ANTI-BULLYING, TARGETING & INTIMIDATION

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1. Statement

The North East Autism Society is committed to providing a compassionate, receptive and non-threatening environment in which every individual has the opportunity to learn, to be happy and to develop their education, personal, social, leisure and work skills for life.

Bullying including cyber bullying and harassment are deemed completely unacceptable by the Society. If bullying or harassment occurs, we aim to assure service users that all instances will be addressed thoroughly and effectively without delay.

Autistic individuals are particularly vulnerable to bullying. Due to misinterpretations in social interactions, some autistic individuals are also vulnerable to inadvertently being drawn into bullying behaviour. Additionally, sensory, communication or social difficulties may also lead to behaviour that others perceive as bullying.

Some autistic individuals can find it very difficult to understand other people in casual relationships between behaviours and specific emotional states. The nature of autism could restrict or limit the individual's empathetic understanding of the emotions other people experience as a direct consequence of their actions. Nonetheless should a service user within the Society display behaviours which result in emotional or physical harm on others, immediate and effective action shall be taken.

A whole-organisation approach to bullying is promoted as it is the most effective way to stop bullying. All staff should understand the Society's anti-bullying policy and understand that it is a priority to address the unacceptable behaviour of bullies.

2. What is Bullying

Bullying means different things to different people. A broad definition is that:-

"Bullying is anything a person does deliberately to cause someone else to feel pain and/or unhappiness".

It is generally accepted that bullying as opposed to other forms of conflict is:

- Deliberately hurtful
- Repeated over a period of time, and
- Difficult for victims to defend themselves against

Some incidents of bullying may be so serious that they should trigger safeguarding actions. This would apply where a service user is at risk of suffering – or has suffered significant harm as a result of bullying. Any incident that raises safeguarding concerns must be reported to staff responsible for initiating appropriate action, e.g. Designated Person or a relevant Manager.

Bullying falls into three main categories:

- Physical: hitting, kicking, taking belongings.
- Verbal: name-calling, insulting, making offensive remarks.

- Indirect: spreading nasty stories about someone, exclusion from social groups, being made the subject of malicious rumours, sending malicious e-mails or texts messages on mobile phones.

Examples of bullying might include: -

- Being ignored or made to feel someone is not good enough.
- Removal of belongings – bags, clothing, personal items, money, sweets, food, etc.
- Teasing / ridiculing – people laughing at someone's clothes, hair or the way they look.
- Use of physical dominance and/or body language to intimidate.
- Peer or 'gang' pressure – e.g. to become involved in car crime, smoking, drugs, bullying, shoplifting.
- Discrimination – race, culture, disability, gender, sexuality.
- Subtle – a look / expression and/or an implied threat.
- Taking advantage – "my sweets for your watch".

3. Why autistic people can be vulnerable

- Some individuals can appear to be locked into their own world, while others are eager to make friends but lack the social skills to fit in with their peer group.

- They may act in ways which seem unconventional or strange, as the result of not understanding social rules or norms.

- Some individuals may have difficulties with physical co-ordination or have sensory difficulties.

- They may have special or very narrow interests in certain topics.

- Some autistic people have difficulties with non-verbal behaviour such as reading facial expressions and body language, they may not be able tell when someone is being friendly or trying to hurt them.

- They may also find it hard to empathise with others and may not understand another person's intention.

- As a result, some autistic people may find it difficult to fit in easily with their peers and can be more susceptible to bullying.

The negative impact of bullying on autistic people can include damaging of self-esteem, mental health issues and reduced progress at school, college or work. It can also impact on the development of social skills and relationships. Autistic people often find it difficult to understand social rules and norms and if other people take advantage of this it will make it more difficult for the autistic person to develop their social understanding.

It is unrealistic to believe that bullying can be totally eradicated, what we can do with some degree of certainty is to control, manage and take appropriate and effective action when bullying and harassment is discovered. Our aim is to instil within our service users the principle of thoughtfulness and respect for the rights of others. The Society will use a range of strategies to teach assertiveness and other social skills, for example role playing to deal with taunts.

Additionally, the Society aims to make clear that it will act swiftly and decisively when cases of alleged bullying and harassment are reported.

