



# Bullying

– the role of adults



FUG

# Contents

<b>Bullying – the role of adults</b>	
What is bullying?.....	3
The right to a safe and healthy school environment.....	4
Duty to provide information.....	5
Duty to act.....	5
If a child is bullied.....	6
If my child bullies others.....	7
Show willingness to resolve the problem.....	7
What the school must do.....	8
Activity plan.....	9
<b>How to talk about difficult issues in a confident, good manner</b>	
Speak to the child.....	11
Different ways of enquiring.....	12
Different ways of listening.....	13
Other useful advice:.....	13
<b>Preventive action, advice, help and the right of appeal</b>	
Coordinating Committee, FAU.....	15
Bullying ombudsman.....	16
Coordinating committee for primary and secondary schools, FUG.....	16
PMM (Partnership Against Bullying).....	17
County Governor and right of appeal.....	18
<b>Adults must be good role models</b>	
FUG's 10 pieces of advice for cooperation and inclusion.....	19

## Bullying – the role of adults

### What is bullying?

All children and young people have the right to a safe, confident environment at school and to develop both academically and socially. Bullying creates insecurity, which in turn means that many do not learn effectively at school. When someone is bullied, it impacts the class community. Therefore, cooperation between the school and parents is invaluable in re-establishing confidence for all and preventing similar situations from reoccurring.

There are numerous definitions of bullying; however, fundamentally, bullying concerns children and young people being subjected to negative interactions, leading to feelings of insecurity or being an outsider.

It is important to differentiate between bullying and conflict. Bullying is about being repeatedly subjected to negative interaction and an imbalance in strength between those involved. Conflict, on the other hand, is unavoidable whenever children and young people meet and interact. Such situations can be unpleasant, but they do not necessarily harm those involved. Dealing with unpleasantness and managing to resolve conflict situations oneself, or with guidance from adults, can lead to an increased sense of independence and resilience.

### Various forms of bullying

Bullying can take place between individual children, between a child and a group, or between children and adults. Bullying can take place through

- The use of nicknames, insults, or humiliation (verbal)
- The use of negative body language, looks, rejection or exclusion (social)
- Someone wilfully destroying another's property (e.g. clothing) (material)
- Someone being threatened, ridiculed, tricked, or forced into doing something (psychological)
- Someone being beaten, shoved, or kicked (physical)
- A person being humiliated or excluded on digital platforms or games


## The right to a safe and healthy school environment

In Norway, there is statutory zero tolerance for offences such as bullying, violence, harassment, and discrimination. The Education Act Section 12-2 stipulates that «all children are entitled to a good physical and psychosocial environment conducive to health, well-being and learning». This applies to the school, after-school club, and homework assistance.

Various activities outside of school, both digital and physical, can also impact the security of individuals in everyday school life. As parents, we must therefore be conscious that the choices we make on behalf of our own children can have consequences for their confidence and well-being and that of their fellow pupils.

The school has a legal obligation to work systematically to prevent, reveal and deal with bullying. Whether children bully or are exposed to bullying is ultimately the responsibility of the adults. Children require help and guidance from sympathetic and engaged adults who dare to impose limits, communicate values, and promote friendship with both words and actions. This applies not only during school hours, but also when pupils are at home, participating in recreational activities or active in digital fora.

The core part of the curriculum is clear that the pupils and the home also have a responsibility to contribute to a healthy school community and environment. The school and home should therefore work together to create safe, confident class environments.



*Just as the individual student contributes to the school community, the community contributes to the well-being, development and learning of the individual.*

*Core curriculum*

## Duty to provide information

Section 10-8 in the Education Act stipulates that the school has a duty to provide information. As stated in the first sentence of the paragraph, the school must provide pupils and parents with the information they require, about among other things the education program itself, the individual pupil, the school environment and school rules, and about their rights and duties otherwise.

The home and school have a mutual responsibility to notify if there is suspicion or specific knowledge that a child or young person does not feel safe and confident at school. As parents, we must however understand that it can be difficult for teachers to be aware of everything that takes place during the school day. We parents can sometimes become aware of situations occurring outside the school that can have consequences for pupils during their daily school life. In such case, we must speak out.

