



# Bullying findings from The Big Ask

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November 2021

## **Bullying – Findings from The Big Ask**

### **Introduction**

'I think bullying has a big impact that you carry with you for a long time.' - Boy, 13

In April 2021, the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, launched The Big Ask: a national consultation exercise with children in England to ask them about their lives and their priorities, aspirations and worries for the future. The purpose was not only to provide a large-scale 'state of the nation' assessment of the views of children on these issues, but also to help inform the Commissioner's priorities and longer-term strategy for her term in office, and to help ensure that children's needs and interests could be placed at the forefront of policy measures to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

The Big Ask ran for approximately 6 weeks and gathered more than 550,000 responses, making it the largest ever survey of children anywhere in the world, to our knowledge.

The 6-8 and 9+ 'Big Ask' surveys included one free-text question each. To ensure the survey was age-appropriate, the questions asked to the 6-8 age group and children aged 9+ were slightly different, though designed to capture the same theme and underlying issues.

The 9-12 and 13-17 surveys asked:

- 'What do you think stops children/young people in England achieving the things they want to achieve when they grow up?'

The 6-8 survey asked:

- 'If you could change anything to make your life better when you grow up, what would it be?'

To understand the issue of bullying as part of Anti-Bullying Week 2021 we have identified responses where children mentioned words related to bullying including: 'bully', 'bullied', 'bullies', 'mean people', 'being mean', 'body shaming', 'harass' and 'making fun'. Just over 12,000 responses from children aged 6-17 mentioned one of these words. This analysis explores why children see bullying as a barrier to achievement and what they think protects from the negative impacts that bullying can have.

## Statistical overview of responses

*Table 1 - Percentage of children whose response referenced 'bullying', by demographic characteristics*

Characteristic	Percentage of responses which referenced bullying
Age	
6-8	0%
9-11	8%
12-15	4%
16-17	1%
Gender	
Male	4%
Female	5%
Self-identified gender	5%

Across all children who gave a qualitative response, children aged 9-11 were the most likely to raise bullying as a barrier (8%) compared to only 4% of respondents aged 12-15 and 1% of those aged 16-17. There was no difference by gender.

## Cyber-bullying

Children talked about bullying happening online and through social media as a potential barrier to achievement. From their responses we can also see instances where schools have been put in difficult positions, unable to influence the online space children are interacting in but having to support students with the impacts.

'People might be bullied online and fell really insecure about them self.' – Girl, 13

'I think something that stops young people in England achieving what they want is social media. [...] it is a big part of this young community because of the things you can do like meeting new people, speaking to your friends from school etc. However, people get bullied online and out of social media. [...] It can make people feel like they aren't good enough which impacts on not only their school life but also to their home life. [...] schools can help you which I think is very important.' – Girl, 13

'Online safety. Just a few days ago some person pretended to be one of my friends online and started saying rude stuff. I know they are from my year but my teacher can't help because we don't know who they are.' - Girl, 12

'Cyber-bullying [...] I describe it as a bug it won't go away until you flick it of you but then more come [...] every day bugs come at you. [...] the bugs are the people online one comes at you and you just forget about it and let it slide by as it was just one but then more come and they won't leave you alone so you go offline for a couple of days [...] but when you come back on to check how everything is going the same thing happens again.' – Girl, 12

'Education is one of the most important things as well as good friends and a safe environment. One thing stopping that I believe, is social media. Social media means that you can even be bullied at home.' – Boy, 12

## Protective factors

One of the most mentioned impacts of bullying was how it degrades children's self-esteem. As one 10-year-old girl said: 'Bullying because they will just give up and be like they are the problem in this world and just be like I'm nothing to anyone and I don't deserve to be here.' Children identified feeling supported and valued by family and friends as protecting against the impacts of bullying, by building children's self-esteem and happiness.

'I think that some children get put down from bullies and low self-esteem on themselves. They need good friends and family to help them feel safe and happy again and make them believe in themselves.' – Girl, age not given

'My parents want me to have a good education and my friends believe in me too. It makes all the difference to children' – Girl, 10

Children also talked about bullying in the context of their school and the impact that being bullied could have on their learning.

'In England, the education system and the way the country execute teaching is amazing; however, the things I personally find hard are the students bullying me and others this can drastically effect learning and the way you think sometimes. It is really difficult to know when bullying is happening, but I think if more time and effort was put in to looking closer at that people would be happier and healthier.' – Boy, 11

'I find it difficult to make friends and this makes it harder generally things are hard for young people cause of pressure from friends and the social media as I've been bullied this makes it hard to settle in school and get on with some others' – Boy, 14, SEND

'Children/kids/teenagers should not be afraid of going to school just to be bullied they should want to go to school to get their education and in the future get good jobs' – Girl, 13

Children shared their ideas for what schools could do to help them feel more supported such as reviewing bullying policies and building trust between teachers and students and supporting children to feel confident to talk to them about bullying.

'I think it is important to stop bullying before it starts to progress and get worse because it starts affecting children's physical and mental health. As I have experienced this I know how it feels to be worried to go to school, because you fear that you will be bullied again. So I think that schools should take more time to create their bullying policies.' - Girl, 11

'Many children also get bullied whether it is physical or mental, online or face to face, that also can break someone's confidence and really impact on their goals and ambitions. Many kids don't speak out or even tell trusted adults what they are going through even though they might want to badly.' – Girl, 11

'The thing that stops children the most is bullying if a child is bullied and there's no one to go or talk to that's a big problem. The chaos can be sorted by having a school or home teacher/ learner to talk to about the situation.' – Gender not given, 11

# Children's COMMISSIONER

Children's Commissioner for England  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Visit: [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Twitter: @ChildrensComm