responding to bullying incidents. Your school should make sure that their policy is accessible to and reflects the needs of deaf pupils.

This resource outlines what schools can do to meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010[1] to:

- take reasonable steps to make sure deaf pupils aren't treated less favourably than other pupils in terms of the school's arrangements for preventing and dealing with bullying

- take measures to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation

- promote equality of opportunity between pupils and encourage good relations between deaf and other pupils.

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1. Or the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 in Northern Ireland.

> **What do we mean by bullying?**
> The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as:
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> "The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online."
>
> Bullying is often aimed at certain groups, for example, because of race, disability, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
>
> Children can be bullied by adults as well as by other children.

We know from talking to families that most deaf children and young people don't have problems with bullying at school. However, research shows that deaf pupils can be more vulnerable to bullying than other pupils. For example, a University of Cambridge comprehensive literature review *Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities* found that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities face a significantly increased risk of being bullied. And nearly two-thirds of deaf young people reported having been bullied because of their deafness through an online poll on our Buzz website for deaf young people.[2]

Deaf pupils may be more likely to experience bullying because of:

- the impact of deafness on social interactions

- absences from school or the classroom because of audiology appointments or meeting their ToD

- differences in appearance through use of, for example, radio aids and sign language.

Impact of deafness on social interactions

If there's poor deaf awareness or communication among pupils, deaf pupils can be vulnerable to bullying or experience difficulties in integrating socially and developing good relationships with their classmates.

Some of the challenges that deaf pupils may experience include:

- difficulty talking in groups, because of other pupils' attitudes or misconceptions about deafness and disability

- difficulty making friends because many opportunities to socialise take place in the noisiest parts of the school

- worrying that they won't understand what's being said or that their classmates will misunderstand them.

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2. National Deaf Children's Society Buzz website online poll. 2014. More than 600 responses, of which 42% said they had been bullied and 24% said sometimes (totalling 66%).

**"I often have problems with my friends –
I've missed what's been said and gone before,
then we misunderstand."**

Deaf pupil

Social acceptance requires an understanding of social norms. Hearing children often pick these up through 'incidental learning' (through listening to background conversations and chatter), which deaf children may struggle with.

This can mean that deaf pupils lack the social skills or confidence to fit in easily with their friendship group, making them more vulnerable. For example, deaf pupils may not always have a developed understanding of 'communication etiquette' and can be singled out if they don't respond in social situations in a way that's considered appropriate by others in the group. Deaf pupils may also be unaware of current social language or slang.

There's also evidence that some support for disabled pupils can increase their vulnerability. Being seen as 'in need of help' and being isolated from teachers and classmates are risk factors. For example, when deaf pupils are taken out of the classroom for additional support from a ToD or a teaching assistant.

Absences from school

Research[3] suggests that pupils who are repeatedly absent from school can be marked out as 'different'. Deaf pupils, for example, may need to go to audiology appointments during school time.

Appearance

Disabled pupils and young people are often bullied simply because they're seen to be 'different' from other pupils and young people. A deaf pupil may be singled out if they use sign language, have additional needs, or wear and use equipment such as hearing aids, cochlear implants and radio aids. If a deaf pupil experiences communication difficulties, this can also lead to them being identified as 'different'.

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3. McLaughlin, C., Byers, R. and Peppin Vaughan, R. 2010. *Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.*

2. Preventing bullying

Equality and anti-discrimination legislation requires schools to proactively eliminate disability-related harassment and promote more positive attitudes towards disabled pupils and young people.

Your school should already have their own definition of bullying and have an established anti-bullying policy. Make sure anti-bullying policies incorporate and reflect the needs of deaf pupils.

The anti-bullying policy should:

- highlight prevention strategies to support deaf pupils
- include indicators and symptoms relevant to the deaf pupils in your school
- ensure reporting, responding and prevention procedures meet the communication needs of deaf pupils
- involve deaf pupils in the review and any updates.

There are simple and specific actions that you can take to prevent bullying of deaf pupils.

In terms of highlighting prevention strategies to support deaf pupils, think about how you can achieve the following.

1. Create a safe school environment that addresses the vulnerabilities of deaf pupils to bullying by:

- promoting deaf awareness and positive attitudes to deafness
- making sure deaf pupils can access safe or quiet zones
- checking that deaf pupils understand what cyberbullying is and how to protect themselves
- checking you have systems in place for reporting and monitoring
- thinking about the needs of deaf pupils in any staff training on bullying
- supporting deaf pupils in extra-curricular activities.

