

# Friends Report

2014



**friends**



# Contents

3

ABOUT THE REPORT  
& FRIENDS

12

FEELING SAFE AT  
SCHOOL

4

KEY FINDINGS

14

UNSAFE PLACES  
AT SCHOOL

5

INTRODUCTION

16

TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE  
ABOUT BULLYING

6

BULLYING  
AT SCHOOL

18

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR  
PREVENTING BULLYING

8

SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT

20

FRIENDS' RECOMMENDATIONS  
& LEGISLATION

10

CAUSES OF  
BULLYING

22

FREQUENTLY ASKED  
QUESTIONS ABOUT BULLYING



# About the report

The Friends Report is based on data from the Friends survey service in which 12,766 children answered questionnaires about bullying and degrading treatment. The data was collected between 1 August 2013 and 1 June 2014. Collection took place via web-based, age-adjusted questionnaires at schools. This does not mean that all schools have undergone training with Friends, but all have chosen to review the situation at their school with the help of Friends.

The participating schools are spread throughout Sweden and are located in both cities and rural areas. Friends has not chosen which schools participate

and the participating respondents have full anonymity. Of the students who have answered the questionnaires, 6,088 are in years 3–6 and 6,678 are in years 6–9. The staff questionnaire was answered by 1,888 school employees. Of these, 1,526 are teachers, 75 are head teachers and 287 are other school staff.

Friends' surveys are based on current legislation and cover well-being and feeling safe at school as well as participation and awareness of equality work at school.

Read more  
about Friends at:  
[www.friends.se](http://www.friends.se)



## About Friends

Friends is a non-profit organisation with the purpose of stopping bullying. We adopt a long-term approach via training, advice and opinion formation, aiming to enhance know-how and commitment among adults and children. Friends is active at schools, preschools and sports clubs. Our training courses are based on current research on bullying, structures and norms, as well as the legislation governing school mandates.

Friends was founded in 1997 and is represented throughout Sweden via regional offices in Malmö, Gothenburg, Umeå and Stockholm. Activities are financed by donations from private individuals and companies, as well as by the fees charged for our training courses. Friends has a so-called “90-account” and is audited by Swedish Fundraising Control.

# Key findings



## Least safe places

1	Toilets
2	Changing rooms
3	The Internet

## Most common degrading behaviours



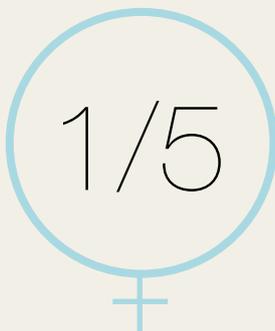
1. Mean comments



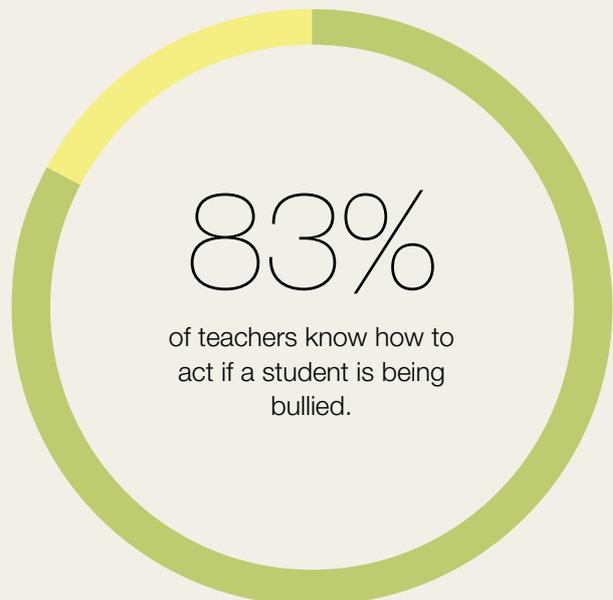
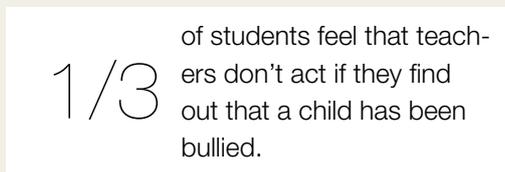
2. Mean looks or pulling faces



3. Physical abuse



of girls at secondary school have been subjected to sexual harassment.





# "She's so strange"

When I was younger, we moved around a lot, there was a lot of conflict at home that I didn't understand and school was the one place I felt safe. Moving so often also meant changing schools a lot, and one primary school I went to soon became a place I hated.

It was as if I was invisible; no one talked to me and no one seemed to want to. I never understood why it felt like everyone was against me as I hadn't done anything. I didn't stand out and I didn't dare stand out. I remember that we used to have something called fruit swap in class. In the afternoons, we were supposed to swap fruit with each other and I remember the comments:

*"Don't take any fruit from her, it's dirty. She's so strange. You can't eat what she eats."*

And the teachers weren't very good at spotting the bullying. It was almost as if they accepted it, otherwise how could it happen every day without anyone noticing? When I switched to my current school, I promised myself that no one would look down on me in the same way. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out as I hoped – bullying the new member of the class was like a tradition, something everyone did.