Bullying and harassment can only be controlled and managed when staff and others within the Society have a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviour. In order to develop effective strategies for dealing with incidents staff and managers must seek to understand the motivation of the bully, where bullying is likely to take place and how to identify potential victims through risk assessment procedures and quality assurance mechanisms.

4. Understanding why somebody might bully

People might sometimes bully others for many different reasons. These may include: -

- They are unhappy
- They need to feel important
- They have been bullied themselves
- They are frightened of being bullied themselves
- They are being abused
- They need help/attention
- They are jealous

5. Understanding why some people may be bullied

It may be something to do with the following things amongst others:-

- Disability
- Beliefs
- Size
- Sexuality
- Age
- Appearance/clothing
- Race/colour
- Being too clever/find it difficult to learn
- Likes and dislikes
- For being a looked after person

6. Warning signs and symptoms of bullying

In some cases, victims of bullying will not have the confidence or will be too frightened to seek help. In some cases, victims will hold the view that to report incidents would only serve to increase or worsen the situation and imply weakness on their part. Unfortunately, there may be victims, who through past experience, have little or no confidence in the effectiveness or worth of reporting systems or the staff that operate them. It is vitally important to try to encourage individuals to report all incidents alleging bullying and harassment and to attempt to restore their confidence in seeking help.

Due to problems with understanding others intentions, some autistic people may not always realise that they are being bullied. Communication difficulties can also make it difficult for them to tell anyone about the incidents. Even in the event that an individual is unable, or not willing to report incidents there may be signs or symptoms that indicate bullying. Staff should be aware of these and should initiate action without delay.

The individual may be suffering bullying if he or she.

- is noticeably frightened or evasive when asked "what's wrong"?
- suddenly loses appetite.
- is unusually short of money.
- loses money or possessions repeatedly.
- has unexplained cuts, bruises or injuries.
- begins to perform poorly in sessions.
- repeatedly complains of being ill before attending School/College/Community Services.
- begins to have nightmares or is unable to sleep.
- attempts to self-harm.
- attempts to run away from School/Home/College or Community activities.
- seems withdrawn or anxious.
- requests a change in course.
- makes significant changes to personal routines.
- gives implausible/unconvincing excuses for the above behaviours.
- mimic the actions of bullies at home by bulling siblings because they don't understand such behaviour is unacceptable

This is not a definitive or an exhaustive list. There may of course be other explanations for the above, but it should be used as a helpful check list.

Staff and carers need to remain vigilant to the fact that victims may often try to appease the bully by 'siding' with them, if the bullying behaviour is challenged.

7. Cyber bullying

The advancement of communication technologies offers greater opportunities to autistic people to communicate with others. However, anyone with a mobile phone or Internet connection can be a target for cyber bullying. Bullies can reach much larger numbers within a peer group than they can with conventional bullying. Vindictive comments posted on a website, for instance, can be seen by a large audience, as can video clips sent by mobile phone. Although it leaves no visible scars, cyber bullying of all types can be extremely destructive.

Evidence from the report to the *Anti-bullying Alliance by Goldsmiths College, University of London (July 2006)* showed that:

- between a fifth and a quarter of learners had been cyber-bullied at least once over the previous few months.
- phone calls, text messages and email were the most common.
- there was more cyber bullying outside school than in.
- females are more likely than males to be involved in cyber bullying in schools, usually by phone.
- for males, text messaging is the most usual form, followed by picture/video clip or website bullying.
- picture/video clip and phone call bullying were perceived as most harmful.
- website and text-bullying were equated in impact to other forms of bullying.
- around a third of those bullied told no one.

ANTI-BULLYING, TARGETING & INTIMIDATION

Mobile, internet and wireless technologies have brought benefits in terms of communication to our service users, but their popularity provides increasing opportunity for misuse through cyber bullying.

What is cyber bullying?

Cyber bullying is an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly over time against a victim.

In most cases, victims are ill equipped to defend themselves.

The advent of cyber bullying adds a new and worrying dimension to the issue of bullying – there is no safe haven for the person being bullied and unlike other forms of bullying, cyber bullying can follow individuals into their private lives and outside of the Society support services.