2. Develop the social skills, confidence and resilience of the deaf pupil by:

- supporting the development of social skills and friendships
- helping to develop deaf pupils' understanding of social norms and what bullying is
- helping them develop confidence and self-esteem
- making sure any additional support doesn't lead to deaf pupils becoming 'isolated' from their peers.

The following sections give more information on some of the specific strategies that can be adopted. Think about how deaf pupils can be involved in the development of these strategies to make sure that they will benefit from them.

Creating a safer school environment

Promoting deaf awareness and positive attitudes to deafness

It's important that all pupils develop knowledge and understanding of diversity and that there is a whole school ethos that underpins this. Disabled pupils have spoken about how understanding and valuing difference and disability can be an effective way of preventing bullying happening in the first place.

Deaf pupils say that it's helpful if their classmates understand the problems that deafness can cause and how best to support them. Running deaf awareness training for all staff and pupils will also help highlight the communication needs of deaf pupils.

Involve deaf pupils and a Teacher of the Deaf with the design and delivery of deaf awareness training. Some deaf pupils may feel confident in delivering part of the training themselves, whereas others may not feel comfortable about drawing attention to themselves – in this case, you'll need to consider a more subtle approach to raising awareness.

Look, Smile, Chat

Developed by members of our Young People's Advisory Board, the Look, Smile, Chat resources help deaf teenagers break down communication barriers at school. The resources have simple tips to help hearing young people to understand the impact of deafness.

For more information, visit **www.buzz.org.uk/looksmilechat/.**

Safe or quiet zones

Some deaf pupils have spoken about wanting safe places to go if they're at risk of being bullied. These include areas where supervised activities take place that they could choose to go to. Ask pupils which parts of school make them feel most vulnerable and what changes would make them feel safer in the short term while you address concerns about 'unsafe' areas. If you survey pupils annually on this it could give you useful data on their views and how you're improving these areas over time.

Deaf pupils may also particularly value 'quiet' zones where they can interact more easily with their school friends, free of noise and distractions.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is any form of bullying that is carried out through the use of electronic devices, such as computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets, or gaming consoles. Cyberbullying can be particularly difficult for children to deal with because:

- it can happen at any time of day or night and within the home
- it can be done anonymously, which can make it feel more scary (it also makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source of information posted online)
- it can reach a wide audience very quickly
- it's very difficult to delete inappropriate messages once they are posted online.

Some deaf pupils may miss out on information about cyberbullying. When information is being given to pupils around online safety and cyberbullying, you should check that:

- the deaf pupil was present when this information was delivered
- that the information was given in an accessible way (for example, it was given via a video clip that was subtitled)
- whether they need additional support to fully understand the issues and the associated risks.

Be Safe and Smart Online

Our resource, written in collaboration with Childnet International, is aimed at education professionals supporting deaf students in secondary schools.

It explains why deaf children and young people need to be taught about online safety and has lesson plans on cyberbullying, safe social networking and sexting.

www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/be-safe-and-smart-online-lesson-plans-for-secondary-school-teachers/

There is also a flyer with tips for deaf young people, and a webpage with guidance for parents.

Flyer: **www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/how-to-be-safe-and-smart-online**

Information for parents: **www.ndcs.org.uk/information-and-support/education-and-learning/bullying-and-deaf-children/help-your-child-stay-safe-and-smart-online**

Other resources are available to help support understanding of cyberbullying, including some targeted at deaf children, which are listed at the end of this booklet.

Reporting and monitoring

Just like hearing pupils, some deaf pupils may be reluctant to share their concerns with staff or to 'tell' if they're being bullied, so be proactive in encouraging them to share – by checking they know who to go to and making sure they feel confident in doing so.

Make sure deaf pupils know about the different reporting systems that they can use if they don't feel confident enough to tell an adult face to face. This could include a reporting box, email or text system. Deaf pupils also need to know that the school can't promise confidentiality but that the information will be shared on a need-to-know basis so that the issue can be resolved and the pupil is protected.

Make sure your school has systems in place to monitor incidences of bullying against deaf or other disabled children to help identify if more needs to be done to prevent bullying aimed at this group.

Training

Many schools will already have training programmes in place to prevent and address bullying. As part of this, staff should know about the different forms of bullying and the particular vulnerability of some pupils to bullying, including those who are deaf. Staff should also know about the specific ways that deaf pupils may be bullied, including by:

- using made up signs
- turning away from a deaf pupil on purpose to exclude them
- getting their 'attention' too forcefully
- whispering on purpose to exclude them.

