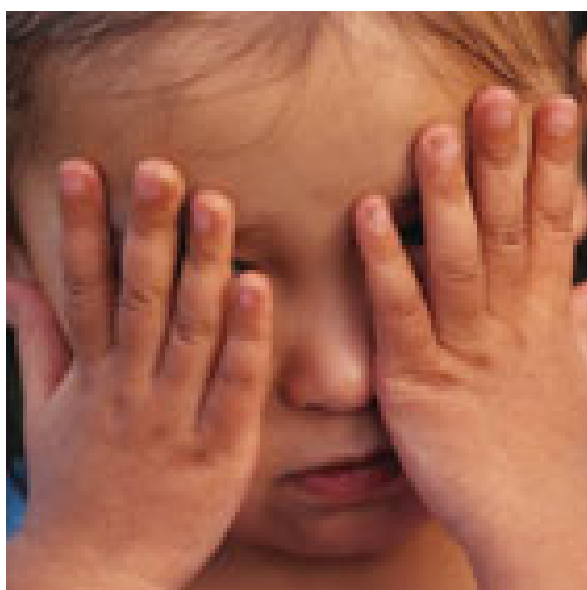




Speak Up!



The Bullying of Children with Learning Disabilities

ENABLE Scotland 2007

Introduction

ENABLE Scotland is an organisation that's not afraid to be bold in campaigning for the rights of people with learning disabilities. We are committed to consulting with our members and the people who we support to recognise the issues that affect them most and the things they would like to see changed.

We have consistently been told that more needs to be done about the bullying of people with learning disabilities. The launch of our "Stop It" Report and the subsequent campaign in 1998 highlighted the experiences of bullying and harassment faced by adults with learning disabilities. Developing our knowledge of the issue allowed us to make practical differences to people's perceptions and people's lives; training people with learning disabilities to give presentations about the effects of bullying; and producing a resource pack that is used by ENABLE Scotland as well as other organisations to combat the problem. We are now well recognised as experts in this field.

Our work with our Young People's Self Advocacy Groups has revealed that bullying is also an important issue for children and young people with learning disabilities. We joined forces with Mencap to undertake UK wide research to find out the scale and nature of the problem and most importantly to tell us more about how to stop it.

We knew that bullying of children with learning disabilities existed. We knew that it is widespread and has a significant effect on children's lives. However, we were shocked by the results that the survey revealed. We could not have predicted the scale of the problem.

- The sheer numbers of children who were bullied
- The persistence of bullying throughout childhood
- The failure of adults to stop bullying when it is reported
- The range of places where bullying takes place
- The effects bullying has on the emotional state of children
- The social exclusion faced by children who are afraid to go out

Bullying is not just a part of growing up. ENABLE Scotland believes that no child should have to put up with bullying and that we all have a responsibility to speak up to ensure that this stops.

Report Summary

Headline Results

- 93% of children with learning disabilities have been bullied
- 46% of children with learning disabilities have been physically assaulted
- Half have been bullied persistently for more than two years
- Bullying is not just a school issue
- 40% are too scared to go to places where they have been bullied

Key Recommendations

- Build the capacity of adults to take positive action when bullying happens
- Make information more accessible to allow children with learning disabilities to recognise bullying when it happens
- Involve people with learning disabilities in educating the public about learning disability and bullying

The Speak Up Campaign

Speak Up by adding your name and message to our online petition
www.dontstickit.org.uk

Speak Up by telling someone if you are being bullied

Speak Up to your friends if they are bullying children with learning disabilities

Speak Up to invite someone with learning disabilities to join your games

Speak Up if you witness bullying in a public place

Speak Up to ask organisations that work with children with learning disabilities to produce anti-bullying policies

How we found out

This idea for this report came out of our young people's self advocacy groups, which meet to identify and address the issues that are most important to children and young people with learning disabilities. It is intended to represent the experiences of children with learning disabilities in their own voices and as such the research focuses on children rather than teachers or professionals.

The research was undertaken in conjunction with Mencap, as part of a UK wide study of over 500 children.

The methods took the form of a survey, (Appendix 1). We wanted to move beyond the perception of bullying as an exclusively school based problem and as a result the surveys were completed in a range of settings. These included out of school clubs and our self advocacy groups, as well as in schools for children with special educational needs.

