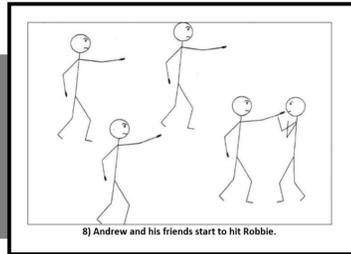


# Children's and teachers' bullying definitions and strategies: the role of aggression type, repetition and power imbalance.



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## Background

- Bullying prevalence in England reduces as children go through school, with younger children reporting being bullied more often than older children.
- Bullying definitions also change with age, with previous research showing older children and teachers hold narrower definitions.

### What is the definition of bullying, and why are differences in this important?

- Academics define bullying as any physical, verbal or social behaviour which causes intentional harm, is carried out repeatedly and involves a power difference between perpetrator(s) and victim(s).
- It is important to understand differences in definitions between age groups and teachers because:
  - teachers may not identify some episodes which pupils consider bullying if they hold narrower definitions, and thus may not intervene when pupils would like them to
  - these differences in definitions may explain why prevalence rates drop throughout school, as younger children may perceive a greater range of acts as bullying

### What do we know about solutions to bullying?

- All schools in the UK have anti-bullying policies, and there is research into the effectiveness of schools' anti-bullying interventions
- Little is known about what strategies children think will help victims in bullying situations, or how this compares to teachers' views

## Materials and Procedure

- Questionnaires for teachers and secondary school pupils showed scenarios of victimization or pro-social behaviours in stick-figure cartoon form.
- Participants were asked to respond to the image by defining the situation as "bullying" or "not bullying", and to give a reason for their choice.
- They were also asked to provide a possible strategy for the victim to overcome the bullying for scenarios they considered bullying.
- Primary school pupils were shown the same cartoons in interviews, and were asked to sort them into two piles (bullying and not bullying). They were also asked to give their reasons and to provide possible strategies for the victims

## Participants

- Pupils and teachers from five primary schools and three secondary schools took part.
- A total of 440 pupils and 38 teachers were included in the analysis.

## Aims

- The study aimed to investigate differences in bullying definitions and strategies for overcoming bullying, between pupils in years two, five/six, eight, and ten, and teachers.
- The study also aimed to examine how the type of bullying [physical aggression, verbal aggression and social exclusion] and aspects of a power imbalance and repetition impacted participants' responses.
- To overcome limitations in the previous research, one-to-one interviews and individual questionnaires were used to examine all participant groups' responses. These included forced-choice (yes/no) questions and more open ended explanations.

## Results

- **Teachers held more restrictive definitions**, classifying fewer acts as bullying and acknowledged bullying as a repeated act, often involving a power difference between the perpetrator(s) and victim.
- **Secondary school pupils held more exclusive definitions than primary school pupils**, but neither group appeared to include repetition or a power difference in these definitions.
- **Physical aggression was rated as bullying more than verbal aggression and social exclusion**, and this effect was strongest for teachers and secondary school pupils.
- A number of strategies for overcoming bullying were offered, with **telling someone being the most favoured solution by all participants**. Differences in primary, secondary and teacher responses can be seen in the graph below, **with pupils offering the strategy ignore much more often than teachers**.

## What can we learn from this study?

- Teachers' and pupils' definitions of bullying vary. It is important for schools to be sensitive to this when tackling bullying.
- Pupils may have different ideas than teachers about what is the best way to overcome bullying, and may try to ignore it. Teachers might want to ensure that pupils know they can get help if ignoring bullying does not work.
- Schools may benefit from creating a shared definition of bullying and how is best to tackle it, incorporating both pupils' and teachers' views.

