

## WHY DO PEOPLE

## BULLY?

There are many reasons why a young person may display bullying behaviour. Here are just a few:

### MEDIA INFLUENCES

Young people can be heavily influenced by the media they consume: YouTube, TikTok, Instagram... all these platforms and more can play a large part in how a young person behaves on and offline. Many young people want to 'fit in' to 'Youth Culture' and are afraid of being seen to be 'different'. You may have seen popular dance trends on TikTok or the must-have game. All of these signal behaviours to young people on how to obtain status within their community. This isn't to say that the online world is all bad – it can offer young people opportunities to find their 'tribe' and meet new friends but it's important to consider what media young people are consuming and how it could influence their behaviour.

#### Our Top Tip:

The best way to understand online platforms and trends is to explore it first-hand; why not download TikTok and see what all the hype is about? Or you could plan a session in which young people debate the pros and cons of the online world. Whatever you do, remember that online platforms are not inherently 'good' or 'bad' – it all depends on how they're used.

### SOCIAL INFLUENCE/STATUS

Tied into the above, displaying bullying behaviour can often be seen as a quick way to elevate status within their peer group. They may emanate behaviour seen by others in the classroom which provoke a positive response from their peers. This often manifests itself in disruptive behaviour but it's important to note that sometimes, this behaviour can also stem from a lack of social skills or awareness. Very rarely does a young person misbehave for no reason – they may not otherwise receive any attention and so view negative attention as better than no attention at all. Some young people may also display bullying behaviour because they want to detract from their shortcomings – 'If I act like a tough person who bullies others, no one will know that I have low confidence', for example.

#### Our Top Tip:

If you believe a young person is displaying bullying behaviour in order to gain social status, it's often best to speak with them on an individual basis, away from their peers where they may be tempted to continue to misbehave. Once the audience is no longer in the picture, you will often find that the young person acts very differently. You could ask them why they covet status and if bullying behaviour is the best way to achieve it – every young person has talents and skills that make them unique. They may just need help to discover – and celebrate – what these are.

### A CULTURE OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

When bullying behaviour is seen to be the norm, young people may not question it and instead actively take part. One example we see in a lot of the schools we work with is normalised homophobic language – 'that's so gay'. This cause of bullying behaviour can be difficult to address, as it often requires a whole-school culture change. However, it is important to understand and acknowledge when a culture of bullying behaviour happens so that you can address it cohesively.

#### Our Top Tip:

It can feel overwhelming to try to tackle a culture of bullying behaviour alone – and that's why we recommend bringing staff and students along on the journey with you. Our free Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme (<https://diana-award.org.uk/anti-bullying-training/>) is a great way to start. It's also important to address incidences of normalised bullying behaviour when they happen and take it seriously – recording incidences can help you identify which areas to tackle first in your school. You could encourage your students or Anti-Bullying Ambassadors to create and conduct a survey which asks students where, when and what type of bullying behaviour they see in the school – the results may match your expectations or they may surprise you! This will help you to understand the full extent of the situation and bridge the gap between staff and students.

### EXTERNAL PRESSURES

Various external pressures can contribute towards a young person displaying bullying behaviour – for example, academic pressures or perceived academic 'failures', exam stress, high-expectations at home, caring responsibilities, etc. All of these can pile on top of one another and cause a young person to act out by displaying bullying behaviour.

#### Our Top Tip:

Does your school currently offer a 'drop in' session during break times for students who are struggling? Or is there a school counsellor/nurse who can support young people's mental – as well as physical – health? Provide opportunities throughout the school day for students to speak to trusted school staff about whatever is on their mind.

## DON'T WANT TO BE TARGETED THEMSELVES

By displaying bullying behaviour themselves, some young people believe this will protect them from experiencing it.

### Our Top Tip:

This is often tied into social status mentioned above. It's therefore important to build a school culture in which bullying behaviour is addressed and not permitted to fester, so that young people's fear of being targeted by others is reduced.

## LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

This may sound like an obvious one but it's important to remember that a young person who displays bullying behaviour may be doing so in order to compensate for a lack of self-confidence or similar insecurity.