Outside school

Deaf pupils should have the same opportunities as other pupils to join in activities outside of school. Think about how the strategies on page 10 can also help prevent bullying outside of school, as well as inside.

After-school clubs, including those run by external organisations, should meet the pupil's communication needs and make reasonable adjustments to make sure they can fully take part. You may need to encourage deaf pupils to join in and reassure them about the support they'll receive.

Involving parents

Make sure parents know about the school's policies and procedures on bullying, how to spot signs of bullying and how to report concerns. Give them guidance on how to share anti-bullying messages at home, particularly where you believe the deaf child needs further reinforcement of these messages, such as on, for example online safety and cyberbullying.

Developing the social skills, confidence and resilience of the pupil

Supporting the development of social skills and peer relations

Peer mentoring and peer mediation have been identified as two key methods of responding to bullying in deaf and other disabled pupils. These can take a range of forms, such as befriending, buddy schemes and peer mentoring, depending on what is most suitable for your school.

We have guidance on how you can set up peer mentoring schemes in your school.

Buddy Up! A guide to setting up a peer support scheme for deaf pupils (primary schools)

www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/buddy-up/

Setting Up a Peer Support Scheme for Deaf Young People (secondary schools)

www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/setting-up-a-peer-support-scheme-for-deaf-young-people/

Understanding social norms and bullying

Deaf pupils can face barriers to incidental learning (learning about social norms through picking up chatter and conversations around them). Some deaf pupils may also be less able to pick up on social cues, both verbal and non-verbal (for example, a sarcastic comment). Deaf pupils may therefore need additional reinforcement through individualised support and interventions when it comes to understanding social norms around behaviour. They may also need support to recognise what bullying is. You need to help the deaf pupil understand the concept of bullying and the different types – that all pupils tease and are teased but unacceptable levels should be challenged and personal toleration levels should be respected. You may need to teach deaf pupils the difference between sarcasm, teasing or 'banter', and language that is derogatory/discriminating if they are to understand or appreciate that they're being bullied.

Many disabled pupils and young people speak of how sometimes they didn't understand that their own behaviour could be perceived as bullying by others. For example, some deaf pupils can appear to be more 'direct' in their conversations. Some deaf pupils may also need support to understand how their own behaviour might be perceived by others.

Monitor the outcomes of any interventions and discuss follow up strategies with the pupil to make sure they're effective.

> "I attended a one day training session with a focus on bullying. It included looking at why people bully others, looking at different scenarios and deciding if these were incidences of bullying or just falling out. We talked about the power of a smile and when to stop trying to be friends with someone and walk away. I now know what bullying and cyberbullying are and what [they aren't]. I feel more confident in my understanding and [know] what support is available."
>
> **Deaf pupil in a mainstream secondary school**

Providing opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem

Some deaf pupils may not have a positive view of their own deafness or don't feel empowered to overcome communication barriers or difficulties that may arise. A history of 'over-protection' (from their families) might also mean that some deaf pupils have less experience of standing up for themselves. Deaf pupils need to be given opportunities to succeed and receive meaningful praise to enhance their confidence and self-esteem. They also need to have opportunities to fail, to enable them to develop the resilience skills to repair situations and learn from them.

Making sure that pupils have opportunities to meet deaf role models can also help to develop pupils' confidence and identity as deaf young people.

Healthy Minds

Our Healthy Minds training offers support for professionals working with deaf children and young people aged eight and above to improve their emotional health and wellbeing. The resource gives step-by-step guidance on how to encourage deaf young people to have a 'healthy mind' and explores ideas to prevent low self-esteem and poor mental health.

For more information, visit **www.ndcs.org.uk/healthyminds**.

Additional support

Make sure that any additional support doesn't lead to deaf pupils becoming 'isolated' from their classmates. For example, make sure any teaching assistant support doesn't mean the child finds it harder to interact with other pupils and helps them learn how to be independent.

If you work directly with deaf children you need to be aware of this risk and take steps to mitigate against it, for example, by including other pupils with individual deaf pupils' learning support and/or making sure that other pupils know why deaf pupils are being given additional or separate support.

