

The Youthline approach is to provide a safe environment for clients and therapeutic interventions that are based on safety, client preferences and needs, and available resources in accordance with Youthline Ethics, Policies and Procedures.

"...a small but significant number of students (10%) report being afraid several times during the past school year that someone at school would hurt or bother them and 6% of students report being bullied at school weekly or more often."

(Youth '07)

Bullying is a form of abuse – and can be emotional, verbal or physical in nature (1). Essentially, bullying is when one person or group of people use their power to take advantage of someone who is unable to defend themselves (2).

The tactics bullies use include: physical and verbal threats and/or attacks, damaging or stealing property, excluding others from activities, and making others feel uncomfortable or scared (2). The popularity of the internet, social networking sites and cell phones have also provided new avenues through which bullying can occur, with 'txt bullying' and 'cyber bullying' becoming increasingly common (1).

Bullying can damage a young person's mental and physical wellbeing, having potentially very serious effects on their current and future mental health (3). Emotions and beliefs generated through bullying can in turn lead to low self esteem, anxiety and depression (3). In severe and persistent cases of bullying the victim may see suicide as the only way out (4).

Young people may not tell their parents or other trusted adults they are being bullied and may attempt to deal with

the problem without seeking parental support, which they need, particularly when there are threats of violence (5).

Unless a young person discloses that they are being bullied or there are visible bruises or injuries, it can be difficult for others to identify that bullying is happening. Signs that a young person is being bullied could include:

Behavioural Signs:

- Feeling ill in the morning
- Reluctance to go to school
- Changes in route taken to school
- Change in grades
- Aggressive behaviour
- With-drawl, stammering, reluctance to talk about the issue (5)

Emotional Signs:

- Mood Swings
- Aggression
- Frequent tears
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits (5)

Physical Signs:

- Unexplained bruises, cuts or other injuries
- Coming home with lost or damaged property
- Coming home hungry/not having eaten (5)

Other Signs:

- Few friends/left out of peer groups at school
- Frequent target for teasing or ridicule (5)

This is by no means an exhaustive list and such signs could also indicate that a young person is experiencing other difficulties unrelated to bullying. However, if you are or you suspect that someone is being bullied it is important to tell a trusted adult who can help to resolve the issue (5).

As well as providing a telephone helpline and text service, Youthline utilises the following approaches with an individualised assessment and plan to help young people who are being bullied:

- Family focused counselling
- Individual counselling
- Personal development programmes

SOLUTIONS TO BULLYING

The first step is for a parent/caregiver, youth worker or other trusted adult to communicate effectively with the young person being affected by bullying (5).

Effective communication requires parents or other trusted adults:

- to choose a good time and place to talk
- to take a non-judgmental stance by being open to the experience the young person is having and putting any critical tendencies aside
- to show respect by listening carefully, providing warmth and support, and highlighting the positives (5)

The second step is to work with the young person to find a way out of being bullied. Recent research and theory suggests using some of the following:

- developing a network of support, for example, going with the young person to talk to a teacher, counsellor or an older friend who can be trusted (5)
- Encourage the young person to adopt behaviours conducive stopping bullying, including telling the bully to stop, using neutral language, walking away or ignoring, trying to act unimpressed (5)
- supporting the young person to make a complaint to the police if threats or physical violence have been involved (6)
- approaching the parents of the bully and trying to get them to put a stop to the behaviour (6)
- keeping the lines of communication open and listening with a non-judgmental ear (5)

- expressing love and support to the young person and letting her/him know they are not at fault (5)
- focussing on the young person's attributes in a positive way because it will increase their confidence and self esteem
- **keep telling people until something is done**

Bullying is a serious problem and can significantly impact on a young person's life. Bullying can be stopped! And parents/caregivers, teachers, youth workers, and counsellors have an important role to play.

It is also important to take into account the role which schools and communities have in addressing issues surrounding bullying (7). Programmes implemented community wide and within schools which address issues of discrimination and social standpoints on bullying at large have been proposed as effective and necessary lines through which bullying may be reduced (7). Enquiring as to whether programmes are being used within the school/location in question may help address wider issues surrounding the bullying.

UNHELPFUL APPROACHES

Do not tell the young person to 'fight back'. This approach could only make matters worse (5). Although this advice is often given with the best intentions, it often leads to a greater level of hopelessness felt by the young person.

Don't tell the young person to wait for it to go away – in most cases it won't, and this will cause continued harm (5).

Lastly, it is important to encourage the young person not to avoid school or the place where the bullying is taking place, but rather, that you can find a way to solve it together. Avoidance won't solve the problem and can make outcomes worse (5).