We must also be aware that pupils often have differing versions of events. It is indeed completely natural that children and young people provide the version that is most favourable to them. As parents, we must appreciate this when we enter into a dialogue with the school. Dialogue between teachers and parents can help to gain a better overview of the situation, so that it will be easier for the school to propose initiatives

## Duty to act

The school has a duty to act. This means that all staff are obliged to monitor how pupils are doing at school and to intervene if they discover physical fights, exclusion, verbal harassment or similar. Furthermore, all staff at the school have a duty to notify the headteacher if they have any suspicion that a pupil is not experiencing a secure and healthy school environment. This also applies if the pupil him/herself informs of any issues. The school must investigate the matter as soon as possible and rectify the situation by taking appropriate measures. In particularly serious cases, the headteacher must also report the matter to the school's governors.

## **If a child is bullied**

As adults, we must be aware that bullying is often concealed, where adults are not present. Bullying also takes place through 'looks' and body language. Pay attention to changes in the child's humour and behaviour. Perhaps they do not wish to go to school, they feel ill or drop classes. Their motivation and desire to learn often change and children can spend less time with friends.

There are many reasons why children and young people can find it difficult to talk to adults about bullying. The most common reasons are:

- They do not wish to worry their parents
- They are afraid that the bullying will get worse
- They do not wish to 'snitch' on others
- They are ashamed of something they have taken part in (images, video online)
- They are afraid that their parents will be angry and judge them
- They believe that their parents do not have sufficient digital skills to understand and to be able to help
- Bullying is associated with guilt

Who is the bully, and who is bullied, can be completely circumstantial. Research shows that boys are equally subjected to bullying as girls, and they are less likely to speak out about it. Therefore we should not refer to bullying incidents as a 'boy thing' or a 'girl thing'. In general, we should not use characteristics that undermine how the child him/herself experiences their school day. We should instead encourage the child to speak out and to show through our words and actions that we are there for them in their situation.

If we suspect or have specific

knowledge that our child is being bullied, we must inform their class teacher, a senior member of the teaching staff or other adults at the school in whom we have confidence. As parents, we must be expected to be heard in such situations.

## **If my child bullies others**

There can be many different reasons as to why a child bullies or offends others. It can be about holding power over another or establishing their position, or it can be a way to denote that they are a member of a gang or specific group. Some children bully because they are afraid of being bullied or excluded themselves. Bullying can also be related to a poor self-image or other difficult issues with and around the child.

If we are made aware that our own child is bullying or offending others, this will, naturally enough, invoke many different emotions. It can feel both painful, unpleasant and difficult. For some it can be challenging to accept that bullying is a reality.

The difficult aspect of such situations does not, however, absolve us of our responsibility as parents. The school depends on us taking the information seriously and cooperating constructively - with the aim of finding a solution that helps all of those involved and the class community as a whole.

For us as parents, it is therefore important to keep a cool head and an open heart if we are informed that our child is a bully; do not adopt a defensive position, choose rather to think that this is something to be taken seriously and to resolve. If we can manage our own emotions and reactions properly, this will have a positive impact on how the situation develops, both concerning our own children and others who may be involved.

## **Show willingness to resolve the problem**

Contact the school and ask for a meeting as soon as possible. Do not wait until the next term review meeting or parent/teacher meeting. Share the information you have, even if it does not favour your own child. Show willingness to cooperate to establish a dialogue to resolve the problem, and ask whether there is anything specific you can contribute further.



### What the school must do

Regardless of whether you are the parent of a child subjected to bullying, or whether your child bullies others, you can expect to receive information from the school about what will be done. If you have had a dialogue with the teacher about the matter and do not hear anything from the school within the next few days, you should contact the headteacher to ensure that they are aware of what is happening. The school has an obligation to begin an investigation and to implement initiatives within one week.

The investigation will involve:

- All of those involved will be given the opportunity to explain their own experience of the situation
- School staff can make observations of the student group in learning situations and free periods
- The school can use surveys, mapping tools or sociograms to acquire an overview of well-being and interaction in the pupil group
- Your child has the right to be heard and to talk to adults they trust
- You can be invited as a parent to an interview to provide information and advice to the school

There is no fixed template for how the school can create or re-establish a confident and healthy school environment. All students are different - this also applies to the situations they experience. Therefore initiatives to re-establish a healthy environment will vary from case to case.