But this time something was different. This time the teachers noticed the bullying and ensured that everyone in class knew how wrong it is to be mean to other people. They taught us three core values to always follow at school: "respect, consideration, responsibility." I quickly noticed what a difference it makes when the adults at school have the time and knowledge to take things seriously and constantly remind us that everyone is equal. It's about setting boundaries so that we know when the fun becomes bullying. Because what one person thinks is a joke, another can find incredibly hurtful.



Photo: Kalle Jansson

Children and youth are experts when it comes to their own realities. That's why we let Halla Nassir, one of 100,828 sixteen-year-olds in Sweden, write the introduction to the Friends Report.

I've been to both good and bad schools so I know what a difference it can make. I love my current school and that's because we have staff who care about us. They get involved, intervene, teach us responsibility and set boundaries. Together we can create a school where everyone is happy, but adults have to take the lead!

HALLA NASSIR, 16 YEARS OLD



# Bullying at school

Every fifth child has been subjected to harassment or other acts of intimidation at school this past year. The most common forms of harassment and bullying are mean comments and psychological abuse.

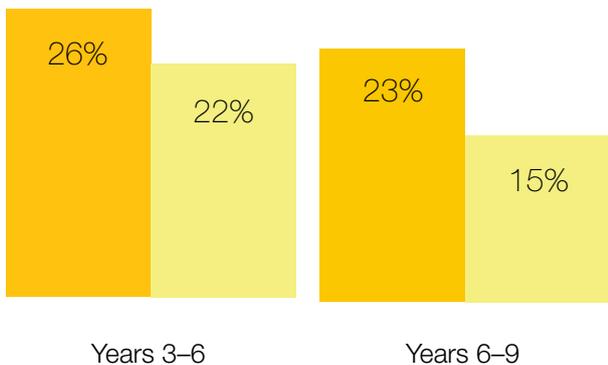
Most children feel safe at school, but despite this bullying and degrading treatment occur far too often. In the Friends Report, we mostly use the terms “bullying” and “degrading treatment” or “harassment or other acts of intimidation”, but it’s important to differentiate them. The Swedish Education Act defines degrading treatment as behaviour that violates a child’s dignity. When harassment and other acts of intimidation are repeated on numerous occasions, it’s usually referred to as bullying.

One in five children in years 4–9 has been subjected to harassment or other acts of intimidation by another student at school this past year. Degrading treatment is most common among younger students in years 4–6, with one in four saying they’ve been targeted this past year. Repeated degrading treatment – bullying – is most common among years 4–6, with 11 percent regularly targeted.

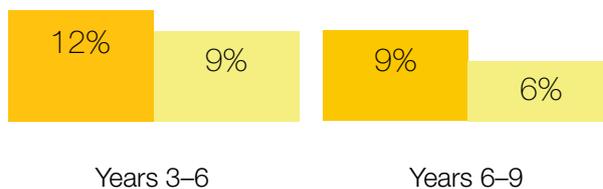
It’s more common for girls to be subjected to individual unkind acts than boys, while regular bullying is equally common among both sexes. Most who’ve been bullied by another student at school say that it involved mean comments. Psychological ostracism through mean looks or pulling faces is also common, particularly among girls. Physical abuse such as kicks and punches are most common in years 4–6 while sexual harassment mostly affects girls in years 7–9.

On occasion, students are bullied by adult school staff. The free-text answers include teachers making students feel stupid in front of the entire class, for example. Bullying by adults is especially serious as adults are supposed to prevent bullying.

## 1. Have you been subjected to harassment or other acts of intimidation by another student this past year? (yes)



## 2. Percentage of students targeted on numerous occasions



● Girls ● Boys



1/4  
say that they've degraded another pupil at school.

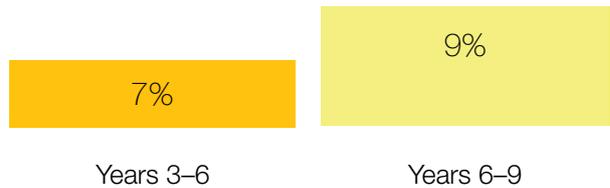
### 3. Type of bullying

Baseline: Have been bullied. Multiple choices.

