

DL18: Responding to physical homophobic bullying

This summarises how staff should respond to serious incidents of physical homophobic bullying where safeguarding is a concern. It is intended to be used in the context of existent school policy and alongside current guidance on behaviour and bullying. Information about day-to-day intervention strategies can be found in the section relating to verbal abuse.

Identifying possible incidents of physical abuse

- You observe an incident of physical abuse.
- Make sure your interaction with the pupil is sensitive. Do not assume that the pupil is gay; this may discourage them from discussing the issue with you.
- Decide what action needs to be taken – can the issue be resolved between staff, the pupil and the bully? Can the same methods of intervention used in verbal bullying be applied in this case?
- Is it an isolated incident or has it been going on for some time?
- Follow agreed sanctions, as set out in the school anti-bullying policy.

Responding to a pupil who tells you about an incident

- Respond promptly and calmly to the pupil's disclosure. Do not assume that they are gay, just because they have experienced homophobic bullying. However, be responsive and respectful if they do tell you they are gay.
- Make it clear that it will be necessary to tell other people about the incident. This does not mean you will tell people that the pupil is gay, just about the physical abuse. Make sure you follow procedures for reporting incidents.
- Give the pupil appropriate reassurance and support.

- Talk to the pupil at their pace; do not rush them or ask them unnecessary questions.
- Record the incident, and the details of the incident.
- Follow agreed procedures, as set out in the school anti-bullying policy.

Following policies and procedures

- Record all the information whilst it's still fresh in your memory.
- Make sure you make a distinction between what you have been told, what you observed, and what you've learnt from elsewhere.
- Make sure that information that can be kept confidential (for example, if a pupil has told you they are gay) is kept confidential. Be familiar with school policy on confidentiality, and the times when you must breach this (e.g. when it is judged that the young person is at risk of significant harm). This is particularly important if other agencies (and parents) are likely to be involved in the case later on.
- Make sure that some members of the school bullying team are aware of the incident. This will be important if the situation escalates, and other people might have to arbitrate.

Future work

- Ensure that the pupil is safe and is not experiencing on-going homophobic physical abuse.
- Examine new strategies for preventing homophobic bullying.
- Follow the hierarchy of sanctions to ensure bullies are held to account.
- Work with the bullies. Find out why they are behaving in this way