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Bullying an epidemic in the U.K.

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21 November, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Bullying an epidemic in the U.K.

The British government has announced that school bullying has reached epidemic proportions. Last week, England's specially designated Commissioner for Children said nearly every child was affected by the problem. In the run up to Anti-Bullying Week, which starts today (November 21), education ministers are considering fining the parents of bullies. Pupils who attack or threaten their classmates could land Mom or Dad with a cash penalty of up to \$1,710. Schools minister Jacqui Smith said: "This will send a strong message to parents that schools will not tolerate a failure to take responsibility for bullying." Additionally, there are proposals to give teachers a "clear right" to discipline children and "restrain them through reasonable force" where necessary.

Ms. Smith said: "Bullying should never be tolerated in our schools, no matter what its motivation." She added that: "Children must know what is right and what is wrong, and that there will be consequences for crossing the line." She spoke after a recent spate of particularly violent and disturbing cases in schools. Twelve-year-old bullies have preyed on their victims, slashing them with knives and using iron bars to beat them unconscious. One child was told she would be "dead meat" if she returned to school. Although the right to education without fear is enshrined into the UN convention on the rights of the child, it seems Britain's schoolchildren have gone haywire and are hell bent on tormenting and injuring other students rather than learning.

WARM-UPS

1. THE BAD KIDS: Write down the names of some of the bad kids from when you were at school. In pairs / groups, talk about the bad things these students got up to. Did their bad behavior affect you in any way? Did you do anything wrong and behave badly at school?

2. BULLYING: In pairs / groups, talk about bullying. Were you bullied at school? What kind of bullying did you see? Who was the biggest bully? Did you bully a younger brother or sister? Is there bullying in your office? What would you do if the things below happened to you?

- Being harassed
- Being shoved
- Being beaten
- Having your nose broken
- Being harmed with a knife
- Having your head banged against the wall
- Being grabbed
- Being choked
- Being teased and called names
- Being told you'll be "dead meat"

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Bullying / epidemics / British schools / worrying trends / politicians / monetary fines / strong messages / using force / teachers / right and wrong / violence / education

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. COMMENTS ON BULLIES: (1) Read the comments below made about bullies. Agree or disagree with them with your partner / group. (2) Rewrite the sentences so they match your own opinions. Add an extra sentence to each opinion. (3) Change partners / groups and read and talk about what you wrote.

- a. Bullies are losers.
- b. If you stand up to a bully, he/she will stop bullying you.
- c. Bullying is a part of school life. It does no real harm.
- d. Bullies have mental problems.
- e. Teachers too often ignore bullying in classrooms.
- f. Bullying leaves mental permanent mental scars.
- g. Boys are worse bullies than girls.
- h. Bullying stops after people are eighteen years old.
- i. Bullies should be arrested.
- j. Being bullied builds a stronger character.

5. BULLY: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with bullies. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Britain's government announced it needs anti-bullying vaccines. | T / F |
| b. A government spokesman said bullying affects nearly every child. | T / F |
| c. Parents of bullies could receive fines of over \$1,500. | T / F |
| d. Proposals encourage teachers to use maximum force against bullies. | T / F |
| e. The education minister said some bullying is acceptable. | T / F |
| f. Violent bullying disappeared from British schools many years ago. | T / F |
| g. One child was forced to eat the meat of a dead animal. | T / F |
| h. Many of Britain's students seem to have gone crazy. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| a. proportions | lead in |
| b. designated | surge |
| c. run up | subdue |
| d. penalty | determined |
| e. restrain | fine |
| f. spate | levels |
| g. preyed on | held sacred |
| h. enshrined | berserk |
| i. haywire | nominated |
| j. hell bent | terrorized |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. that school bullying has reached | on their victims |
| b. In the run up to | cash penalty of up to \$1,710 |
| c. land Mom or Dad with a | force where necessary |
| d. schools will not tolerate a failure | without fear |
| e. restrain them through reasonable | tormenting and injuring other students |
| f. there will be consequences | have gone haywire |
| g. Twelve-year-old bullies have preyed | epidemic proportions |
| h. the right to education | for crossing the line |
| i. Britain's schoolchildren | to take responsibility for bullying |
| j. hell bent on | Anti-Bullying Week |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

ODD WORD OUT: Delete the incorrect word from each of the groups in *italics*.

Bullying an epidemic in the U.K.

The British government has announced that school bullying has reached epidemic *propositions / levels / proportions*. Last week, England's specially *designated / nominated / protracted* Commissioner for Children said nearly every child was affected by the problem. In the *run down / lead in / run up* to Anti-Bullying Week, which starts today (November 21), education ministers are considering fining the parents of bullies. Pupils who attack or threaten their classmates could *land / take off / leave* Mom or Dad with a cash penalty of up to \$1,710. Schools minister Jacqui Smith said: "This will send a strong message to parents that schools will not *throttle / condone / tolerate* a failure to take responsibility for bullying." Additionally, there are proposals to give teachers a "clear right" to discipline children and "restrain them through *reasonable / moderate / lethal* force" where necessary.