- Years 3–6**
- 1. Mean comments 80%
  - 2. Mean looks or pulling faces 50%
  - 3. Physical abuse 32%

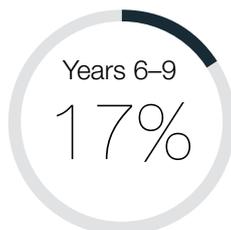
- Years 6–9**
- 1. Verbally 70%
  - 2. Psychologically 55%
  - 3. Cyberbullying 30%

### 4. Have you been subjected to harassment or other acts of intimidation by a member of the school staff this past year? (yes)

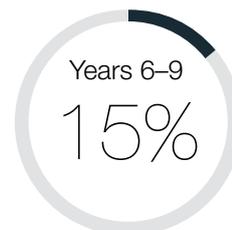
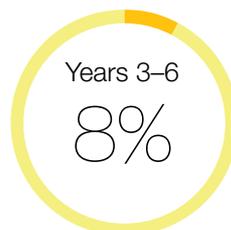


Most who felt bullied by a member of school staff say that it involved mean comments. One in five says the abuse was physical.

### 5. Have you received a mean text message from another student at school this past year? (yes)



### 6. Has another student at school written something mean about you online this past year? (yes)



**TIP!** For more facts about cyberbullying, read the Friends Online Report: [friends.se/natrapporten](http://friends.se/natrapporten)



# Sexual harassment

In this year's Friends Report, we've delved deeper into the issue of sexual harassment. This term encompasses physical, psychological and verbal abuse.

The results show that 11 percent of students in years 4–6 and 15 percent of students in years 7–9 have been subjected to sexual harassment. The biggest difference is in years 7–9, where twice as many girls as boys said that they've been sexually harassed. One in five girls in years 7–9 has been subjected to sexual harassment, compared to one in ten boys.

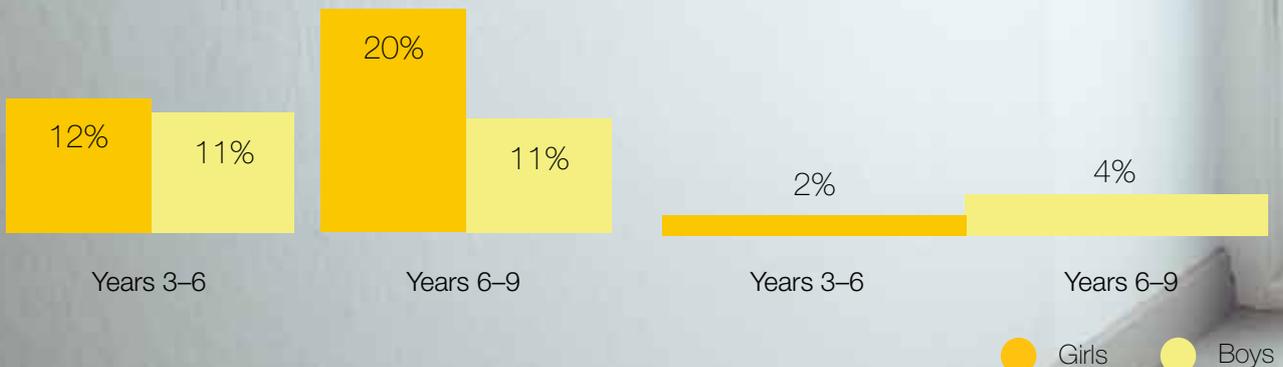
In the free-text answers, students describe how other students make sexual advances and then “make a joke out of it.” Those targeted describe how they brush off the behaviour and say that it wasn't a big deal or that it was a joke, but they still feel very upset by what has happened.

Our experience is that in some cases sexual harassment becomes normalised behaviour. For many students, looks, unwelcome touching and sexual jokes are part of the school day, but also a way to reinforce gender roles. Gender and sexuality norms are always present at school and when sexual harassment is excused as part of sexuality, the behaviour is reduced in importance, as are those subjected to it.

