

Banter v Bullying

Banter and bullying are clearly distinguishable. Many seek to excuse bullying by claiming it is 'just banter'. Banter can be argued to have an important place in an inclusive culture and could help in developing cohesive relationships in workplaces and organisations such as sports clubs. Where it is genuine banter, it can encourage trust between individuals which is important in successful teams.

Banter is - teasing or joking that is amusing and friendly between people where there is no power imbalance. Most importantly it is **an exchange** and not one way – each giving and taking an equal share of the teasing. It is neither designed to nor has the effect of shaming, upsetting, belittling, offending or otherwise making anyone hearing it uncomfortable.

Bullying is - repeated behaviour that causes physical or emotional harm whether intended or not. It can be offensive, insulting, humiliating, abusive, intimidating or malicious. **Bullying doesn't require intent**, what is important is the impact it has on the person being bullied.

In a group situation, if someone seems to get teased more than others, or is the repeated target of a joke, then it's not really banter anymore. That person is being singled out.

Often people will not be confident enough to stand up for themselves if they are hurt by something. They don't want to be considered someone who can't take a joke, so will often laugh along so as not to draw attention to themselves. This means that everyone is still under the illusion that this is banter, not bullying, and it will only be reinforced! Don't be a bystander – if you suspect that some banter has become offensive to anyone involved, don't laugh. Even better – call it out! Just because someone calls it banter, doesn't mean it is banter!

Negative language or behaviour targeting any of the protected characteristics under the **Equality Act 2010** are always considered inappropriate, irrespective of the bullying/banter debate. These protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender or sexual orientation. Banter which 'crosses the line' in these areas and is not challenged, can disguise or lead to the apparent normalisation of discriminatory abuse.

Useful resources:

[Banter \(anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk\)](http://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk);

[Banter VS Bullying Poster \(antibullyingpro.com\)](http://antibullyingpro.com)

