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Developing Effective Anti-Bullying Practice: Free Online CPD Training for Professionals developed by the Anti-Bullying Alliance as part of its All Together programme. Available: <https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/free-cpd-online-training>

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA), official organisers of Anti-Bullying Week across the UK, has copious resources for practitioners and schools wanting to reduce bullying, including free online training to reduce bullying of disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEN). These children are twice as likely to experience bullying than non-disabled children, and they may be more likely to experience direct, manipulative and verbal bullying (Chatzitheochari *et al.*, 2014). There are many adverse outcomes for victims of bullying (including cyberbullying). It is therefore essential that we have high-quality resources to prevent and reduce harm.

The ABA's online learning programme covers a wide range of topics on bullying in clearly defined modules that are available to anyone who works with children and young people. Each module takes between 30 and 45 minutes to complete and aims particularly to reduce bullying of children and adolescents with a disability or SEN. Modules contain a mixture of learning materials, from informative videos to interactive quizzes and exercises, case studies and relevant recent research. Evidence on the impact of bullying comes from a range of sources, including the ABA, Childline, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, government reports and activist groups (e.g. LGBTQ+ organisations).

The content throughout is informative on issues and experiences of bullying and disability or SEN. The materials are equally engaging for learners with an understanding and experience of anti-bullying work with children with a disability or SEN and learners with less experience.

The core idea behind preventing bullying of children with a disability or SEN is not to try to change the characteristics of the child; rather, it is to convey a message of acceptance and respect amongst his/her peers. The programme outlines the message that schools must set out for pupils: 'A pupil might irritate you; you might not like them; you might find something they do a bit different – but it is never an excuse to disrespect someone or bully them'.

A real strength of the anti-bullying content is the distinction between bullying behaviour and relational conflict. Relationships with peers during childhood and adolescence can be complex and turbulent, and conflict often occurs. This can be difficult and upsetting for those involved, but it is important to distinguish it from bullying behaviour. The ABA defines bullying as behaviour that is intentional, repeated and occurs between individuals, or groups of individuals, between whom there is a distinct power imbalance.

Another strength of the content is that while a particular focus is given to children and adolescents with a disability or SEN, the anti-bullying lessons apply to all members of the school community. Whether the topic is defining bullying or discussing the prevalence and impact of bullying, the modules continuously highlight the whole-school nature of bullying and how prevention is a task for the entire school community.

Training Update

Edited by
William Baginsky

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‘An excellent resource for anyone working with children with disabilities or SEN’

The programme presents learners with ten key, evidence-based principles – the most important being ‘Listen’, ‘Celebrate difference’ and ‘Include all’ – highlighting the need to listen actively to all members of the school community (pupils, parents, staff, carers), explicitly celebrate differences between all pupils and staff, and include all members of the school community equally. It provides details about bullying prevention both within and outside the classroom and using peer support strategies.

Recent research suggests that the most effective components of anti-bullying programmes include a whole-school approach, anti-bullying policies, working with peers in the classroom, enforcing classroom anti-bullying rules and informing parents about bullying issues and bullying prevention (Gaffney *et al.*, 2021). The online learning provides information to schools and other organisations that work with children and adolescents on how these components can be implemented to prevent bullying and how to respond if it does occur.

Finally, a great strength of this online learning is acknowledgement of the ever-changing landscape of bullying, including the emergence of cyberbullying and how children may be bullied for reasons reflecting what is happening in the world outside school. One module specifically focuses on bullying and the law, and when it is appropriate to involve the police in incidents that occur in school. The module on disability and SEN outlines clearly how these children may be discriminated against and how schools can prevent it – for example, by not teaching disabled students outside of the peer group and by ensuring that they have equal access to opportunities.

These modules are an excellent resource for anyone working with children with disabilities or SEN and wanting to prevent or reduce bullying and extend his/her knowledge. I hope that the ABA will continue to update the research included in these modules and maintain the high-level of evidence-based content.

References

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Hannah Gaffney

Betty Behren's Research Fellow, Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, UK

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