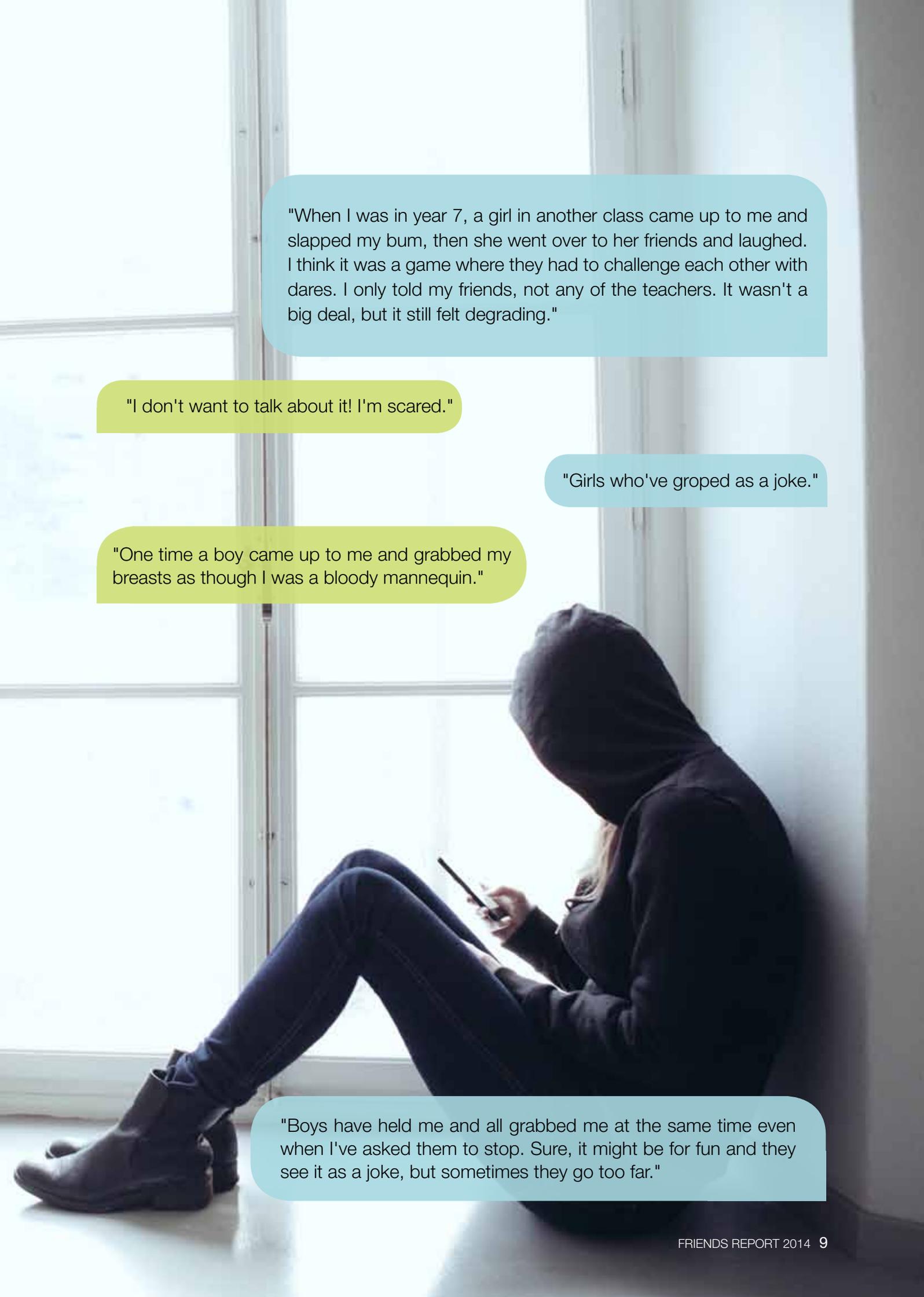
As to whether any adult school staff have used sexual innuendo or touched students in an inappropriate way, two percent in years 4–6 and four percent in years 7–9 respectively answer yes. This often involves touching that the student considers a sexual advance.

1. Has a student at school made sexual innuendos or touched you in a way that felt inappropriate?\* (yes)

2. Has an adult at school made sexual innuendos or touched you in a way that felt inappropriate?\* (yes)



\*The question was supplemented with the explanation: Sexual innuendos can mean, for example, comments, whistles, looks, groping and rumours about you that have felt unpleasant or can be about sex or your body.

A person wearing a dark hoodie and dark pants is sitting on a windowsill, looking down at a smartphone. The background is a large window with a view of a bright outdoor scene. The person is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the frame.

"When I was in year 7, a girl in another class came up to me and slapped my bum, then she went over to her friends and laughed. I think it was a game where they had to challenge each other with dares. I only told my friends, not any of the teachers. It wasn't a big deal, but it still felt degrading."

"I don't want to talk about it! I'm scared."

"Girls who've groped as a joke."

"One time a boy came up to me and grabbed my breasts as though I was a bloody mannequin."

"Boys have held me and all grabbed me at the same time even when I've asked them to stop. Sure, it might be for fun and they see it as a joke, but sometimes they go too far."



# Causes of bullying

There is never one single reason why degrading treatment or bullying occurs. Bullying involves complex processes and the background and reasons can be many and varied.

If we are to prevent bullying, then it's important that we understand the causes. Every case of bullying is unique and needs to be analysed from different angles. In order to understand bullying, it's important to use an approach that encompasses individual, group, organisational and social aspects. Our experience is that many schools focus solely on the individual aspect and look only to the target or the bully for reasons. Instead, we believe that you need to widen the approach and consider aspects such as the sense of security within the group, leadership in the organisation and norms in society in order to see the whole picture.

We also need to use a norm-critical approach if we are to understand the cause of the bullying. In the Friends Report, many children say that bullying is connected to several different things, such as hobbies, music taste, clothes style or the sport you practise. Invisible rules are often involved – norms that determine which

hobbies girls and boys should have, which clothes you should wear or which music you should listen to. Anyone who deviates from the norm in any way risks being bullied.

These invisible rules that limit the choices children and youth can make are found on many levels. At one school or in one particular class, for example, the norms might be a certain clothes style and listening to certain music, and these can differ greatly from the norms in other classes or at other schools. As such, it's very important for each school to analyse the norms found among their students. Afterwards, these norms can be considered and reviewed with a critical eye together with the students. In this way, we can broaden the norms that set limits and create inequities and strive instead for norms that create an inclusive environment in which everyone can be themselves.