YOUTHLINE'S APPROACH

Youthline is guided by the six principles of the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA; Ministry of Youth Development, 2007). Youthline's approach to bullying therefore follows these principles.

The Principles of Healthy Youth Development are:

1. Youth development is shaped by the 'big picture'

Youthline understands that building resilient young people requires a focus not just on individuals but in creating safe and supportive environments around them. This is particularly poignant when addressing issues of surrounding bullying, a process resulting from wider community issues, such as discrimination (7).

2. Youth development is about young people being connected

Youthline aims to provide a foundation for young people to branch out and establish a network of connections to draw strength from. This can be as simple as linking the young person with a sports team or social group where they can develop relationships with peers and adults. Creating relationships which can support students against bullying is one of the most effective strategies for reducing its occurrence and effect.

3. Youth development is based on a consistent strengths-based approach

A strengths-based approach focuses on minimising the effect of risk factors while promoting strengths and resilience. Youthline incorporates a strengths-based philosophy into their approach to bullying by helping the young person to identify risk and resiliency factors around their situation and acting accordingly.

4. Youth development happens through quality relationships

Bullying at its core is a relationship problem. Often the best protection against the negative outcomes of bullying is to build positive and trusting relationships with victims. This is relevant both to the relationships between the client and the people around them as well as the relationship between the client and Youthline. Evidence has shown that efficacy of treatment is dependent on the strength of the client-therapist relationship. When appropriate, Youthline will endeavour to include the young person's family when addressing issues of bullying in order to facilitate greater understanding and support.

Inclusion of the young person's main support figures will facilitate greater change not only within the young person, but within the greater environment in which the bullying is taking place.

5. Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate

Victims of bullying often feel isolated because of their perceived powerlessness to deal with the situation. Participation fosters a sense of connection, making it a useful tool against the feelings of isolation that can be caused by bullying.

Youthline provides youth development programmes and activities that are open for all young people to take part in. The content of these programmes is designed to promote leadership and communication skills, but as well as this the participation itself is a positive influence towards building social skills and connections.

6. Youth development needs good information

Youthline's approach to bullying stems from best practice. This means that the best available evidence is used to shape the treatment for clients. It also includes regular evaluations to ensure that services are producing the desired outcomes.

SAFETY OF CLIENTS AND OTHERS

All counsellors will clearly explain confidentiality and its limits when they enter into a new counselling relationship.

All Youthline counsellors are familiar with and utilise Youthline Policies and Procedures to underpin their practice. As Youthline is an accredited provider under the Child Youth and Family Act, these policies and procedures are assessed by Child Youth and Family regularly.

At all points, work with young people experiencing bullying will include assessment of individuals to facilitate addressing other issues, such as depression, substance abuse and anxiety, which may be present. Risk of suicide and suicide attempts are increased among people with depression; Youthline's policy includes comprehensive risk assessment and regular review. Therapists are required to

follow Youthline Policy and Procedures regarding safety, suicide and self-harm.

Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment, 20(7), pp. 952-962.

Ministry of Youth Affairs. (2002). Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa. Wellington: Ministry of Youth Affairs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information about the client is treated with confidence within Youthline and not passed on without the client's prior consent, unless the safety of the client or of others is threatened.

If a Youthline worker assesses that a client or another person's safety is threatened and they need to contact an outside agency they will inform the client of this step if at all possible.

Youthline is able to refer clients to other community agencies if it is appropriate. Clients have the right to choose whether they see a counsellor alone, with a friend, or with family members. A translator can be arranged if required. If clients prefer, Youthline will also help them to find someone from their own culture to talk to.

REFERENCES

1. Adolescent Health Research Group, (2008). Youth '07: The Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in New Zealand. Initial Findings. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
2. www.nobully.org.nz. Accessed 20/12/10
3. Ramya, S.G. & Kulkarni, M.L. (2010). *Bullying among school children: Prevalence and association with common symptoms in childhood*. Indian Journal of Paediatrics, DOI 10.1007/s12098-010-0219-6.
4. Juvonen, J. & Graham, S. (2001). *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and the victimized*. New York, America: The Guilford Press.
5. www.ncab.org.au. Accessed 06/01/2011.
6. www.bullingnoway.com.au. Accessed 06/01/2011.
7. Haeseler, L.A., *Stopping child bullying: educators diverse approaches for school improvement*.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Youthline 24-hour contact details:
Youthline support line: **0800 37 66 33**
Txt: **234**
E-mail: talk@youthline.co.nz
- No Bully:
www.nobully.org.nz/kids.htm