Ms. Smith said: "Bullying should never be tolerated in our schools, no matter what its *spark plug / motivation / impetus*." She added that: "Children must know what is right and what is wrong, and that there will be consequences for crossing the line." She spoke after a recent *surge / spate / sating* of particularly violent and disturbing cases in schools. Twelve-year-old bullies have *preyed on / terrorized / prayed for* their victims, slashing them with knives and using iron bars to beat them *unconscious / senseless / repressed*. One child was told she would be "dead meat" if she returned to school. Although the right to education without fear is *written / entombed / enshrined* into the UN convention on the rights of the child, it seems Britain's schoolchildren have gone *haywire / berserk / haystack* and are hell bent on tormenting and injuring other students rather than learning.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Bullying an epidemic in the U.K.

The British government has announced that school bullying has reached epidemic _____. Last week, England's specially _____ Commissioner for Children said nearly every child was affected by the problem. In the run up to Anti-Bullying Week, which starts today (November 21), education ministers are considering fining the parents of bullies. _____ who attack or threaten their classmates could _____ Mom or Dad with a cash penalty of up to \$1,710. Schools minister Jacqui Smith said: "This will send a strong message to parents that schools will not _____ a failure to take responsibility for bullying." Additionally, there are proposals to give teachers a "clear right" to _____ children and "_____ them through reasonable force" where necessary.

Ms. Smith said: "Bullying should never be _____ in our schools, no matter what its motivation." She added that: "Children must know what is right and what is wrong, and that there will be consequences for _____ the line." She spoke after a recent _____ of particularly violent and disturbing cases in schools. Twelve-year-old bullies have preyed on their victims, _____ them with knives and using iron bars to beat them unconscious. One child was told she would be "dead meat" if she returned to school. Although the right to education without fear is _____ into the UN convention on the rights of the child, it seems Britain's schoolchildren have gone _____ and are hell bent on _____ and injuring other students rather than learning.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'hay'** and **'wire'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. ODD WORD OUT: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "BULLYING" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about bullying.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| • reached | • tolerated |
| • affected | • line |
| • run up | • spate |
| • pupils | • meat |
| • message | • UN |
| • reasonable | • bent |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What is your impression of British schoolchildren?
- c. Is bullying a big problem in your country?
- d. Did you witness or experience bullying at school?
- e. What would you do if your child was being bullied?
- f. What would you do if you knew who the bullies were?
- g. Do you think bullies eventually become respectable members of society?
- h. What should the British government do if nearly every child is affected by bullying?
- i. Do you think an Anti-Bullying Week is an effective measure?
- j. Do you think the parents of bullies are bad parents?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think fining parents of bullies is a good idea?
- d. Bullies often destroy the confidence and lives of their victims, who have mental scars for life. Should bullies be severely punished?
- e. Do you think teachers should have greater powers to discipline bullies?
- f. Whose fault is it that there are so many bullies in schools?
- g. Do you think children are having greater trouble differentiating right from wrong?
- h. Do you think violence in video games and movies contribute in any way to bullying?
- i. Do you think teachers care if someone is being bullied?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

BULLYING SOLUTIONS: How far do you agree with these solutions to curbing bullying in schools? Discuss the pros and cons of each with your partner(s).

SOLUTIONS	PROS	CONS
All classrooms should have web cameras so parents can monitor their children.		
Children who repeatedly misbehave should be automatically expelled.		
Parents of bullied children should be able to sue the bully's parents.		
Teachers should receive better training to cope with delinquency.		
Parents of delinquent children should be named and shamed in local newspapers.		
Parents must pay a fine for all incidents of their child's misbehavior.		
Well-behaved children can suggest punishments for badly behaved children.		
Teachers who cannot control their classrooms should be fired.		
Bullies should be put in special children's prisons.		

- Change partners and compare and share your ideas.
- Decide on a revised wording for each of the above solutions.
- Return to your original partner(s) and discuss your revisions.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on Anti-Bullying Week in the UK. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. ANTI-BULLYING POSTER: Make an anti-bullying poster outlining the different kinds of bullying offences and the punishments for each offence. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

4. LETTER: You have been bullied for the past year. Write a letter to the bully explaining your feelings. Ask the bully some questions. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F b. T c. T d. F e. F f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. proportions	levels
b. designated	nominated
c. run up	lead in
d. penalty	fine
e. restrain	subdue
f. spate	surge
g. preyed on	terrorized
h. enshrined	held sacred
i. haywire	berserk
j. hell bent	determined

PHRASE MATCH:

a. that school bullying has reached	epidemic proportions
b. In the run up to	Anti-Bullying Week
c. land Mom or Dad with a	cash penalty of up to \$1,710
d. schools will not tolerate a failure	to take responsibility for bullying
e. restrain them through reasonable	force where necessary
f. there will be consequences	for crossing the line
g. Twelve-year-old bullies have preyed	on their victims
h. the right to education	without fear
i. Britain's schoolchildren	have gone haywire
j. hell bent on	tormenting and injuring other students

ODD WORD OUT:

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