## 1. What was the bullying about?

### Years 3–6

- 1. Something else 61%\*
- 2. Who you love 24%
- 3. Which country you come from 23%
- 4. That you are a boy or girl 19%
- 5. That you do or do not believe in god 15%

### Years 6–9

- 1. Something else 74%
- 2. Cross-gender identity 21%
- 3. Gender 17% (that you are a girl/boy)
- 4. Ethnic group 17%
- 5. Sexual orientation 13%

\*"Something else" means, for example, hobbies, the sport you practise, music taste or appearance.



"Say I give my friend, who's also a girl, a hug when I see her, they shout things like: Are you a couple? Lesbos!"

"When I started school in year 4, some boys teased me because I come from another country and look different."

"Boys in my class are always saying the sport I play is gay."

"I have a boy's haircut so they say that I'm a boy. But I love having short hair."

"People want to see how much crap they can give you before you react. They want to see how much power they have, and prove it by being nasty for no reason at all, such as by saying mean things, or ganging up on you."



# Feeling safe at school

Swedish students generally really enjoy school and most of them feel safe there. This is very encouraging and a good thing for Swedish schools.

There are, however, variations and some groups feel safer than others. Boys are more likely to feel safe than girls, for example. Only every other girl in years 7–9 say that they always feel safe compared to more than 70 percent of boys. There are several explanations for this, and one is that girls are more commonly subjected to harassment and other acts of intimidation than boys.

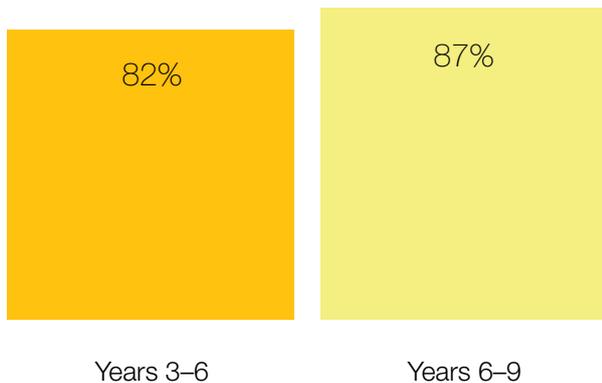
One important aspect of making children and youth feel safe at school is ensuring that there's an adult they can talk to if something happens. Children must have enough confidence in adults to feel safe in approaching them for help in difficult situations.

Among students in years 7–9, one third feel that there aren't any adults at school they can talk to if they're sad or if someone's been mean to them.

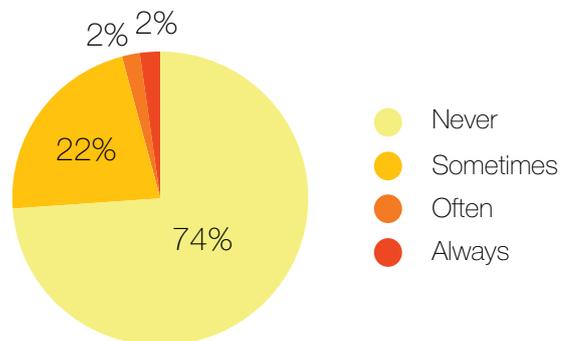
If children are to feel comfortable talking to adults, it's important that school staff have good relationships with students and show that they are there for them.

It's also important that adults act if they find out that a student has been bullied. If students don't feel that adults intervene when someone is treated badly, it knocks their confidence in adults because why would you approach an adult with your problems if you don't feel they act? 40 percent of students in years 7–9 don't think staff intervene if someone has been bullied. One way to improve this number is for school staff to act swiftly against bullying and to clearly explain to students that bullying is not accepted.

## 1. Do you enjoy school? (yes)\*



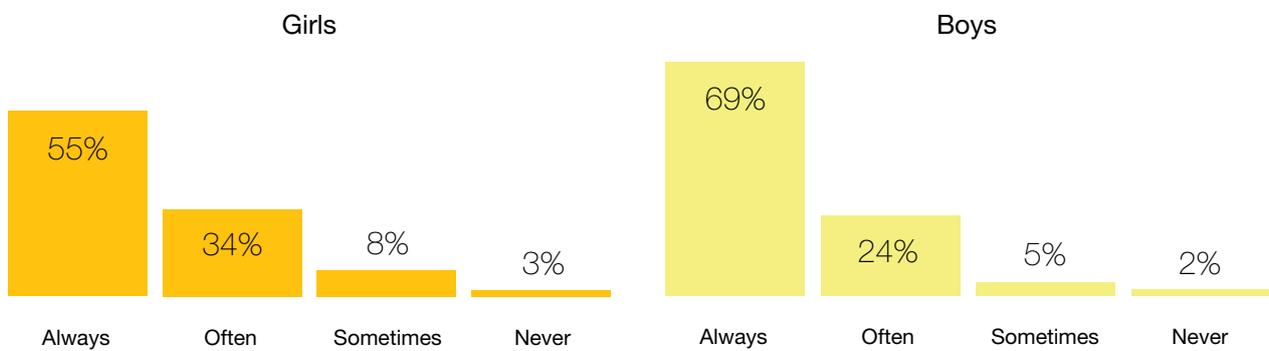
## 2. Do you feel lonely at school? Years 6–9



\*For years 3–6 the question is phrased: Do you have fun at school?



