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- Provide a summary of up to date research on topics relevant to schools, settings and services
- Make research studies published in journals accessible to practitioners
- Provide a foundation for those with similar interests to discuss topics relevant to their work
- Contribute to developing a research ethos within Norfolk Children's Services

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## Research Briefing Paper 2, September 2008

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**1. New Research Into the Circle of Friends Intervention indicates the importance of 'perspective taking' in promoting social acceptance**

*James, A.B. and Leyden, G. (2008) A Grounded Theory Study of Circle of Friends Groups: the power of the Set Up Meeting as a tool for opening the social field for isolated children in schools Educational and Child Psychology 25 1 48-58.*

*Summary by Alistair James, Educational Psychologist*

'Circle of Friends' (CoF) was originally developed in Canada as a social tool for including vulnerable children or adults within their mainstream communities (Pearpoint, Forest, Snow, 1992). Within the UK context, CoF has been increasingly introduced by schools as a strategy for including pupils, with a range of challenging needs or behaviours, who have become rejected by or isolated from their peers.

The initial Set Up meeting plays a critical role in establishing CoF intervention. The present paper, therefore, focuses on a review of relevant qualitative and quantitative literature and a Grounded Theory analysis of a research study undertaken by the lead author. The design involved interviews with twenty-five facilitators of CoF within mainstream schools in a large Shire County and an outer London suburb. The children comprising the COF groups ranged in age from seven to twelve years.

The psycho-social theories emerging from the analysis contribute to our understanding of the part played by the Set Up meeting and 'perspective taking' in the initial stages of the change process.

At its highest level of conceptualisation the final theory describes how a 'Circle of Friends' can facilitate the movement of a pupil from a 'closed' or isolated, social field to more 'open', peer based, social relationships. Hypotheses for subsequent social action and future research are discussed.

**2. Do babies have object permanence or don't they?**

Moore, M., Meltzoff, A. (2008). Factors affecting infants manual search for occluded objects and the genesis of object permanence. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 31(2), 168-180. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2007.10.006>  
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*This item originally appeared in the British Psychological Society's Research Digest, Issue 114. See [www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog](http://www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog).*

When babies younger than nine months watch as an object is placed under a cloth, most will subsequently act as though it no longer exists - that is, they don't go looking for it. The pioneering developmental psychologist Jean Piaget thought this reflected the fact that babies of a certain age are unable to grasp the idea that objects continue to exist even when they are out of sight - what psychologists call "object permanence".

However, more recently, developmental psychologists have shown that young babies spend longer looking at a situation that appears to contradict object

permanence (e.g. the object is no longer visible once the cloth is lifted), almost as though they're surprised that the rules of physics have been broken. These "looking time" experiments have led some experts to suggest that babies do have an understanding of object permanence, it's just that they lack the bodily coordination to look for hidden objects, or they lack the memory capabilities required to remember that the hidden object is still there.

Now Keith Moore and Andrew Meltzoff have cast some fresh illumination on these controversies. They found that the majority of the thirty-two 8.75-month-old babies they tested were able to lift a cloth to reveal a partially hidden toy, but failed to lift a cloth to reveal a completely hidden toy. This shows that it's not a lack of coordination that prevents young babies from passing tests of object permanence.

A second experiment showed that some 10-month-olds but none of the 8.75-month-olds benefited when a completely hidden toy emitted a noise. This suggests that it's not a memory issue causing the younger babies to fail to look for the hidden toys because presumably the noise would serve as a reminder.

Moore and Meltzoff think that the discrepancy between the looking time experiments and reaching experiments can be explained by the fact that they place different demands on the babies. In the looking time experiments, the babies have to compare what actually happened (i.e. no object) with the prior state of affairs (i.e. an object was there) whereas the reaching experiments are more difficult in that the babies have to make a prediction about what the future situation will be if they lift the cloth.