The survey was completed as part of a session on the subject, which included an activity and discussion. It was important to provide a supportive environment to talk about potentially traumatic experiences.

What we found

- **93% of children with learning disabilities have been bullied**

The bullies kick me and call me names. I wish it would stop.

Lauren, 7

Nearly every child with learning disabilities in our survey had experienced bullying at some point. No child should have to put up with bullying, but our research shows it is an everyday feature of the lives of children with learning disabilities. This was consistent across all age ranges and all the areas in Scotland. It also represented a significantly higher figure than the results in England and Wales. We do not know why this is, but it clearly demonstrates that there is a real need for action.

- **46% of children with learning disabilities had been physically assaulted**

Of the children surveyed, nearly half had suffered physical abuse and 51% had been called names. In around a third of cases, the bullying took the form of theft of children's possessions. 26% reported feeling left out of games and activities. Bullying takes many guises, but each one is hurtful and requires our attention.

- **40% of children with learning disabilities cry because they are bullied**

There are few images more heart wrenching than the thought of a child crying. People with learning disabilities want the same things from life as everyone else. Having friends to play with and talk to is a vital part of every child's life and children with learning disabilities are no different. Being picked on and being left out is just as upsetting for children with learning disabilities as it is for any other child.

I wish people would realise that I have feelings, just like everyone else

Craig, 13

- **Half of all children with learning disabilities are bullied persistently**

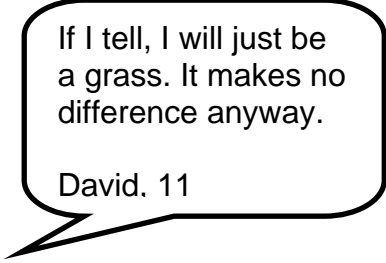
I get bullied all the time. I don't really let it bother me any more.

Olivia, 14

53% of the children in our survey had experienced bullying continuously for two years or more. 16% said it had been going on for more than five years and many had suffered bullying for as long as they could remember. Bullying is not just a part of growing up. It is vital that children with learning disabilities know that they have a right not to be bullied.

- **38% said that telling an adult had no effect**

38% of those who had told an adult said the bullying continued anyway. 1 in 5 said that they had not told anyone about the bullying. Telling about bullying is only the first step. It is important that as adults we take these reports seriously and act on them. As it stands, we are failing to safeguard our children's rights.



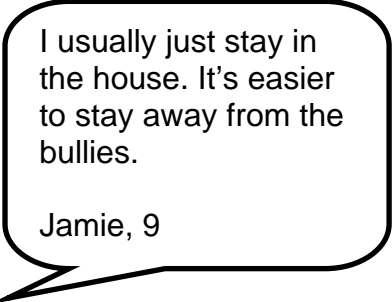
If I tell, I will just be a grass. It makes no difference anyway.

David, 11

- **Bullying does not just happen at school**

Bullying takes place in a whole range of settings. 38% are bullied on the bus, 38% in the street and 23% at the park. Half of all the children who told us they travelled by bus said that they had experienced bullying there. Bullying is not just a school issue and is not just the responsibility of teachers. When bullying happens in these very public places, we all have a responsibility to speak up.

- **40% of children stay away from the places where they have been bullied**



I usually just stay in the house. It's easier to stay away from the bullies.

Jamie, 9

40% of children with learning disabilities are afraid to go out in the street. 26% are afraid to travel by bus. 20% are too scared to go to the park.

Bullying, and the perception that bullying will happen, excludes children with learning disabilities from the places and the activities that make a happy childhood and allow them to be part of their communities.

The Key Recommendations

The results of the research speak for themselves. Nearly all children with learning disabilities are bullied, many persistently over many years. We know that this causes physical harm, emotional distress and social exclusion.

We hope that by carrying out this research and publishing this report that we are sending out a message to children and young people with learning disabilities that we are listening. However, we need to go beyond recognising the problem and take action to end it. Children with learning disabilities need to know that bullying is not just a part of growing up. No child should have to accept bullying as a normal part of life.