### 3. Do you feel safe at school? Years 6–9



4. Is there an adult at school you can talk to if you're sad or if someone is mean to you? (yes)



5. Do the adults intervene if they find out that someone has been treated badly? (yes)





# Unsafe places at school

The places where children feel unsafe at school are often places with few adults around. Another factor that influences things is if they're in a vulnerable situation, such as using the toilet or the changing room.

Most students find the toilet the least safe place at school. This is due in part to few adults being around, but also because of hygiene issues and bad locks on toilet doors. Another place many students feel unsafe is in the changing room. Here too there are few adults and students feel vulnerable when changing. The fear of someone coming in and seeing you naked is one of the things that make the changing room feel unsafe.

Both girls and boys say they have trouble with body ideals, which makes them compare themselves to others in the changing room.

Many younger students also say they feel unsafe in environments together with older students. Another example is walking alone in areas where there are larger groups of students, such as in corridors. As such, whenever possible it's important to ensure that adults are about during breaks so that students feel safer.

In our experience, schools that prioritise the issue of unsafe places also succeed in making them safer. Measures can include, for example, increasing adult presence near toilets and changing rooms. Proper locks, well-cleaned toilets without graffiti and curtains in shower rooms are other ways to make students feel safer.

## 1. In which places do you feel unsafe?

### Years 3–6

1. Toilet 21%
2. Changing room 11%
3. Internet 7%
4. Corridor 4%
5. School yard 4%

### Years 6–9

1. Toilet 15%
2. Changing room 8%
3. Corridor 6%
4. Internet 5%
5. Cloakroom 4%



*"Lots of people pull on the doors and that stresses you and you get scared that the door will open."*

*"It feels like loads of people are watching you in the changing room and laughing and the fact that some have their mobiles out makes you scared they might take your picture."*

*"Many girls are so skinny and then I come along... I feel ugly and fat so I never shower."*

*"People think you have to have visible muscles, always be strongest as a boy and not be too skinny. Those who have washboard abs or strong muscles and are not skinny show off and you feel like you have to look the same to be accepted."*



# Teachers' knowledge about bullying

Seven out of ten feel that the staff is motivated in equality issues. Many also want to know more about conflict management and anti-bullying methods.

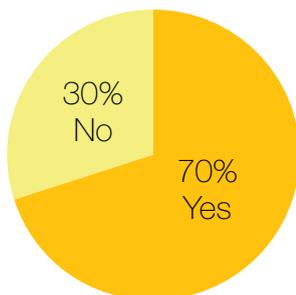
The structure of the school's preventative work to counter bullying, discrimination, harassment and other acts of intimidation is reported each year in an equality plan/anti-bullying plan. This document provides a basis for how the school works to counter all forms of bullying.

Most teachers feel that they have a good understanding of equality issues, which is a prerequisite for ensuring a school where everyone feels safe and equal. However, a third say they lack sufficient knowledge of these issues and would like to know more. The knowledge they seek often concerns conflict management, counselling and practical measures when a student has been targeted.

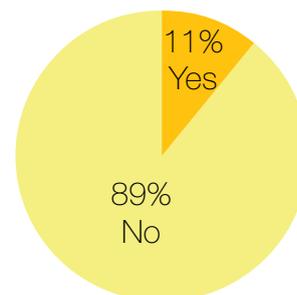
The majority of teachers know of a student who has been targeted this past year. School staff are obligated by law to act, which means they have to act and investigate if they are made aware that a child has been bullied. In spite of this, one in seven states that they are unsure of how to act and proceed if a child is being bullied. Here we see examples of where to draw the line, as well as how to act, step by step, when a child has been bullied.\*

You have to set aside time to discuss these kinds of issues if you are to reach agreement on how the school should act when a student is being bullied.

1. Do you know of a student who has been subjected to harassment or other acts of intimidation by another student this past year?



2. Do you know of a student who has been subjected to harassment or other acts of intimidation by a member of the school staff this past year?



\*A step-by-step guide to how school staff should act when a child is being bullied can be found on page 20.

## WHAT TEACHERS SAY

I'd like to know more about how to practically help students resolve conflicts.