### 3. **Living with chronic fatigue syndrome**

Dickson, A., Knussen, C., Flowers, P. (2008). 'That was my old life; it's almost like a past-life now': Identity crisis, loss and adjustment amongst people living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. *Psychology & Health*, 23(4), 459-476. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08870440701757393>  
Author weblink: [http://www.napier.ac.uk/fhlss/HSS/Staff/Pages/Adele\\_Dickson.aspx](http://www.napier.ac.uk/fhlss/HSS/Staff/Pages/Adele_Dickson.aspx)

*This item originally appeared in the British Psychological Society's Research Digest, Issue 115. See [www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog](http://www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog)*

'Chronic fatigue syndrome' (CFS) can sometimes lead to an identity crisis so severe it is akin to dying. That's one message derived from comments made by fourteen people with the condition who were interviewed in-depth by health psychologists in Scotland.

CFS, also known as ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis), is a poorly understood condition characterised by long-term tiredness that persists even after sleep and rest. The organic cause is unknown.

Using a qualitative technique called interpretative phenomenological analysis, Adele Dickson and colleagues identified three themes in the accounts of what it is like to live with CFS: "Identity crisis: agency and embodiment"; "Scepticism and the self"; and "Acceptance, adjustment and coping."

The people with CFS said that the condition has stripped them of their identities and left them feeling detached from their minds and bodies. "The frequent use of the language of bereavement is suggestive of processes of mourning and even perhaps the death of anticipated self," the researchers said.

The lack of a medical explanation for CFS means the condition is often met with scepticism. The people with CFS said social interactions, rather than being supportive, often became a source of anxiety because of people's scepticism and the pressure to behave as if one did not have CFS. The interviewees said they even began to doubt themselves. One woman said she had asked herself: "Who am I and am I turning into a malingerer?"

Fortunately, most of the people with CFS had started to accept the reality of their new lives and small, achievable tasks were said to boost morale.

Adele Dickson and her co-workers concluded that there was an urgent need for health psychology to respond to the increasing prevalence of chronic health conditions such as CFS in Western Society. Health psychology needs to truly embrace a biopsychosocial model of illness, they said, and to conduct longitudinal qualitative research "to fully understand the processes underlying adaptation to illness."

#### **4. Measuring psychopathy in children and teenagers**

Sharp, C., Kine, S. (2008). The Assessment of Juvenile Psychopathy: Strengths and Weaknesses of Currently Used Questionnaire Measures. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 13(2), 85-95.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2008.00483.x>

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Questionnaire measures of childhood and teenage psychopathy should not be used in clinical or forensic settings because their legitimacy has yet to be established.

That's the message from Carla Sharp and Sarah Kine who assessed four youth psychopathy questionnaires: The Antisocial Process Screening Device, The Child Psychopathy Scale, The Psychopathy Content Scale and The Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory.

The closest thing to a gold standard in this field is the youth version of Hare's Psychopathy Checklist, but this requires lengthy interviews with children and their parents, hence the appeal of self-report questionnaires.

Sharp and Kine found the current batch of questionnaires had many strengths - for example, different items that are meant to gauge the same thing tended to correlate with each other, and high scores on the questionnaires tended to correlate with arrests or other measures of antisocial behaviour, as you'd expect.

However, there was a severe lack of longitudinal research with the measures, which is particularly important for distinguishing between typical teenage characteristics and genuine psychopathy. There was also a lack of consensus over whether child psychopathy is made up of two factors (callous plus antisocial) or three (arrogant/deceitful interpersonal style; irresponsible behaviour; plus emotional deficiencies).

The idea that psychopathy can be identified in childhood is a controversial and sensitive issue. In theory it could allow treatment to be targeted early on when it is most likely to be effective, but on the other hand, children labelled as psychopathic could see their liberties curtailed based on a clinical diagnosis. Given these concerns, and in the context of the current state of knowledge, Sharp and Kine advised that, right now, using youth psychopathy questionnaires in clinical and forensic settings may be "considered unethical".

Instead, they recommend the questionnaires may best be suited "for screening purposes that may lead to more comprehensive clinical interview, file review and the gathering of collateral information."

