

Feedback from the pinpoint June 2014 Network Meetings

Hot Topic: Bullying

Background

The meetings were held in 5 areas during the month of June. In addition to the 33 parents who attended the meetings and participated in person, we used social media and the pinpoint website to consult more widely and received feedback from parents through email and Facebook.

In the first part of each meeting parents were asked about their experiences of their child being bullied, the affect this had on the child and the family and the support they were given.

In the second part of the meeting parents worked with service providers to look at what support was needed for children, families and settings in the future to prevent bullying from occurring and to deal with it when it does occur.

Parent Feedback

Effects of bullying

Parents fed back about **how being bullied had affected their child:**

- Having very low self esteem
- Losing confidence
- Children not being aware of being bullied due to their lack of social understanding and therefore gravitating towards bullies believing them to be their friends.
- Feeling excluded from social activities – play and parties
- Not being able to walk home from school or use transport as these were times where they were particularly vulnerable to bullies
- Isolating themselves
- Being made to admit to actions they hadn't done to please the bullies
- Becoming more anxious
- Self-harming – cutting their arms, pulling out their own teeth
- Reporting they felt suicidal – there was no point in life
- Suffering physical injuries
- Faking illnesses to avoid school
- Becoming school refusers
- Feeling not listened to and not believed
- Feeling ashamed and humiliated
- Developing eating disorders
- Becoming aggressive at home with parents and siblings
- Showing anger, frustration and rage

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- Immersing themselves more into obsessions and fantasy
- Becoming withdrawn from the family group

Quote from a parent when asked how it affected their child: “it made her cry, it made her bleed”.

Parents fed back on **how bullying had affected their families:**

- Parent’s parenting techniques were questioned – they were put onto parenting courses etc. instead of their child’s needs being recognised
- Parents were isolated by other parents in the playground and at social activities
- Parents were told it was their child’s behaviour which had made incidents happen
- Parents felt isolated
- Parents were not listened to or believed by the settings
- Parents themselves felt bullied by other parents
- The family became fractured as the child’s behaviour at home grew worse
- Parents felt frustrated, angry and helpless about a situation they could not change to help their child
- Parents mental health and wellbeing was damaged e.g. anxiety, depression, sleeplessness
- One parent reported she had developed an eating disorder as a result of the stress
- Parents felt they were bullied themselves by the settings and professionals and made to feel they were responsible for their child’s behaviour
- Parents said they lost confidence in their parenting abilities as they were unable to protect their child
- Some parents were bullied by the communities in which they lived as well as the child in the setting
- Siblings were bullied by other children as a result of their sibling’s disability
- Siblings developed mental health issues and anxiety as a result of seeing their sibling bullied
- Siblings became withdrawn
- Siblings and parents were attacked by the child being bullied as a reaction to the situation

Quote from a parent asked how it affected the family: “It caused mental health issues and I lost all my hair through anxiety”

Prevention and Intervention

Parents reported that **what hadn’t worked well for them** was:

- Settings removing the victim but not dealing with the bullies
- A lack of staff awareness about the sensory and behavioural needs of SEND children

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- A lack of recognition of the trigger points and what constituted bullying for a child with SEND
- A non-individualised approach
- A lack of communication between settings and parents
- A lack of communication between professionals e.g. school nurse and school
- Generic behaviour and bullying policies with no SEND recognition
- Bullying not recorded
- Bullying not investigated
- Reports not taken seriously or believed
- Denial of incidents
- Settings often directing the bullied child to “sort out the problems themselves” and “make friends with the bully”
- The use of mobile phones/technology to continue bullying outside of schools was not investigated
- Lack of capacity in sibling support services
- Lack of support for child, parent and siblings

Parents reported that **what had worked well** was:

- Settings promoting awareness of disabilities and acceptance
- Head teachers intervention
- Having a staggered intake to get the child used to the setting
- Having a written plan within the IEP to deal with behaviour and incidents
- Having incidents dealt with immediately
- Play Therapy
- Children’s Disability Team
- Peer mentor system
- Buddy system
- SIBS
- Assemblies and talks with the class about understanding and respecting the children’s needs
- Work with the child about managing anxieties
- Having an identified, trusted adult for the child to talk to
- Peer support for parents through Facebook
- The child having a “worry book” for recording anxieties in at school
- Staff who were trained and understood the child’s needs
- Counselling for child
- Counselling for siblings
- Having a structure for play and break times
- Good, open and honest communication between setting and parent
- Good TA support
- A consistent setting-wide approach
- School nurse support
- CAMHS

Finding solutions with service providers

Providers and parents worked together to look at the support needed for children and families in order to make a positive change for the future.

There were many interesting discussions including the need to change culture so that there is generally more mindfulness in the whole community and in settings to promote shared morals and give all children the support they need.

In all 5 areas and through the internet and social media feedback, common key themes/recommendations emerged which are summarised below:

- a) **There should be a SEND specific section added to the current Cambridgeshire County Council Bullying Policy which should be circulated to all settings for implementation within their own Bullying Policies.**

The section should include:

Guidelines on effective communication

Parents should have a named contact within the setting to speak to about incidents of SEND bullying. The contact should actively listen to parent's concerns and ensure that they are communicated with throughout any investigation process. Settings should recognise that often children will exhibit behaviours at home as a result of incidences during the day which they may not show within the setting.