### Our Top Tip:

If you know or suspect that this may be the reason for a young person displaying bullying behaviour, provide opportunities for them to feel empowered or important. This is not to be confused with rewarding or ignoring the bullying behaviour – this should always be addressed directly so that they understand the behaviour is not tolerated in school. However, it's also important to build the young person's confidence and skills and thereby reduce their need to compensate for a lack of self-confidence. One-to-one mentoring – either from a teacher they trust, an older peer or an external mentor – can be a great way to support a young person in this situation longer-term. In the short-term, celebrate their successes – however small – and show them that their positive contributions are valued by you and their peer group.

## BLAMING THE TARGET

Some young people – and some staff! – try to justify bullying behaviour by claiming that the person experiencing it was 'asking to be bullied'. For example, you may have heard or even thought 'if that student lost some weight/had a normal hair colour/didn't dress like a goth, no one would bully them'. Saying this to a young person who displays bullying behaviour reinforces the idea that someone 'deserves' to experience bullying behaviour and that it's their fault – it's important to remember that everyone deserves to be respected and it's never someone's fault for experiencing bullying behaviour.

### Our Top Tip:

Ensure you discuss with students that importance to respect and celebrate what makes us different and remind them that everyone should feel welcome in your school. Why not create a display board which celebrates people who were considered 'different' throughout history? For example, Albert Einstein is widely believed to have had autism – something which some may say makes him 'different' – and Richard Branson has dyslexia.

## REPLICATING BEHAVIOUR

Some young people may replicate behaviour they have seen or experienced from others. They may have parents/carers or siblings who display bullying behaviour as the norm at home and believe that they too must behave in a similar way. Some young people may not think there is anything 'wrong' with their behaviour at all as a result.

### Our Top Tip:

The first step towards addressing this behaviour is often to explain what bullying behaviour is – young people may struggle to identify bullying behaviour without a clear definition. The Diana Award defines bullying behaviour as 'repeated, negative behaviour that is intended to make others feel upset, uncomfortable or unsafe'. Once students understand this, it is then their choice whether to change their behaviour or continue to display bullying behaviour.

## HOME/FAMILY DIFFICULTIES

A negative and/or dysfunctional home life can sometimes result in a young person displaying bullying behaviour in school as a coping mechanism. Negative behaviour, like violence, that the young person has seen at home may be mirrored when with their peers.

### Our Top Tip:

It's important to acknowledge when a young person displays bullying behaviour and get to the bottom of whether their home life may have some bearing on why. Have things changed for them recently? This may explain sudden changes in mood of behaviour – particularly aggression. If things haven't changed recently, it's still important to speak with the young person on a one-on-one basis in a safe, supportive environment, in order to understand where they are coming from and what may be affecting them at home.

**Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all to explain why a young person displays bullying behaviour and it can often be a result of a combination of factors. Whatever the reason, young people should be given an opportunity to acknowledge, address and change their behaviour. It's important not to label young people as 'bullies'. Instead, at The Diana Award, we focus on 'bullying behaviour' because behaviour is something that can be stopped or changed. Young people who are displaying bullying behaviour may need support to see the impact of their behaviour or support with managing their own feelings. Educators are well placed to help them make this behaviour change.**

## FURTHER SUPPORT\_

For further support on how to address bullying behaviour in your school, check out our Resource Centre at <https://www.antibullyingpro.com/resources> and free Anti-Bullying Ambassador Programme at <https://diana-award.org.uk/anti-bullying-training/>.

We're proud to be the only charity set up in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, and her belief that young people have the power to change the world. It's a big mission but there are two things within it that we focus our charity's efforts on – young people and change.

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Throughout all of our programmes and initiatives, 'change' for and by young people is central, including our anti-bullying work which encourages change in attitudes and behaviours.

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We hope you found this resource useful and wish you all the best in your anti-bullying journey. If you would like to help us create more resources and train even more Anti-Bullying Ambassadors, you can make a £5 donation by texting CHANGE 5 to 70470 or visit [diana-award.org.uk/donate](https://diana-award.org.uk/donate)

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