#### 5. **Parents' socioeconomic status and their children's brain response to rhyme**

Raizada, R., Richards, T., Meltzoff, A., Kuhl, P. (2008). Socioeconomic status predicts hemispheric specialisation of the left inferior frontal gyrus in young children. *NeuroImage*, 40(3), 1392-1401.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2008.01.021>

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The type of household a young child grows up in appears to be associated with the way their brain responds to rhyming sounds.

We already know from past research that the processing of sounds is vital to reading ability and that children from less advantageous backgrounds are at increased risk of developing reading problems. This new finding adds the brain jigsaw piece to the reading development puzzle.

Fourteen 5-year-olds had their brains scanned while they judged whether or not words, real and made-up, rhymed with each other. Among the children with wealthier, better educated parents, the difference in amount of activity between the left and right hemispheres tended to be larger while performing this task, than among the children with poorer and/or less educated parents. In other words, among the children whose parents were of higher socioeconomic status, language processing appeared to be more localised to the left hemisphere, as is seen in most adults.

The specific region of the brain showing this difference included an area famously associated with language, known as Broca's area, after its discoverer Paul Broca.

Moreover, the pattern of findings held even after taking into account the

children's scores on tests on vocabulary and their awareness of the sounds in words. This means the brain scanning was highlighting links between socioeconomic background and language processing that the behavioural tests were not sensitive to. As well as revealing functional associations, the brain scans also showed that the children's socioeconomic background predicted the amount of brain cell volume in the Broca's area of their brains.

So, why is a child's home environment associated with the way their brain responds to rhyming sounds in particular and, presumably, language processing in general? Rajeev Raizada and colleagues who conducted the research said: "One candidate mechanism that we are currently investigating is the richness of the vocabulary and syntax to which a child is exposed."

## 6. **Points to consider when using Personal Construct Psychology as a method of listening to children**

*Maxwell, T. (2006). Researching into some primary school children's views about school: using personal construct psychology in practice with children on the Special Needs register. Pastoral Care in Education. 24 (1), pp. 20-26*

<http://www.informaworld.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/smpp/ftinterface~content=a790558869~fulltext=713240928>

*Summary by Helena Bunn, Trainee Educational Psychologist*

'Personal Construct Psychology' (PCP) is a very popular multi-sensory approach that is used in eliciting children's and young people's views. An outline of the techniques will be briefly explored below, in order to provide a general framework. However, the emphasis will be on how PCP could be used, mainly but not exclusively, within educational settings.

The PCP is a non-directive, child centred method developed by Kelly in the mid 1950s, and continued in education by Ravenette and Beaver. The heart of this method is the consideration that every person has their own particular "lens" or "goggles" through which they see the world. A principle of PCP is that the only way to understand another person's attitude and perspective is to explore those attitudes further, from a non-judgemental position. A variety of techniques such as verbally structured interviewing using root and exploratory questions, "drawing and its opposite" (Maxwell, 2006) are used in the PCP to elicit personal perceptions, to explore them cooperatively and to seek higher level beliefs, values and attitudes.

The above study in eliciting children's views conducted by Maxwell is small scale research. In his project, he used 13 children to gather their views about school, using questioning and drawing techniques specific to the PCP. The naturalistic paradigm that informed Maxwell's research is congruent with the PCP principles, as it affirms the mutual influence the researcher and the participants have on each other. The investigation process is realised through exploring words, actions and communications in narrative or descriptive ways, and such a qualitative analysis was used for analysing the data. Apart from the arguments for using the PCP techniques in eliciting children's views, which can also be found in other authors' positions, there are some important learning points to draw from his conclusions.

As Maxwell's research reveals, it is important to understand where a particular child is in a developmental sense. This should incorporate an understanding of their emotional, social



and intellectual developmental in relation to their ability to experience situations and to express themselves. Additionally, listening can be valuable in helping children to feel included in their school community. To ask is to acknowledge they exist and have a viewpoint, and can help them to be recognized as members of the school. The small scale research suggested, among other things, that a key aspect of working with children for assessing their views is not only the ability to listen, but also to reflect on what they are like, interpreting and checking that the interpretations given by the adult are accurate.