Examples include:

- text message bullying – sending unwelcome texts that are threatening or cause discomfort.
- picture/video clip bullying via mobile phone cameras – used to make the person feel threatened or embarrassed with images usually sent to other people. So called "happy slapping" involves filming and sharing physical attacks.
- email bullying – uses email to send bullying or threatening messages - often uses a pseudonym for anonymity – sometimes another person's name is used in order to place the blame elsewhere.
- chat room bullying – involves sending menacing or upsetting messages to people when they are in a web-based chat room.
- bullying through instant messaging (IM) – internet-based bullying where service users are sent unpleasant messages as they conduct real time conversations online.
- bullying via websites – includes the use of defamatory blogs (web logs), personal websites and online personal polling sites. There has also been a significant increase in social networking sites for young people, which can provide new opportunities for cyber bullying.

The Society recognises its duty to ensure that cyber bullying is dealt with in an effective manner and to ensure that:

- Bullying via mobile phone or the internet is included in anti-bullying work
- Programmes highlight the risks associated with new technologies, the consequences of their misuse, and how service users may use them safely.
- All e-communications used on the school/care/college site or as part of service activities off-site are monitored.
- Clear policies are set about the use of mobile phones within the Society and at other times when young people are under the Society's care.
- Internet blocking technologies are continually updated, and harmful sites blocked.
- The Society will work with parents and individuals to make sure new communications technologies are used safely, taking account of local and national guidance and good practice.
- Security systems are in place to prevent images and information about service users and staff being accessed improperly from outside.
- The Society will work with police and other partners on managing cyber bullying.

Educational law Bullying is never acceptable. The Society and its community have a duty to protect all its members and provide a safe, healthy environment. A range of education legislation and government initiatives highlight these obligations.

The *Education Act 2011* outlines some legal powers which relate more directly to cyber bullying. Senior Managers have the power 'to an extent that is reasonable' to regulate the conduct of individuals when they are off site. The Act also provides a defence for staff in confiscating items such as mobile phones from learners when there is evidence that they have been used to bully or intimidate others.

8. Civil and criminal law

Although bullying is not a specific criminal offence in UK law, there are laws that can apply in terms of harassing or threatening behaviour, or indeed menacing and threatening communications. In fact, some cyber bullying activities could be criminal offences under a range of different laws, including the *Protection from Harassment Act 1997* which has both civil and criminal provision, the *Malicious Communication Act 1998*, *Section 127* of the *Communication Act 2003* and the *Public Order Act 1986*.

9. Policy Objectives

- All senior, teaching and non-teaching staff, service users and parents should have a full understanding of what bullying and harassment are, including cyber bullying, and what they encompass;
- All staff should be thoroughly familiar with the Anti-bullying Policy and should follow it accordingly when bullying is reported or observed.
- All service users and parents/carers should be familiar with the Anti-bullying Policy and should know the steps to take if bullying incidents occur.
- Service Users and parents/carers should be reassured that the Society takes bullying very seriously and will support victims and their families when alleged bullying is reported.
- Bullying will not be excused, permitted or tolerated under any circumstances.

Roles and responsibilities

Everyone has a responsibility for promoting the welfare and safety of our service users. Members of the teaching and support staff are most likely to be the ones to deal with reports and incidents. It is envisaged that staff will use a range of suggested actions for dealing with incidents however, in certain cases of persistent bullying or in serious cases the matter should be reported to a senior manager.

Social Education

There will always be an emphasis on social education for all service users. This helps in the following ways: -

- Setting an example of good relationships
- Promoting a positive self-awareness and control of their own behaviours
- Making it clear at all times that violent, aggressive behaviour is unacceptable
- Preventing and/or managing any display of unacceptable behaviour immediately

- Identifying and naming the effects of aggression immediately
- Describing how the victim of such aggression feels
- Modelling and encouraging caring and empathic relationships
- Modelling and encouraging responsibility for one's own behaviour and respect for others
- Appropriately expressing caring and gentleness
- Developing and supporting appropriateness and assertiveness
- Providing consistent responses
- Giving clear regular routine
- Channelling and/or avoiding aggression by distraction
- Avoiding unnecessary exposure to violence on TV in the media and on ICT, including discriminatory music lyrics
- Never allowing aggression to produce beneficial results for the perpetrator.

Dealing with Incidents

All dealings with service users should emphasise the importance of respecting the feelings and the rights of others. Service users who demonstrate aggressive tendencies should be made aware of issues through their educational and care planning systems.

