POPULATION HEALTH PROBLEMS



Bullying

Facilitator Notes

Scenario Context and Clarifications

- When referring to autism, use **"an autistic person"** rather than *"a person with autism"*, as autism is an intrinsic part of identity rather than a separable condition.
- The accompanying image illustrates the potential breadth of a young person's online social world. Note that some popular platforms (e.g. *Roblox*) are not shown.
  Microsoft Office appears in the image only because it was the only open-source image containing both *Discord* and *TikTok* logos.

Discussion Prompts

Bullying is a frequent concern among children and young people with additional needs, and it is a common issue raised by parents during community paediatric consultations.

Paediatricians should be familiar with:

- Support routes for parents and schools.
- Evidence-based interventions that reduce bullying in school settings.

1. Risk Factors for Bullying

- **Shift from individual to systemic focus:**
  Bullying should not be viewed as a problem *within the child*. Instead, adults — parents, teachers, and professionals — hold responsibility for addressing an unacceptable situation.
- **Terminology:**
  Use the terms *"children who display bullying behaviour"* and *"children who receive bullying behaviour"* (not mutually exclusive).
- **Systemic approach:**
  When a child receives bullying behaviour, it must be made clear that it is **not their fault**.
  The responsibility for change lies with the **adults and systems** surrounding the child.
  Effective intervention involves changing the **environment**, not the individual.

Further reading:
Van Roosmalen & Lawrence (2024). Clarifying an approach to consultation: The impact of a systemic consultation training for schools-based CAMHS clinicians. *East London NHS Foundation Trust.*

2. Health Consequences of Bullying

For the receiver of bullying behaviour:

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- If systemic change is not made, the young person's mental and physical health can deteriorate unnecessarily.
- Adults must act promptly and effectively to make the environment safe.
- Psychological support may include teaching assertive (not aggressive) communication, but **ensuring environmental safety is the first priority**.

For the person displaying bullying behaviour:

- These young people often need substantial psychological and parenting support.
- Early interventions such as **Incredible Years** and **Triple P** can strengthen caregiver–child attachment, which improves relationships, mental health, and long-term attainment.

Further reading:
NICE Guidance: Conduct disorders in children and young people.

3. Explaining Anxiety-Related Symptoms to Children

When a young person presents with physical signs of anxiety related to bullying:

"The symptoms you've noticed in your body are real. They're likely caused by your body's natural *fight or flight* response — have you heard of that before? Everyone experiences this when they feel under threat. It's a normal, healthy reaction, even though it can feel unpleasant or scary."

4. Roles and Responsibilities

- Identify **named roles** within local authorities and schools that oversee **anti-bullying strategies** (to be confirmed locally, e.g. Designated Safeguarding Lead, Anti-Bullying Coordinator).
- Encourage **settings-based** and **whole-school approaches** that promote inclusion and respect.
- Where needed, refer children displaying bullying behaviour for **psychological or behavioural support**.

5. Evidence-Based School Interventions

- **MARCH Centre (Maternal, Adolescent, Reproductive & Child Health)**
  Research group specialising in school-based interventions for child health and wellbeing.

6. Example Organisations for Support

Organisation	Description	Website
Childline	Free, confidential 24/7 support for young people.	childline.org.uk
The Mix	Support for under-25s on bullying, relationships, and mental health.	themix.org.uk
YoungMinds	Mental health advice and helpline for young people and parents.	youngminds.org.uk
Anti-Bullying Alliance	Resources for schools, families, and professionals on preventing and responding to bullying.	anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

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Organisation	Description	Website
Kidscape	Practical advice, parent helpline, and school training on bullying.	kidscape.org.uk
BulliesOut	Support, training, and workshops to prevent bullying and promote positive relationships.	bulliesout.com
NSPCC	Guidance and safeguarding information related to bullying and abuse.	nspcc.org.uk

Useful Resources for Trainees

1. Hate Crime and the Law

- In **Scotland**, hate crime legislation protects individuals from crimes linked to protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010).

Reference:
Platts, A.; Griesbach, D.; Mackay, F. (2019). *One Scotland: Hate Has No Home Here. Consultation on amending Scottish hate crime legislation: analysis of responses.* Scottish Government

2. Trauma-Informed and Culturally Competent Practice

Free e-Learning for Healthcare (eLfH) modules (NHS):

- **Trauma-Informed Care – eLfH**
- **Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety – eLfH**

Definition:
Being *trauma-informed* means understanding distress as arising from *what has happened* to someone, rather than *what is wrong with them*.
This approach balances understanding past trauma with recognising the importance of supportive relationships in recovery.

Summary

- Approach bullying **systemically**, not as an individual fault.
- Focus on creating **safe environments** and **adult accountability**.
- Support both **those receiving** and **those displaying** bullying behaviours.
- Equip professionals with **trauma-informed, culturally competent** approaches.
- Signpost families and young people to **reliable UK-based support services**.

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