Children should have a named adult who they know they can speak to in the setting if they have any concerns – parents and children should be involved in identifying the adult to ensure the child is comfortable with that person.

Training/Awareness Raising

All staff in the setting including playground supervisors should be fully aware of the individual needs of the child in order to recognise sensory triggers, behavioural triggers, and social needs, and to assist the child when necessary.

Peer assemblies/class time should include opportunities to educate peers about specific conditions and needs in a way that is comfortable to the child and parents. This could include specialist assemblies delivered by older children/adults with the same condition.

Staff should receive training and support to understand the conditions of children in their care in order to be able to better support the child and family.

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Where possible parents and the setting should work together to plan the most appropriate way to raise awareness and promote understanding of the child's needs with other parents and the wider community.

Settings should consider the identification of a Bullying Champion who can receive specialised training to support children, families and other staff and ensure policies are adhered to and advice is given as required.

Systems and Processes

Settings should put in place a transparent process for dealing with incidents of bullying. This should include how reports of bullying are investigated, how support is offered to the victim and to the perpetrator/s, and how this is communicated to the child and family. It should also state timescales for each stage of the procedure.

Parents should be given information about the setting's complaints procedure if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation or actions taken.

Incidents of SEND bullying should be recorded and monitored and results published.

Children with SEND should have a Social Plan linked to their IEP to ensure that social times are supported and that the child is given the structure required to cope and to be kept safe.

Reasonable adjustments need to be made to setting's Behaviour Policies and to the classroom to meet the individual needs of the child and to ensure a positive experience.

Settings should ensure that rewards systems recognise the efforts of all children and are inclusive e.g. recognising that rewarding attendance may be detrimental to children who have ongoing medical conditions and lead to further isolation.

Support

Settings should ensure that children with SEND receive individualised support to enable them to cope and be safe in the unstructured times in the day. This should be recognised to be as important as the support they receive in structured sessions and should be part of any plan.

A package of support for children who have been bullied should be discussed with the child and parents. This could include play therapy, counselling or referral to other services including CAMHS as necessary.

Siblings of SEND children should be identified at the school admissions stage and should be carefully monitored and given access to support as required.

Settings should introduce a peer mentoring and/or buddy system (as appropriate to the age of child) where specific children selected by peers and staff could be trained

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to give peer support to children with SEND and would provide a peer for them to link to at non-structured times.

Parents should be supported/signposted by the setting to access the support they require in order to maintain their health and wellbeing.

Support should be given to the child and family to prevent and deal with any incidents of bullying outside of the setting e.g. on the journey from and to the setting.

Support should be given to the child and the family to investigate incidences of cyber bullying or text messaging where it involves other children within the setting and the same procedures applied as for incidents occurring directly within the setting.

b) In addition to the policy, consideration should be given to the need for an increase in the following services who provide support to the child and family but are limited in resource and capacity:

- Counselling Services
- CAMHS Services for children without a learning disability
- Play Therapy
- Music Therapy
- Young Carer and Sibling Groups

c) There was particular concern raised about children who became school refusers after bullying at school.

In these circumstances parents reported that they were given very little support. It affects their ability to work, the whole family's social connections, the child's confidence and self-esteem and education. They reported it can cause the whole family to fall apart.

There does not appear to be a specific package of support that is offered to families in this position. CAMHS services were available to some of the children but not others, Locality Teams sometimes have involvement but parents report it is very hard to access the amount of support required. Families were not offered tutor support and some children have missed up to a year of education.

We would like to suggest that a specified route/package is put in place for these families so they have a point of contact and advice to help them through this time, possibly routed in the CAMHS.

d) Bullying in the community

Some parents reported that they were bullied in the community in which they live and that they had reported these incidents to the police but they were not progressed.

We will ensure we put guidance and links to the appropriate services to support families on the pinpoint website so that they can access support.

e) Other Settings

We would like to circulate the guidance to other community settings and volunteer led organisations e.g. Scouts, Youth Clubs etc.

These settings are often staffed by volunteers who may have a limited awareness of the needs of SEND children.

f) Learning from Others

There were some interesting approaches identified by parents in the sessions which were in place in some settings and working well. These included:

- The Marlborough Project led by Educational Psychologists – piloted in some areas
- An approach of Mindfulness run in American Schools
- The application of self-esteem theory
- Peer Mentor Systems
- Playground Buddy Systems
- Kidscape Zap Sessions for Victims of Bullying
<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/training/zap-anti-bullying-workshops-for-young-people/>

It would be really useful for settings to have opportunities to share these experiences and good practice examples to benefit everyone.

Further Actions for pinpoint

- present findings to SEND Project Board and seek support of key staff
- seek case studies from parents to be presented alongside the paper
- identify the Bullying Policy holder within Cambridgeshire County Council to seek the addition of the SEND segment
- present the findings to key personnel to influence change
- report back to parents on progress and changes.