



Operational Instruction 15

Anti-bullying

Legislation referred to: [Prisons Act 1981](#) s 35

1. Introduction

Bullying, which may also be referred to as intimidation, threatening behaviour or standover tactics takes on a variety of forms, which may include:

- psychological pressure, name calling and threats
- vandalising property
- unprovoked attacks
- repeated occurrences of any one or more of the above
- the intention to cause fear or harm to the victim.

It may be well organised, for instance in relation to the supply of drugs or protection, or less structured, for example as a response to boredom. Whatever its form and cause, it is a problem which all prisons face. It challenges and undermines the prison's ability to maintain good order and a safe environment for all prisoners and constrains the constructive work that can be done with them to address their needs. Unless the behaviour of bullies is addressed in prison, they are unlikely to leave prison with the attitude and behaviour needed to stay away from crime after release. It is therefore a problem that must be addressed through a state-wide approach within which each prison has the flexibility to develop local solutions.

2. Terminology

This Instruction uses the term "bullying". If intimidation, standover tactics or threatening behaviour would better suit local circumstances and be better understood by prisoners, then one of those terms should be used.

3. Aim

The aim of the approach being taken is to heighten awareness of the consequences of bullying and to reduce its incidence in prisons. This aim will be achieved by discouraging those who have anti-social or predatory tendencies from indulging in behaviours which are harmful to others through the provision of appropriate environments and opportunities to address anti-social behaviour, and by giving victims of such behaviour support and opportunities to develop skills for dealing with intimidation. These are essential elements in working towards the goal that requires a stable system creating a safe and co-operative environment within which prisoners can undertake constructive activity.

4. Principles

The approach being taken is based on four key principles:

- awareness
- identification
- intervention
- training

4.1 Awareness

A whole prison approach to reduce bullying by changing the climate and culture of prisons needs to be implemented. Awareness should begin at induction into the establishment and continue throughout the prisoner's sentence. Staff, prisoners and visitors need to work together and be made aware of the approach being taken to address bullying behaviour in each prison and of the nature, extent and harmful consequences of bullying. Prisoners must understand the detrimental impact of bullying and know what sanctions can be imposed against bullies.

4.2 Identification

If prisoners are suspected or known to be either bullies or victims, it is important that they are identified as such and that all staff are aware that they have been identified. It is also important that staff gain prisoners' trust to ensure that every opportunity is taken to gather information about bullying.

4.3 Intervention

Intervention may take a number of forms and may include structured interviews with Unit Staff, discussions with a Forensic Case Management Team or Peer Support Officer or coaching by staff. While the specific intervention required will depend on individual circumstances, any action should target the bully rather than the victim and should normally be taken when bullying first becomes apparent (although there will be a need to ensure that this does not compromise prisoners who have given staff information in confidence).

Based on experience elsewhere, it is likely that a multidisciplinary approach will be the most effective method of addressing bullying behaviour. The needs of different prisoner populations throughout the State mean however that there is no one set of interventions which can be adopted in every prison. What is critical is that there should be intervention and that there should be seen to be intervention.

4.4 Training

For an anti bullying stance to be fully effective, staff training should be available locally so that staff are familiar with the elements and principles involved as well as local solutions.

5. Evaluation

Superintendents are responsible for establishing an appropriate structure of responsibilities for the development, implementation and evaluation of the particular approach being taken in their prison. Responsibilities for taking the lead in developing the anti-bullying response in the establishment may be incorporated into a job description of

one of the Unit Managers and supported through a workgroup such as a local Anti-Bullying Committee.

6. Managing the Victim

Prisoners who claim they are being bullied or who staff suspect are being bullied, should be treated in a professional and sensitive manner at all times.

Suspensions of bullying may be raised by various indicators:

- information from a third party
- unexplained injuries
- self harm
- lack of possessions / missing canteen purchases
- buying canteen items not for personal use eg. tobacco, if a non-smoker
- general behaviour (eg withdrawn or upset)
- efforts to change accommodation - sometimes through deliberate breaches of discipline
- changes in routine.

In some cases a prisoner may confide in a member of staff that they have problems but generally, being bullied is an experience that many people will not admit. Often staff will have to draw out information from victims who may be in a state of fear and distress. In all cases, initial suspicions should be reported as soon as possible.

During the interview, staff should emphasise to the victim that all allegations will be taken seriously and their identity protected. It is important that the prisoner feels that reporting an incident of bullying is a positive step towards ending the abuse.

Where there is insufficient evidence to prove that a prisoner is being bullied, the alleged victim should be closely monitored and supported by staff.

Each prison may wish to designate a particular officer(s) who can be called upon to discuss the situation with the prisoner. The Unit Manager may take on this role or it may be that the prisoner may be able to cope with the problem simply by having someone they can confide in, with the staff encouraging them to talk about their experiences.

Consideration should be given to telling the victim what action has been taken with the bully and it is essential to ensure that the substance of the victim's allegations is recorded.

Where the victim is unable to cope with their situation, the Unit Manager may consider their removal to a more appropriate area of the prison. This course of action should, however, be a last resort and at all times the bully, not the victim, should be seen to be the target.

7. Dealing with the Bully

Suspensions may be raised for several reasons eg information from a prisoner, injury, an incident witnessed or a conversation overheard. However insignificant such incidents may seem, the matter must not be discounted as trivial. What may be very little to go on at first, could, when added to other information, identify a bully or a bullying group.

Where a prisoner gives information in confidence or states that they do not want any action taken, staff should still record details of the allegations. It is possible to submit a report without naming the victim, but an attempt should be made to convince the prisoner that the only way to stop the bullying is to make an official complaint and for action to be taken. Staff should reassure the prisoner that their identity will be protected and encourage the prisoner to report any further incidents.

8. General

Where prisoners, (bullies and/or victims), are transferred between Units, all relevant records must be forwarded to the new unit. Each case will be reviewed individually and the receiving Manager will decide whether to continue any regime restrictions imposed. Similarly, when a prisoner is transferring between prisons, the relevant records should be forwarded to the receiving prison where appropriate management decisions can be taken.

9. Local Orders

Superintendents are required to develop local solutions to deal with bullying and to incorporate these in a Local Order.