Areas for concern or development should be dealt with through the relevant services programmes. The Society expects that the service user will co-operate by working with staff to eliminate the problem. Service users should be encouraged to report bullying incidents including instances of cyber bullying. They should be encouraged to keep a log of contacts which may include messages they have received.

Approaches to dealing with alleged bullying and harassment should be threefold. Aims should be:

- to operate effective guidance and counselling services.
- to develop an atmosphere of non-confrontation.
- to develop mediation as the main process for solving difficulty between the complainant and the alleged perpetrator.

Talking to the complainant

The person alleging bullying or harassment should be given the time and the opportunity to relate their feelings or worries. The member of staff should allow the person time to offload but should lead the conversation towards effectively communicating about their feelings.

The conclusion of the meeting should be an assurance that the alleged perpetrator will be seen and that a further meeting will be held with the complainant to communicate details of progress or outcomes.

Talking to the alleged perpetrator

Autistic people can sometimes be the perpetrator of bullying. There are a wide range of reasons for this, including reasons related to their condition, such as not being able to understand other people's point of view.

Where an autistic person is seen to be bullying or at risk of developing bulling like behaviour it needs to be made clear to them that this is unacceptable, what the consequences of such

behaviour are and what the alternatives to this behaviour could be. These messages need to be clear, unambiguous and effectively delivered in a supportive, non-judgemental manner reflecting of the communication and other material abilities of the individual concerned.

Good home school/college/community services liaison will be needed to ensure a consistent message and so the individual knows there is communication between both settings.

Talking to a group

If the bullying or harassment involves a group, staff may be tempted to talk to them individually based on a "divide and rule" form of control. Staff are encouraged to effectively communicate with whole groups concentrating on feelings rather than establishing the facts of the case.

In most cases, this sort of meeting should not involve the complainant unless it is felt that the alleged perpetrators are genuinely feeling remorse and that the anger or fear within the complainant has subsided.

The meeting should conclude with an agreement of how the group or individuals within it are going to behave towards the complainant. They should be encouraged to suggest ideas about how the situation can be rectified. This may start by a simple apology.

Follow-up meetings

It is essential that the victim and the alleged perpetrator/perpetrators are later consulted to assess whether or not issues have been resolved. If there has been a continuation of the problem, then the dialogue should be restarted concentrating on the areas of feelings and the reasons behind the alleged bullying and its continuing despite the earlier intervention.

The Society recognises that in such instances the complainant may however prefer to now follow the complaints procedure and if so, staff should support this right.

Referrals

In cases where alleged bullying or harassment is persistent and attempts to address the problem has failed, the matter should be referred to a senior manager. The manager will resort to range of interventions, which may include exclusion from the provision where necessary and appropriate.

All reports and incidences of alleged bullying and harassment should be recorded in the relevant service users file, e.g. occurrence file, restricted access file etc. Where persistent bullying is proven against an individual, the Society may consider the expulsion of the individual from the provision where necessary and appropriate.

Our ongoing aim in tackling bullying and harassment must be directed towards breaking the cycle of rivalry and conflict, to encourage service users to co-operate and have respect for one another.

Documentation

All incidents must be documented in the relevant file. Full reports must be submitted to the senior manager responsible.

Learning the Lessons

The Society promotes a culture of shared understanding and learning the lessons to continuously improve. Following any case of bullying, intimidation and/or harassment the people who were involved in the case (including the service user) should be involved in reflective practice de-briefing.

10. Summary Guidance

The following summary guidance will assist staff in supporting service users:

Guidance step 1 - Talking to the Complainant

- Give the complainant the time and opportunity to communicate effectively about their feelings and/or worries
- Let them off load
- Lead them to describe feelings rather than events
- Assure them that the alleged perpetrator will be seen
- Arrange to see the complainant again
- Record the meeting

Guidance step 2 - Talking to the Alleged Perpetrator

- Try to establish the motivation behind intimidating others.
- Make clear to them that their behaviour is unacceptable, what the consequences of such behaviour are and what the alternatives to this behaviour could be.
- Communication must be effective, clear, unambiguous and deliver in a supportive, non-judgemental manner in keeping with their communication and other material abilities.
- Good home school/college/community service liaison will be needed to ensure a consistent message and so the service user knows there is communication between both settings.
- Discuss the alleged perpetrators relationships with other service users rather than the Complainant.
- Try to get the alleged perpetrator to think about how the complainant must be feeling.
- Reach an understanding of how the alleged perpetrator is expected to behave in relation to the complainant and others.
- Arrange to meet the alleged perpetrator again.