Recommendation 1

Make information about bullying more accessible to children with learning disabilities

- **Recognising bullying when it happens**

We know that 45% of the children surveyed had been physically assaulted. This behaviour is easily recognisable as bullying, but it is just as important to tackle the name-calling, theft and exclusion that many others face. It is important that children with learning disabilities do not accept this behaviour as normal and are aware that they have a right not to be bullied. We believe that working with children with learning disabilities to help them to recognise bullying behaviour is the first step in putting a stop to it.

Recommendation 2

Provide a forum for children to talk about their experiences of bullying.

- **Encouraging children to speak up about bullying**

20% of the children in our survey did not tell anyone that they were being bullied. 36% of those who did tell an adult found that this failed to put a stop to the bullying. It is important that we encourage children to speak to someone about their experiences of bullying, and since most children experience bullying outside the school gates, this must be about more than telling a teacher. More than this, it is vital that they feel confident that reporting it will make a difference.

Recommendation 3

Adults must know what positive action to take when bullying happens

- **Taking action when bullying happens**

Under child protection law, any professional working with children has a duty to take action when a child tells them that they have been harmed. Youth workers, health professionals, personal carers, social workers and any other adult who comes into contact with children with learning disabilities should be equipped to deal with disclosures of bullying. Organisations that work with children with learning disabilities should have policies and procedures on bullying and should take steps to provide training to the relevant staff and volunteers. Information on what to do must also be available to parents and carers.

Recommendation 4

Involve people with learning disabilities in telling people more about learning disability

- **Educating the public**

Bullying stems from ignorance and misunderstanding. Learning disability, despite being common, is little understood by the public as a whole. Letting children and adults know that people with learning disabilities feel the pain of bullying and rejection in the same way as everyone else is an important step in stopping it. People may be intimidated by the differences between themselves and people with learning disabilities. By learning more about the nature of learning disability, children and adults can recognise the similarities and celebrate diversity. Again, this work must go on outside the classroom as well as in a school setting.

Recommendation 5

Speak up to make things change

- **Speak Up against Bullying**

ENABLE Scotland wants to make a strong statement that the bullying of children with learning disabilities is unacceptable. We hope that people will respond to the statistics revealed in this report by taking steps to make it stop. Bullying takes place in a whole range of social settings and we all have a responsibility not to be bullies and to speak up against bullying when we witness it.

You can join our campaign to condemn the bullying of children with learning disabilities at www.dontstickit.org.uk

What is ENABLE Scotland doing about bullying?

ENABLE Scotland is already Scotland's leading organisation in tackling bullying of people with learning disabilities. Our Stop It report on the bullying with adults with learning disabilities has led to a range of projects to prevent bullying and build natural friendships and strong social networks. There has been a natural progression to implement these projects with the children and young people who use our services. This research has armed us with the information we need to campaign for and deliver services and resources that take account of the specific requirements of children with learning disabilities.

Stop It

The publication of the Stop It report on the bullying of adults with learning disabilities allowed us to secure funding to run a project that trained people with learning disabilities to make presentations about their experiences of bullying. We also produced an interactive training pack and a booklet on the subject that has been adopted as a resource and a model of best practice by other organisations across Scotland.

ENABLE Link

ENABLE Link was set up in 2004 to support children and adults with learning disabilities to make friends and build up strong social networks. The project now runs in 10 areas and has supported 125 people. ENABLE Scotland have recently appointed a dedicated development officer to expand the programme.

respectme

respectme is the new body enlisted by the Scottish Executive to tackle bullying among all children. They offer training and consultancy services to help organisations that work with children to develop anti-bullying policies and procedures. We are working in partnership with respectme to develop services that take into account the extra requirements of working with children with learning disabilities.

The Campaign- Speak Up

The publication of this report sees the launch of our "Speak Up" campaign. The main thrust of the campaign is recognising that the responsibility for preventing the bullying of children with learning disabilities lies with every adult and child in Scotland, and not just with schools.

Bullying of children with learning disabilities is far more widespread than we had predicted and it takes places well beyond the school gates. Half of the

children in our survey had been bullied while on a bus. We believe that bullying in this very public space could be prevented if just one person made the decision to Speak Up.

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Contact Information

To find out more about ENABLE Scotland visit www.enable.org.uk

To receive a copy of the Stop It report call our information line on **0141 226 4541**

If you are being bullied, call Childline on **0800 1111**

More information about *respectme* is available at www.respectme.org.uk