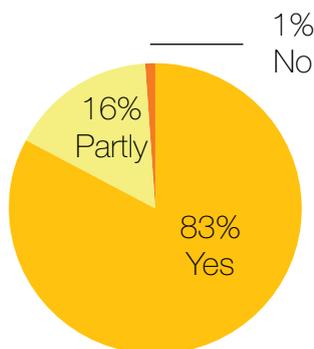
It's very difficult to know where to draw the line. Sometimes it's difficult to know what bullying is and how a child reacts to it emotionally.

To start with, I feel that I need to know more about positive conflict management and how to best resolve situations involving harassment and bullying.

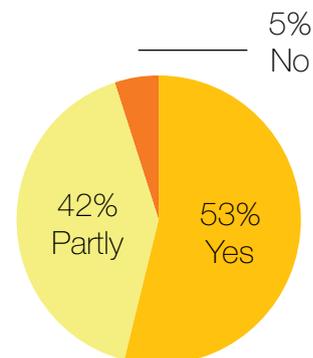
How can we adults work with students on these issues in the long-term in a way that interests and motivates them?

There are many SUBTLE ways to bully each other. Sounds, barely noticeable face pulling, ways to exclude others... Things that you notice but don't have the energy or desire to deal with every time.

3. Do you know how to act if you see or find out that a child is being bullied?



4. Do you feel that there is consensus among staff in equality issues?



# Success factors for preventing bullying

All schools have different needs and face different circumstances when working to prevent bullying.

There's no universal method that works in all situations and as such the first step in successful anti-bullying work is to survey the needs and circumstances of your school. Firstly, the adults and students need to share their views, after which you can analyse problematic situations and decide which measures need to be taken. As an organisation, Friends works with a "whole-school approach", which means that everyone at the school,

from teachers to administrators and from the youngest to the oldest students, as well as their parents, participates and feels involved in anti-bullying efforts. Involving the whole school creates good conditions for preventing bullying from occurring. It's about creating a joint approach to a safe school, in terms of what that is and how to achieve it together. Everyone plays an important role in this work.

## 1 Begin with the situation at your school

The initial survey provides the basis for all work to make students feel safe at school, and this work should always be based on how students and staff perceive things. The survey can be conducted in several ways, such as student and staff questionnaires, group discussions, observations or document analyses. It's also important to review the expertise held by the staff. The aim of the surveys is to identify needs and conditions for making students feel safer at school. Without an understanding of the situation at your school, it's impossible to know what measures are needed.

## 2 Include everyone

All adults at the school are to communicate and represent the school's core values both during and outside class. This work mustn't become something that is only done on theme days, when mentoring or in certain lessons – it should be integrated with day-to-day activities. The core values should be incorporated in systematic quality work with clear analyses, goals, planning and follow-ups.

## 3 Students are experts

One prerequisite for successfully making students feel safer at school is to include them in the work to achieve it. The important thing is to involve the students in formulating the problems and measures and in evaluating the school's work. In this way, the initiatives are better supported at the school, as well as more relevant and more effective since they are based on the students' experiences at school. Children and youth are experts when it comes to their schools.



#### **Reach consensus**

4

All staff should know where the line is drawn for bullying and how to act when it occurs. These issues ought to be on the agenda at all times and even encompass parents. It's important for both students and staff that consensus is reached on when core values are broken and what happens. For example, one way to include parents is to discuss abusive language at parent-teacher meetings and create common guidelines for discussing such things at home and school.

#### **Clear structure**

5

The work should be conducted within a clear organisation and with a long-term perspective. Responsibilities must be clearly assigned, expertise in the organisation clearly mapped and procedures for how work is pursued well established. A common trait among schools that experience little bullying is a dedicated head teacher who admits challenges and works to overcome them.



# Friends' recommendations

Here we have gathered recommendations based on the most frequently asked questions from schools, parents and children.

## As a teacher, how should I react to bullying?

When bullying takes place, as an adult it's important that you act even if you're not always equipped to resolve the situation there and then. As long as you firmly indicate that it's not okay, you're sending an important message to the students.

1. Intervene and talk to the children involved.
2. Inform the head teacher, concerned staff and parents.
3. Plan support for those involved and draw up a plan for how similar behaviour can be prevented in the future.

## As a parent, what can I do if I'm worried my child is being bullied?

Children often find it difficult to tell their parents that they're being bullied, so it's important for parents to talk to their children and show that they're there for them. Show an interest in how things are for your child at school, and in the friends they have there. If it turns out that your child might be the victim of bullying, tell your child that the people who bully and upset others are doing wrong. Emphasise that it's not your child's fault – everyone can be bullied or harassed. Make it clear that the situation can be changed. Then try to agree with your child on how you should get in touch with the school and who you should talk to.

### STEP BY STEP

1. Talk to your child about what's happening.
2. Talk to the child's class teacher or mentor.
3. Contact the head teacher at the school.
4. If the school can't help you, contact your municipality or other authority.
5. If you feel the school isn't doing enough, contact the Child and School Student Representative or the Equality Ombudsman.