A broad investigation can be decisive in understanding the overall situation and finding out what the school can do to help. By establishing all of the facts, the school will have a better premise for introducing effective initiatives.

Any initiatives should be both individual and collective. This means that some initiatives should focus on the student whose well-being is negatively affected, whilst other initiatives should specify what will be done in the class environment and community. Not seldom, students who subject others to bullying, also have a need for initiatives themselves.

The initiatives must be specified in writing, in the form of an activity plan, which must be sent to parents within 14 days. The activity plan will only reference initiatives that apply to your child and the general class community, not other pupils who may be involved.

### Activity plan

An activity plan is a plan outlining initiatives designed to help the student regain a confident and healthy school environment.

The activity plan must contain information about:

- The problem the initiatives are intended to resolve
- Which initiatives have been planned by the school
- When the initiatives will be implemented
- Who will implement initiatives
- When the initiatives will be reviewed

The plan should be reviewed underway and must be followed until such time that the student has regained a confident and healthy class environment. If the plan does not function, the school must find other initiatives.





## How to talk about difficult issues in a confident, good manner

### Speak to the child

Before you begin to speak to your own child about the matter, you should try to find calm in the situation. Think about what you need to know to help your own child and the school in resolving the matter.

Laws and rules can be a good way to ease into the conversation. The Education Act states that «all pupils are entitled to a good physical and psychosocial environment conducive to health, well-being and learning». The same legislation highlights that the school shall have zero tolerance for bullying and other offensive conduct.

As parents, we should clearly support these requirements in our conversations with our own children, whilst at the same time expressing our understanding that it is easy to make mistakes or make unwise choices, both when one is alone and together with others.

Allow the child him/herself to explain what has happened or what is going on. Be conscious that different ways of asking questions can generate different answers, and that the way you listen can also have an impact. Be conscious that it is more important to shed light on the situation than to find evidence.



## Different ways of enquiring

Some ways of asking questions provide 'yes' or 'no' answers. This type of closed question can also contain hidden prompts and guidance from us adults. In other words, these types of question are not always appropriate if we require a good insight into what has actually happened. Questions that begin with an interrogative often function better.

Open questions generate longer, more complex responses. We can often achieve more by asking questions that begin with interrogative, i.e. what, who, where, when and how.

Examples of closed/open questions:

- Are you angry? / How do you feel in this situation?
- Do you think this is right? / What is right for you?
- Do you like to be a part of this gang? / What do you think about being part of this gang?
- Was it difficult? / What was your experience?

It is a good idea to avoid questions that begin with why. This word puts the child into defence mode. The immediate response can be explanations, excuses or justification.



## Different ways of listening

Particularly in difficult situations, what we hear can become mixed up with our own inner thoughts. We assess and evaluate along the way and risk placing what we hear «in the filing cabinet in our head». This is not always in the situation's and the child's best interests.

Through focused listening, we can attempt to understand what is being said from the child's standpoint. By showing empathy and by asking follow-up questions along the way, you show that you are listening and want to understand. Ask questions that show that you are making sure that you have understood properly.

In this type of conversation, it can also be relevant to use all of the senses, to listen to the child's tone of voice and to observe the child's body language.

Below are some simple guidelines for active listening:

- Put what you hear into words, as objectively as possible
- Dare to allow silence during the conversation - this will give the child room for reflection
- Observe the effect of what you are saying to the child

### Other useful advice:

- By repeating what has been said, summarising it and mirroring the situation, you can help the child to take another person's perspective
- Note key words that can have special significance in context. Repeat these while the child is allowed to continue talking
- If the child begins to make excuses, explain away or lose focus, emphasise that it is your responsibility as an adult to help to keep the conversation on the right track
- Ensure that that you clarify during the conversation by summarising, confirming or correcting





## Preventive action, advice, help and the right of appeal

There are several different agencies, both local and national, that actively contribute to the work against bullying and exclusion.

### **Coordinating Committee, FAU**

The Education Act stipulates that every primary and secondary school must have a Coordinating Committee, elected by the parents at the school. If required, parents can choose to organise themselves in other ways. The municipality must ensure the setup of other school user agencies.



The Education Act is also clear that parents must be allowed to participate in planning, executing and reviewing school activities, among them those that concern the school environment, quality of education development and drafting of school regulations.

