

## Support for children involved in bullying

At Archbishop Benson we do not use the words 'bully' and 'victim'; although we recognise that such labels may seem an accurate reflection of the experiences of some of our pupils have had.

By calling someone a 'bully', there is the risk that both they (and others) will feel that

- this is who they are at their very core.
- they are inherently 'bad'.

We want to recognise that sometimes we all do bad things sometimes and that labelling people as 'bullies' or 'victims' can be counterproductive. We use the phrases:

'the child who bullied' or 'the child who caused harm'

or

'the child who was bullied' or 'the children who experienced harm'

We can understand people saying "Why does it matter? Isn't it easier to just say "bully?" We can also understand people wanting to use shorthand terms, since it can feel a bit clumsy saying "the child who bullied" or "the child who was bullied." However, at Archbishop Benson School we remain focused on the behaviour, not on the label.

**Using a label sends a message that the child's behaviour doesn't change from one situation to the next.** Actually, a child may play different roles in bullying, depending on the situation. S/he may bully a younger child on the bus on Monday, watch anxiously as a friend is verbally bullied on Tuesday, and be bullied him/herself online over the weekend. Research confirms that a small but worrisome group of children are regularly bullied but also bully others (Limber et al., 2012; [Nansel et al., 2001](#); [Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002](#)).

**Labels suggest that behaviour is fixed and is unlikely to improve over time.** Fortunately, behaviour can change for the better. A Y3 pupil may frequently bully a classmate but, with help from teachers and parents, could stop this behaviour by Y6. Nevertheless, the label may have "stuck" and could be associated with him through his/her formative, primary years and beyond.

**Labels can be harmful to kids.** In her book "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success," Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck notes that labels can limit how children see themselves and how other children and adults see them. She argues that every label sends a message that tells children how to think about themselves. Too often, the messages say, "You have permanent traits and I'm judging them," as opposed to "You are a developing person and I am interested in your development." Both positive and negative labels can cause problems. According to Dweck, "when you're given a positive label, you're afraid of losing it, and when you're hit with a negative label, you're afraid of deserving it." These labels may also affect how others treat children who are involved in bullying – even if they describe the behaviour using other terms, such as "fighting" or "drama." When children are labelled as "bullies," it may signal to their peers that they are bad kids who should be avoided and it may give adults permission to show scorn. Similarly, when children are labelled as "victims," this may send a message that they are weak or deserving of pity – when what they may actually need is help to stop the bullying.

**Using labels may suggest that bullying is purely the "fault" of the child and allow us to ignore other factors that contribute to bullying behaviour.** Although individual differences in temperament and personality may play a role in children's involvement in bullying, there are [many factors that make bullying more or less likely](#), such as peer influences, family dynamics, and school climates ([Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2012](#); [Espelage & Swearer, 2011](#)).

Just as none of us are born with the ability to draw or sing a song; nor are we born with the ability to discriminate against someone because of the colour of their skin, their sexuality or any other unique factor. We believe bullying is a learnt behaviour, **not** an identity and although we can't always identify the exact reason why somebody decides to act in this manner, we do know that often those who bully others have issues that are not being addressed elsewhere.

We seek to encourage those that bully to seek the support they need. In order for them to feel comfortable enough to do that, we do not brand them or give them the impression that they are undeserving of help.