## 7. **Could live theatre help prevent eating disorders in children?**

Haines, J., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Morris, B. (2008). Theater as a Behavior Change Strategy: Qualitative Findings from a School-Based Intervention. *Eating Disorders*, 16(3), 241-254. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10640260802016829>  
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Children seem to be worrying about their weight and body image at an ever younger age. Part of the problem for professionals who wish to help is finding a positive message that is relevant to children and which engages their attention. New research by Jess Haines and colleagues suggests live theatre could be one way to do this.

Eighteen children at an ethnically diverse school in Minneapolis volunteered to help develop and perform a play about body image and healthy eating. One day a week for ten weeks the children worked with a local theatre production company to write the script and rehearse the play, before performing it in front of other pupils, teachers and parents.

Preparations for the play involved the children writing a poem about their favourite body part to be included in the script, and writing a story about teasing at their school, also to be acted out in the play. According to the researchers, the final script "communicated messages about feeling good about your body, alternative ways to communicate with peers other than teasing, and options for healthy eating and being physically active."

After the final performances, Haines and her colleagues interviewed 15 of the participating children in three focus groups of five. Qualitative analysis of the children's comments suggested they had enjoyed the process and that the play had been beneficial to them in several ways, including improving their body satisfaction ("You should be happy with your body," one child said) and increasing their resilience to derogatory remarks made by others.

A key feature of the intervention was that it appeared to engage the children and they reported finding it particularly relevant to their lives. This echoes other health research showing that involving participants in the development and delivery of an intervention leads to it being more relevant and culturally sensitive to its intended audience. Another bonus was that the play was well attended by parents, thus engaging them with the health message too.

The researchers cautioned that their sample size was small, and that

randomly controlled trials are needed to provide "more objective measures of behavioural change [that] would provide stronger evidence of the effectiveness of the...theatre programme as a behaviour change strategy."

## **8. How two-year-olds work out who owns what**

Friedman, O., Neary, K. (2008). Determining who owns what: Do children infer ownership from first possession?. *Cognition*, 107(3), 829-849.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2007.12.002>

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If you think about it, ownership is a rather slippery concept, one based on all sorts of abstract social and economic principles. Now in one of the first studies of its kind, Ori Friedman and Karen Neary have investigated whether and how two-, three- and four-year-olds determine who owns what.

Their findings suggest that young children judge ownership based on who is first in possession of a given object. In an initial study, children aged between two and four were told a simple story about a boy and a girl playing with a toy, after which they were asked to say who owned the toy. If the story described the girl as playing with the toy first, then the children tended to say she owned the toy, and vice versa if the boy was described as playing with the toy first.

But what if the children were simply attributing ownership to whichever person was first associated with the toy, rather than in possession of it? A further experiment involved telling the children that the girl likes the toy, and then that the boy likes the toy. However, in this case, the children were no more likely to say the girl owned the toy than the boy did, even though the girl had been associated with the toy first (the same was true with the sexes reversed).

Finally, Friedman and Neary wanted to see how easily the first possession rule could be overcome in the context of gift giving. When the young children were told that the boy has a ball which he then gives to the girl as a present, they still tended to say that the boy owns the ball (the reverse being true if the story began with the girl in possession). However, when the gift giving was made more explicit (a wrapped present on the girl's birthday), then the first possession rule was broken, and the young children correctly realised that the girl now owned the gift.

The researchers said the most important next step was to find out where young children get this rule about first possession from. They surmised that it could be learned from hearing utterances like "It's her doll, she had it first", or it could be innate, the product of a "cognitive system dedicated to reasoning about ownership."