FAU shall not process cases involving individual students; however, it can contribute to the school's systematic work in ensuring a confident and sound school environment, both by helping to ensure that school routines and preventive work are communicated to all parents, also by taking the initiative on activities that promote inclusion and help students and parents get to know each other better.





### **Bullying ombudsman**

All counties in Norway have a bullying ombudsman, whose task is to safeguard the rights of children and young people to a confident and sound environment in kindergarten and primary/secondary school. This is a service offered to parents and children who require help and guidance. It is also offered to schools.

The bullying ombudsman is an independent resource, subject to a duty of non-disclosure, that functions as a low-threshold service intended to help children and young people in difficult situations. Additionally, the ombudsman works on prevention and holds courses and seminars covering various areas.

### **Coordinating committee for primary and secondary schools, FUG**

FUG is a national committee of parents, appointed for a four-year term. The committee offers advice to authorities and shall safeguard the interests of parents and students in schools, in addition to promoting effective home-school cooperation.



The FUG administration includes several advisers who are available by telephone and contact form, Monday-Friday. Advisers respond to queries and can provide specific advice in cases that parents experience as difficult.

### **PMM (Partnership Against Bullying)**

The Partnership Against Bullying is comprised of 15 organisations that work on counteracting bullying among children and young people. Twice a year, Partnership Against Bullying allocates funds for projects and initiatives designed to enhance local skills and improve cooperation against bullying and other negative conduct. Whether initiatives are small or major, whether the applicant is local or national, Partnership Against Bullying offers assistance as long as the project contributes to achieving the partnership's goals:

- Placing all forms of bullying on the agenda
- That children and young people become involved in overarching work in encouraging an inclusive childhood and education environment
- Reinforcing and developing skills and capacity to counteract bullying in the local community



## County Governor and right of appeal

The County Governor shall ensure that municipalities follow regulations when providing services, check that municipal initiatives are lawful and process appeals against individual decisions made by municipalities.

If the student does not have a confident and healthy school environment, the student him/herself or the parents can appeal to the County Governor. This is provided that:

- A week has passed from the time you reported to the headteacher that your child is being bullied and you still have not received information that initiatives have been implemented
- The activity plan that has been drawn up is not improving the situation for your child

The County Governor will examine whether the following obligations have been met:

- The obligation to rectify the situation by employing appropriate measures
- The obligation to draw up a written plan

The County Governor can dismiss the appeal if:

- The case has not been taken up with the headteacher
- Less than a week has passed since the case was taken up
- The student no longer attends the relevant school



## Adults must be good role models

Remember that you are the child's most important role model, both generally, in everyday life, and when difficult situations arise. It does not help to point out the importance of being kind and helpful if you yourself speak negatively of people. Be positive about other people, and be generous and inclusive. Be inspired by the advice that we in FUG have drawn up:



### FUG's 10 pieces of advice for cooperation and inclusion

1. Smile and say «hello» to children young people and parents. We all need to be seen and accepted for whoever we are.
2. Be curious about what is going on among children and young people, both physically and digitally. Try to understand rather than judge. Make allowances for those who make mistakes.
3. Dare to be the 'boring' adult who imposes standards and sets limits. Ally yourself with other parents. Children and young people require clearly defined frameworks and warm, confident and clear adults who follow up.
4. Find the bright light in all children and young people - also those who are not your own. Everyone has a talent or a quality we can value.
5. Think «everyone is involved» when anything is happening. Ask about those who are not joining in.
6. Try to 'catch out' your own and other people's children doing something good - whatever we focus on, we get more of!
7. Be ambitious, not only on behalf of your own children and young people, but also on behalf of the community. Students thrive and learn best where the class environment is confident and healthy.
8. Nobody can do everything... but everybody can do something. To sum up, you and the parent group to which you belong can contribute with a great deal, in many areas.
9. What you don't know, you can't do anything about. Inform the school, both when things function well and when challenging situations arise. Work to ensure that this is also possible within the Coordinating Committee.
10. Everything can be said - but it is rather about how things are said. Be friendly and sincere. Show interest and listen, respect others' viewpoints and allow for changes of opinion.



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**National Parents' Committee**  
for primary and secondary education