Guidance step 3 - Talking to a Group

- Communicate with the group as a whole
- Concentrate on feelings rather than establishing facts or blame

• Do not involve the complainant unless the group are sufficiently remorseful or the anger and fear with the victim has subsided. (The complainant obviously must have the option not to be involved, if they wish)

• Seek an agreement from the group with regard to how they should behave toward the complainant and others

• Get them to suggest ways by which the situation can be rectified. (This may start with a simple apology)

Guidance step 4 - Follow up Meeting

• I Consult with both the complainant and the alleged perpetrator at a later date (separately).

• Establish whether or not the situation has settled down.

• If the problem has continued, restart the process concentrating on feelings and the reasons
behind the alleged bullying and its continuation.

• Record the outcome of the meeting.

• The complainant should be informed at this stage of their right to make a complaint and offered appropriate assistance if needed.

Guidance step 5 - Referral

Referral to a senior manager must be made if the problem is persistent and attempts to address the problem have failed.

• Reports detailing meetings held, along with action taken should be made available at the time of referral.

• Meetings will be arranged with the alleged perpetrator/perpetrators and the complainant, if necessary.

• Details of the action taken by senior managers will be communicated to the staff referring the case.

• Parents, families (bearing in mind the age of the service user) and the funding body will be notified in writing.

• Where the decision for expulsion has been taken, CEO will notify the Trustees.

Additional Guidance to Designated Managers

1. Ensure that action taken contributes to the development of ethos that promotes non-bullying behaviour and takes the stance that bullying and harassment are unacceptable.

2. Ensure that arrangements exist to publicise the Policy to service users and parents/carers, enlisting their support where possible.

3. Promote an environment whereby individuals themselves actively discourage bullying and harassment, viewing the reporting of incidents as responsible behaviour rather than the telling of tales.

4. Ensure that individuals are not regularly left unattended in classrooms/workshops.

5. Ensure that relationships between service users and staff are based on mutual respect and trust so that service users feel able to report instances of alleged bullying or harassment.

6. Ensure that staff in all service areas have access to the Policy, are familiar with its content and understand their role in tackling bullying.

7. Ensure that supervision and cover arrangements are in place at times and places when bullying is likely to take place. Hot spot areas should be identified and recorded in risk management plans and regularly reviewed. Operate a system of spot checks.

8. Ensure that curriculum and training programmes encourage non-academic as well as academic achievement, co-operative as well as competitive learning.

9. Ensure that bullying as a subject is raised in academic and social learning programmes.

10. Ensure that induction training for new staff incorporates familiarisation with the Policy its aims and guidance.

11. Ensure that service users and their parents/carers and families understand the intention of the Policy and its material parts.

Additional Guidance for Staff

- Any member of staff who has witnessed bullying or had it reported to them is responsible for recording the incident in the daily records of the alleged bully and the bullied service user.

- A decision will be made at this stage by the Manager to agree the strategy (e.g. guidance steps within this policy) for managing the incident and any resultant concerns. The Manager will also make a decision as to whether the incident needs to be reported as a safeguarding issue. Staff will ensure each service user's safety and inform the service user concerned about the strategy, including how the incident will be dealt with and by whom.

- Staff will ensure the additional support from the Therapy Team where a

service user requires an accessible form of information to aid communication and/or understanding.

- Counselling/Victim Support if required, via an appropriately qualified person.

- The guidance steps taken will always assess risk and review the risk management and care planning systems which staff have responsibility for being involved in. Staff have a duty of care to report any potential risk that either has caused and/or may cause ***significant harm*** in line with Safeguarding procedures.

- Staff may be a point of contact to parents, carers, social workers etc so must be familiar with this Policy/procedure and act in a professional and reassuring manner.

- All staff should ensure that they work within a multi disciplinary approach and to document this within the service user's records.

- Staff can refer the service user to relevant information which is available in an accessible format. For further individualised accessible forms, staff must contact the service users Therapist.

11. Relevant Policies/Procedures:

- Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints
- Safeguarding
- STEP Policy
- Joint guidance on recording of incidents
- Accidents, Injuries and Unexplained Injuries
- Communication