3. What to look for and what to do

Identifying bullying in deaf children

Your school's anti-bullying and e-safety policies and training programme will have highlighted the signs of bullying to look for in all pupils. Many of the signs of bullying in deaf children will be the same as for all pupils and could include:

- disruptive behaviour
- quality of school work falling
- becoming anxious and stressed about going to school
- changes to appearance
- lost or damaged possessions
- faking illness to miss school
- loss of friends
- sitting alone in class
- becoming withdrawn and not taking part in lessons
- bullying others (evidence shows that children who are bullied sometimes resort to bullying others).

Because of the vulnerability of deaf children and young people, you'll need to exercise particular vigilance and take the time to observe and monitor the interaction between deaf and other pupils. This will ensure that any bullying of deaf pupils is identified promptly. Vigilance is especially needed if deaf pupils experience communication difficulties.

Don't allow any presumptions about deafness to cloud your judgement on whether a child is being bullied or not. For example, if a deaf child is quiet and withdrawn, don't presume this is because they're deaf, but make sure you investigate it as a sign of potential bullying.

Responding to incidences of bullying

Your school will already have procedures in place for the reporting of and responding to bullying including, for example, making sure the pupil knows they'll be taken seriously and that action will be taken. Where deaf pupils are involved you need to ensure there's good communication.

Make sure deaf pupils know who they can speak to about bullying. This should be a member of staff who is familiar with the child's communication needs

Communication often becomes more difficult for pupils when they're upset, and if they have difficulties expressing themselves. Give deaf pupils plenty of time to explain what has happened as they may take longer to tell you what they want to say. If the pupil communicates using sign language, make sure there's a trained person with the correct skills to engage with the child.

Where there's a difficulty in communication, encourage the child to use a variety of mediums to explain their concerns such as drawing or using props.

For deaf pupils 'telling' needs to be in a visually and aurally private area, as well as one in which there is minimal background noise and distraction.

If a deaf child is going to 'tell' about bullying they need to have confidence in your communication skills on a day-to-day basis. Below we set out some key points to remember.

- Make sure you have the pupil's attention before starting to speak or sign to them.

- Face the deaf pupil when you are talking. Try to get down to their level if possible and always leave enough room for them to see your face clearly.

- Speak clearly and at a normal pace. Speaking too slowly or shouting will distort lip patterns and can make it difficult to lip-read.

- Make sure there is good lighting so that your face is not in shadow.

- Try to make sure that background noise is kept to a minimum and if the child has a radio aid, make sure this is used properly.

- If you need to use an interpreter or a communication support worker, ensure they have advanced sign language skills and that you talk directly to the child (and not via the interpreter).

- Check that the deaf pupil understands what you have said throughout. Try and do so in a subtle way as some deaf pupils may not like admitting they have not understood. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a yes or no as the pupil may say yes, regardless of whether they have understood or not.

- Never give up. If you get stuck, try communicating in a different way or writing it down.

If a pupil is being cyberbullied, you should ask them to keep a copy of any messages or posts and record the dates and times of any bullying messages, along with any of the sender's online details or identity.

All Together programme

The Anti-Bullying Alliance All Together programme is a whole-school anti-bullying programme offered free to schools across England, with a special focus on reducing bullying of disabled children and those with special educational needs. The programme is free and includes a range of online resources and training. The programme is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the Anti-Bullying Alliance with support from Contact and Achievement for All.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work/our-programmes/all-together-whole-school-anti-bullying-programme

4. Useful resources

There are lots of resources available from other organisations with further information on how to prevent or tackle bullying.

Some of the resources below are for use with all children. We have tried to list resources which are accessible to deaf pupils but, if there are any videos or spoken material, you should always check that they are accessible before using them.

Anti-Bullying Alliance

Resources and research on disablist bullying.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org. uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/groups-more-likely-experience-bullying/sen-disability

The Buzz

Our website for deaf young people includes information on bullying and signposts to a range of other accessible resources.

www.buzz.org.uk/category/ bullying/

Childnet International

Let's Fight it Together. What we can all do to prevent cyberbullying

www.childnet.com/resources/lets-fight-it-together

Childline Deaf Zone

Information for deaf children and young people from Childline, including bullying and staying safe online.