## **9. Why psychologists are asking children to touch their toes**

Cameronponitz, C., McClelland, M., Jewkes, A., Connor, C., Farris, C., Morrison, F. (2008). Touch your toes! Developing a direct measure of



behavioral regulation in early childhood. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23(2), 141-158. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2007.01.004>

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Psychologists in America say they have found a simple and quick way to test young children's ability to concentrate and follow instructions in class - what they call "self-regulation".

Self-regulation is said to reflect a combination of attention, inhibition and memory skills. It's a useful attribute to measure because it strongly predicts how well young children will do when they start school.

The new "Head-to-Toes" Task requires that children listen to ten instructions, delivered in random order, telling them to either touch their head or their toes. Points are scored for following the instructions correctly.

Other available measures of self-regulation, such as the Tower of London task, are more time consuming and tend to require special equipment.

Claire Ponitz and colleagues administered the new 'Head-to-Toes' Task several times over two years to 445 children aged between three and six years, based at two sites in Michigan and Oregon.

The researchers said their task showed high reliability and validity. In other words, the same child tested twice, with only a short gap between tests, tended to achieve the same score. Scores on the test also correlated with teachers' reports of the children's self-regulation skills.

The strongest influence on children's scores was their age, with older children finding the task easier. There were differences in performance levels between the two testing sites, but these disappeared once the background of the children in the two sites was taken into account - for example based on their parents' level of education.

The researchers concluded that although older children found the task too easy for it to be a useful measure (in its current form), for the younger children, the "Head-to-Toes" Task could serve as a simple and easy-to-administer measure of self-regulation, thus helping identify those children who are likely to have difficulties when they start formal schooling.

#### 10. **Negative false memories are more easily implanted than false ones**

Otgaar, H., Candel, I., Merckelbach, H. (2008). Children's false memories: Easier to elicit for a negative than for a neutral event. *Acta Psychologica*, 128(2), 350-354. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2008.03.009>

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Children develop false memories for a negative event more readily than they do for a neutral one. Henry Otgaar and colleagues, who made the new finding, said their work has real world implications for anyone working with child witnesses: "The argument that is sometimes heard in court - i.e. this memory report must be true because it describes such a horrible event - is, as our data show, on shaky grounds."

Seventy-six children aged between seven and nine years were asked to recall details about a true event that had happened to them the previous year (e.g. that their class had to perform a musical), and either a neutral fictitious event (moving classrooms) or a negative fictitious event (being wrongly accused of copying a classmate's work).

The children were asked about the events, true and fictitious, during two interviews held a week apart. If at first the children were unable to recall any further details, they were asked to concentrate and try again. They were also asked to reflect on the events during the week between interviews, to see if they could flesh out any further details.

Altogether, 74 per cent of the children developed false memories for the fictitious event - that is, they said they remembered the event and added extra details about what happened. Crucially, those asked to recall the time they were accused of copying a classmate were significantly more likely to develop a false memory than were those asked to recall the time they had to switch classrooms.

The researchers speculated that children might be more prone to developing false memories of negative rather than neutral events because the two kinds of information are stored differently in the brain. "Negative information is more interrelated than neutral material," they explained. "As a result, the presentation of negative information - either true or false - might increase the possibility that other negative materials become activated in memory. This, in turn, could affect the development of a false memory for a negative event."

## **10. Prevention and responses to bullying**

*Thompson (F), Tippett, N and Smith, P K (2008) Ch 9 within 'Practical interventions for young people at risk', (Ed) Geldard, K, Sage, in press*

*Summary by Rita Adair, Senior Educational Psychologist*

### ***What is the article about?***

This article brings up to date information about what bullying is, the types of bullying, incidence and sets out proactive strategies in school, playground strategies, reactive strategies and peer support. It evaluates interventions on the basis of research evidence and asks the reader to consider given what we know about bullying, what kinds of strategies are most likely to be effective in reducing it? Overall there is a sense that we are still acquiring more knowledge about bullying and nothing is clear-cut. Therefore effective strategies may be expected to vary by age, gender or culture. The chapter also

looks at the arguments between sanctions-based, restorative and non-punitive approaches to bullying in terms of their effectiveness. On balance the latter two approaches appear more effective in terms of research evidence.

