

BEATING THE BULLIES

Bullying can affect anyone at any time in their lives. [...] We at the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum want to stamp out the problem and are working with children and young people to make them more aware of how serious it can be.

More than 700 schools across Northern Ireland are taking part in Anti-Bullying Week 2010, which is brilliant. Each year we focus on a different theme — in recent years it has been cyber-bullying, going to a new school, and bullying while travelling to and from school. This year we are looking at where bullying happens around schools and how to stop it. Research shows that the hot spots are corridors, locker rooms, toilets and playgrounds.

As part of Anti-Bullying Week we have given teachers materials and ideas for class and assembly activities and have sent out posters. We've asked classes to write anti-bullying messages in chalk on their school playgrounds. [...] We also ran an art competition and received some fantastic, imaginative entries from hundreds of pupils. Once again Anti-Bullying Week is supported by Translink and they are also displaying our posters in bus and train stations.

NIABF helps schools develop anti-bullying policy and practice, making sure they have the resources to prevent bullying and to take effective action to deal with any situation that crops up. We also work hard to raise awareness among the public, challenging the view that bullying is a natural part of growing up, and making it clear that it isn't an acceptable form of behaviour.

Bullying can make young people withdrawn, leave school early, and it can affect them for the rest of their lives. One of our key messages is that it is the responsibility of everyone in society to tackle the problem. [...]

Bullying can take many different forms — it can be based on race, religion, culture, on what you wear or the colour of your hair — and it can vary in seriousness from name calling and teasing to serious physical assaults. The most common form of bullying is name calling, though cyber-bullying by email or text is a very worrying trend. [...]

Teenagers in particular can be very sensitive at a time in their lives when emotions are running high. There is a fine line between banter and bullying behaviour, and it's our job to let young people know where that line is.

The main thing children and young people want when they are being bullied is for it to stop. We advise anyone going through a bad time to tell someone and bring it into the open. Adults should always take reports seriously and act. Parents need to set a good example and teach their children about tolerance, diversity and respect.

Adapted from *Belfast Telegraph*

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