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/ bullying-abuse-safety/deafzone/

Contact

Information and advice for families with disabled children, and the professionals who support them, on preventing bullying.

www.contact.org.uk/advice-and-support/education-learning/ bullying/

Department for Education (England)

Advice on preventing and tackling bullying (2017).

www.gov.uk/government/ publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying

Department for Education (Northern Ireland)

Guidance on anti-bullying.

www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/ dealing-bullying

The Described and Captioned Media Program

This American organisation provides a range of accessible resources on bullying.

www.dcmp.org/bullying/

Thinkuknow

A video resource called *Sam's Real Friends* which looks at how deaf pupils can protect themselves online. Sign language and subtitles are included.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBmW7OlQLdI

Ofsted

No Place for Bullying (England) 2012.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-strategies-for-preventing-and-tackling-bullying

Scottish Government

Guidance on anti-bullying.

www.gov.scot/publications/respect-national-approach-anti-bullying-scotlands-children-young-people/

Welsh Assembly

Guidance on anti-bullying.

beta.gov.wales/anti-bullying-guidance

Making sure deaf children are included in school life

We've a range of publications for mainstream teachers outlining different approaches for making sure deaf children feel included in the classroom and are able to access learning. These include the *Supporting the Achievement of Deaf Children* resources (available online at **www.ndcs.org.uk/supportingachievement**) and *What Are You Feeling? A guide to teaching emotional literacy in the classroom,* for use with primary school children (**www.ndcs.org.uk/feeling**).

Order our resources for free by contacting our Freephone Helpline on **0808 800 8880**, by emailing **helpline@ndcs.org.uk,** or download them from **www.ndcs.org.uk/documents-and-resources/.**

Your local specialist educational support service for deaf children or your pupil's Teacher of the Deaf may be able to give further advice.

5. Useful organisations

Many organisations and websites offer advice and resources and the below list is not exhaustive. Many of these will have been developed for mainstream education settings. If you plan to use these with a deaf pupil, especially where there are videos or spoken material, please make sure they're accessible.

Anti-Bullying Alliance

A group of organisations and individuals working together to stop bullying and create safe environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Anti-Bullying Network (Scotland)

Scottish organisation providing anti-bullying support to school communities on the internet, with a parents' and young people's section.

www.antibullying.net

Bullies Out (Wales)

Information and advice for children, young people and adults in Wales.

www.bulliesout.com

Bullying online

Online advice for parents, teachers and children who are being bullied.

help@bullying.co.uk

www.bullying.co.uk

Childline

Helpline for children offering emotional support and counselling on any issue, including bullying.

Helpline: **0800 1111** (24 hours). Can also contact by email or online chat.

www.childline.org.uk

Childnet International

Specialist resources for young people to raise awareness of online safety.

www.childnet.com

Contact

National charity for families with disabled children. Offers support, information and advice on topics including bullying.

Helpline: **0808 808 3555**

www.contact.org.uk

Digizen

Provides information for professionals, parents and young people on issues such as social networking and cyberbullying.

www.digizen.org

Equality and Human Rights Commission (England, Scotland and Wales)

Provides information and guidance on human rights, including disability discrimination.

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Provides information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues, including disability discrimination.

Phone: **028 90 500 600**

www.equalityni.org

Information Advice and Support Services

Formerly known as Parent Partnership Services, these services offer advice and support to parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

www.councilfordisabledchildren. org.uk/information-advice-and- support-services-network/find- your-local-ias-service

Kidscape

UK charity established specifically to prevent bullying and child sexual abuse.

Anti-Bullying Helpline for Parents: **020 7823 5430**

www.kidscape.org.uk

End Bullying Now (Northern Ireland)

A group of organisations working together to end bullying of children and young people.

www.endbullying.org.uk/

NSPCC (England, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

Provides information, advice and counselling to anyone concerned about a child's safety.

Helpline: **0808 800 5000**

help@nspcc.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk/reportconcern

Respect Me (Scotland)

Scotland's anti-bullying service.

www.respectme.org.uk

Thinkuknow

Latest information on websites, mobiles and new technology. Website created for young people by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

UK Safer Internet Centre

For e-safety tips, advice and resources to help children and young people stay safe on the internet.

www.saferinternet.org.uk

About the National Deaf Children's Society

We're here for every deaf child who needs us – no matter what their level or type of deafness or how they communicate. We want to work with professionals like you to overcome the barriers that hold deaf children back.

Visit our website **www.ndcs.org.uk** to join us for free. You'll have access to:

- our expert information resources for professionals
- our quarterly digital magazine and email updates
- our workshops and events
- our Freephone Helpline.

We are the National Deaf Children's Society, the leading charity for deaf children.

Freephone Helpline:
0808 800 8880 (voice and text)
helpline@ndcs.org.uk

www.ndcs.org.uk

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