Bullying is defined as an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot defend him or herself (Olweus, 1991). The article suggests that those who bully at school may be at an early stage of development of later anti-social behaviour (Kumpulainen & Rasanen, 2000, Baldry & Farrington, 2000). School bullies are up to four times more likely to become chronic offenders than non-bullies (Olweus, 1991; Farrington, 1993). For victims the research confirms the negative effects on self-esteem and feelings of depression (Hawker & Boulton, 2000) with some effects being long-term (Jugh-Jones & Smith, 1999; Rigby, 2003). Particularly at risk are those who both bully and are victims – ‘bully/victims’ who comprise perhaps 1 or 2% of the school population.

### ***Which interventions work?***

Proactive strategies include a whole school anti-bullying policy, the Checkpoints for Learning diagnostic tool (Varnarva, 2005), the National Behaviour and Attendance Strategy and SEAL (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme, curricular materials to raise awareness and develop skills such as empathy and assertiveness and Quality Circles. The evidence suggests that these strategies can only impact if backed up by continuing anti-bullying work and policy (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

An effective playground policy and well-designed play area can make an impact on reducing bullying. One study found that improvements in the grounds resulted in a 64% reduction in bullying (LTL National School Grounds Survey) while another study examining the effects of trained lunchtime supervisors noted a clear decrease in bullying (Boulton, 1994).

In terms of reactive strategies, direct sanctions can range from mild to more severe. There is no evidence of the effectiveness of the milder sanctions and a small amount of evidence of the effects of exclusion. Case studies of hard-to-reach children/young people, who had been excluded from school, concluded that there are no ‘quick fix’ solutions (Frankham et, 2007). Restorative approaches, which involve bringing about reparation between the bully and the victim, are increasingly being used in schools to deal with bullying situations and are proving effective (Kane et al, 2007). Two other approaches – the Method of Shared Concern (or Pikas method – Pikas, 1989, 2002) and the Support Group Approach (previously known as the ‘No blame approach’) are described. Both approaches aim to sensitise bullying children to the harm they are doing to the victim and change their behaviour. The Method of Shared Concern can result in a decrease in bullying following intervention (Smith, Cowie & Sharp, 1994) and Young (1998) reported that 80% of the support group sessions studied resulted in immediate success.

Peer Support uses the knowledge, skills and experience of children and young people themselves in a planned and structured way to tackle and reduce bullying. There are a variety of forms and most involve some form of training. These include; Circles of Friends, Befriending schemes, Peer mentoring/counselling, peer mediation and bystander training. Reviews of peer support schemes (Naylor & Cowie, 1999; Cowie and Wallace, 2000; Smith & Watson, 2004) find definite benefits for peer supporters, and improvements in school ethos. Reductions in bullying have been identified for particular cases, but are not yet substantiated at a broad level. Effectiveness of the schemes appears to depend on selection, training and the supervision the peer supporters receive.

### ***Why is it important?***

Bullying is a highly undesirable behaviour, which can result in long-term suffering for those who are bullied. Broadly speaking 5% of children might be seen as regular or severe bullies and some 10% as regular or severe victims. Everyone has experience of bullying whether from being a bully, victim or as a witness and therefore schools cannot ignore the impact it has on children's lives.

In addition schools have had a statutory obligation to produce an anti-bullying policy since 1999. This book will help a school to look at the range of interventions they are currently offering in their policy and up date it accordingly.

### ***Where can I find out more?***

H. McGrath & T. Noble (eds), *Bullying solutions: Evidence-based approaches to bullying in Australian schools*, Pearson: Frenchs Forest NSW

The DCSF 'Safe to Learn' Guidance is available at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/bullying](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/bullying)

All of the approaches described in the chapter above are summarised on the Norfolk schools professionals website – [www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/go/bullying](http://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/go/bullying)

The Anti-Bullying Alliance website has a range of useful information including 'Tackling bullying in schools. A mapping of existing approaches' [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)