

Addressing Issues of Teasing and Bullying

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Teasing which then can move into the areas of bullying is a form of aggression and power game among peers. This behaviour often oppresses the younger or weaker person. Teasing can take on different forms from what appears humorous to outright hateful and abusive behaviour. Providing an answer to this situation with children in care is complex.

Having fun in friendly teasing causes everyone to smile and often is a sign of friendship as everyone thinks it is funny. It is not offensive nor does it damage the child's self esteem.

There is no general rule deciphering when teasing is likely to become harmful because not all children will take the behaviour the same way. If the teasing continuum is extended further the teasing then starts to become bullying. Generally children tease to gain a reaction and see the anger or tears that they can provoke. They often do not tease because they really care about the child's weight, colour of skin or disability. Some children tease others because doing so makes them feel good - or because they think it will. Children also tease because society tells them it's Ok to do so – or rather fails to tell them it is wrong.

Suggested Strategies

Supporting and promoting positive social interaction between all children includes addressing and developing strategies to end the teasing, support the resilience of the child who is being teased and develop a sound positive set of ground rules for all children in being a valued member of the child care community.

- Make it crystal clear within your program that teasing is not acceptable.
- Establish rules for **all** that teasing put downs will not be tolerated. Include within these rules that when teasing occurs parents will be working together with staff to stop this inappropriate behaviour.
- Ensure that your service's expectations are clear and specific e.g. Teasing and making fun of others is not allowed. Examples of teasing and belittling behaviours should be explained so that children understand what is unacceptable
- Provide meetings with all children and staff to help establish the rules. This enables all children to own the final decisions of the rules.
- Decide and impose consequences if the rules are broken. The consequences need to be meaningful, within control of being implemented, consistent and stated clearly.

- Provide with your program the opportunities for helping children develop and further develop their concept of empathy. E.g. during the discussion of establishing the rules encourage children to express such questions as “How would you feel if you were in that person’s situation?”
- Provide within your program opportunities to promote and practice an appreciation of differences.
- Utilise the use of children’s literature that supports the development of the concept of empathy and understanding about teasing.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop skills to provide support to the child who is being teased. In a group situation discuss with the children how they can support the child when they witness teasing.
- View your service’s policies and procedures on teasing and bullying. Ensure that all staff and parents have access to what is expected when the child is in care.
- Discuss your concerns with the parents of both the child who is being teased and the children who are doing the teasing.
- Provide activities within the program to assist in building resilience for the child who is being teased. Work on strategies to enable the child to walk away from the teasers, inform staff and gain support from other children.

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