## What signs should I look for to know whether my child is being bullied?

1. You know your child best. Consider whether there have been any recent changes in their behaviour.
2. Your child doesn't bring any friends home and doesn't want to visit any friends.
3. Unwilling to talk about school. Your child is withdrawn and doesn't want to go to school.

## What can I do as a student if someone is being bullied?

If someone upsets you when you're at school, or if you see someone else being treated badly, you should talk to an adult. Stopping bullying is not a child's responsibility – it's for adults to do.



## Legislation

The Swedish Education and Discrimination Acts stipulate the rights and obligations of children, students and their guardians. The Education Act also stipulates the requirements placed on the body responsible for the school.

The Act states that if an employee at the school finds out that a student feels hurt or bullied, the employee is obligated to act. The obligation to act means that the school must investigate and prevent the bullying from continuing as soon as possible.

Staff at a school or preschool who find out that a child has been bullied are obligated to report it to the head teacher or preschool manager. They, in turn, must report to the body responsible for the school.

The Education Act states that each year the school must review the situation faced by students and use this information in its efforts to proactively prevent bullying.

## Anti-bullying and anti-discrimination plan

Each year schools are to prepare a plan to prevent bullying and discrimination. This plan is sometimes referred to as an equality plan.

The plan should describe which measures are planned and how they will be implemented and followed up.

The document should also include descriptions of the school's proactive and preventative work and the contingency procedures in place should bullying occur. This should be based on a survey of the students' situation.

The school's students are to be involved in the work to prepare, follow up and evaluate the plan and it's important to describe the practicalities of this involvement.

In addition, the plan should include descriptions of who is responsible for what and how children, students and parents have been made aware of the content.



# Frequently asked questions about bullying



## **What's the difference between bullying and degrading treatment?**

The Swedish Education Act defines degrading treatment as behaviour that violates a child's dignity. When harassment and other acts of intimidation are repeated on numerous occasions, it's usually referred to as bullying. Bullying is also usually described as deliberate degrading treatment that is intended to cause harm or distress, and the person subjected to such treatment feels that they are in a disadvantaged position and has difficulty defending him- or herself. It's always the targeted student who decides whether the behaviour is degrading.

## **How many children are bullied in Sweden?**

According to studies from the Swedish National Agency for Education, about 7% of students in years 4–9 and just over 2% of students in upper secondary school are subjected to bullying. These figures correspond to about 60,000 students aged 10–19 years. In the Friends Report 2014, 9% of students in years 3–9 state that they have been bullied this past year.

## **How common is cyberbullying?**

According to the Friends Online Report 2014, one in three youths has been subjected to cyberbullying this past year. Most vulnerable are teenage girls aged 13–16 years, with more than half having been targeted. The most common forms of harassment and other acts of intimidation are mean comments or images in social media and degrading treatment via text messages. More information about cyberbullying can be found at: [www.friends.se/natrapporten](http://www.friends.se/natrapporten).

## **At which age is bullying most common?**

According to our survey, repeated degrading treatment, which is normally classed as bullying, is most common in years 3–6. 11 percent of children in years 3–6 have been bullied on several occasions by other students at school this past year.

## **Why does bullying occur?**

There is never one single reason why degrading treatment or bullying occurs. Bullying involves complex processes and the background and reasons can be many and varied. In determining the reason why someone is bullied, we should consider the individual, group, organisational and social aspects. One aspect that plays a crucial role is the norms for how an individual is expected to be or behave.

## **Can bullying be stopped?**

Yes. With long-term continual preventative work bullying can be reduced. Research shows that one effective way to reduce bullying is something known as a "whole-school approach". This means that teachers, students and parents are involved together in the work to create a safer school environment. Friends' survey even shows that schools that have cooperated with Friends for a year reduce bullying by an average of 24 percent.



## Definitions

**HARASSMENT AND OTHER ACTS OF INTIMIDATION** is an overarching term where bullying, harassment, discrimination, and other forms of degrading treatment are included. In the survey we used the following description of the term:

“The term harassment and other acts of intimidation refers to situations where one is mistreated in a way that makes one feel sad, hurt or humiliated.”

**DEGRADING TREATMENT** is the term used in Swedish law to prohibit harassment and other acts of intimidation that are not covered by discrimination legislation. Degrading treatment is defined as behaviour that violates a student’s dignity.

**BULLYING** is repeated harassment and other acts of intimidation targeting an individual over a period of time. The person targeted by this behaviour risks falling into a disadvantaged position and has trouble defending him- or herself.

**DISCRIMINATION** is when an adult at school, such as a teacher, disfavours or treats a student worse than others and this treatment is related to one of the grounds of discrimination: gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

**HARASSMENT** is when someone is targeted based on one of the seven grounds of discrimination. A single incident is sufficient for someone to be guilty of harassment.

**ANTI-BULLYING AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION PLAN** is a plan that schools are to prepare each year. The plan includes information about the school’s work to counter bullying and discrimination. The plan is sometimes referred to as an equality plan.



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