

# Free of Bullying

## Findings from the first pilot survey



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS  
MENNTAVÍSINDASVIÐ



**Barnaheill**  
Save the Children Iceland

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The first pilot survey was conducted for Save the Children (Barnaheill) in Iceland in collaboration with the Educational Research Institute, School of Education, University of Iceland.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Free of Bullying is a research based project developed as a preventive measure against bullying and for friendship in preschools. The original project named *Fri for mobberi* has been translated, localized, produced and published in collaboration with *Red Barnet-Save the Children* and *Mary Fonden* in Denmark. *Fri for mobberi* is also available for the early classes in primary schools in Denmark.

Free of Bullying was developed and adapted from Roskilde University and is founded on findings of current research on bullying. The project aims at preventing bullying through creating a good school atmosphere, by having good communication practice and positive attitude towards everyone in the school. Participation of all children, staff and parents is a necessary for the project to succeed. A special emphasis is made on reaching children and adults who witness bullying in their settings but are unresponsive to it.

It is presumed that participants comply with fundamental values in all work and communication in the preschool settings. The Free of Bullying theory is based on four pillars of values: tolerance, respect, care and courage.

The project has been widely accepted where it has been applied and research findings give promising results. Free of Bullying or *Fri for mobberi* is based on current research on bullying and a defined theoretical frame of values that should be integrated into all school activities and teaching along with realistic assignments for students, staff and parents.

Participant schools in the test application of Free of Bullying in Iceland during the winter 2014-15 are six preschools in six districts. . Along with Iceland and Denmark the project material has been tested in Greenland and Estonia and many other countries have expressed their interest in participation (Save the children (Barnaheill), 2015).

There are three questionnaires linked to the Free of Bullying pilot project, each of which is designed to be applied at different stages of the pilot phase. The three questionnaires are designed to evaluate and adapt the Free of Bullying project. They

are aimed at the various parties involved in the project, as a tool for reflecting on expectations and experiences of the practices used in connection with the program. A test survey was implemented in Iceland with 24 participants. The first questionnaire is intended to identify expectations, options and current practices in the participating institutions. The following report contains detailed description and analysis of the answers given by participants to the first questionnaire. A descriptive analysis of the participants' background is followed by the findings in seven main themes concluding with a short summary: 1. experience of bullying, 2. individual perception of bullying, interpretation of bullying, the difference between bullying and teasing, 3. bullying within and outside the preschool, 4. responsibility, 5. staff conduct – communication practices, 6. cooperation, 7. launching Free of Bullying.

## 2 PARTICIPANTS

Altogether, 23 of the 24 participants answered the question on occupation with 28 answers as categories were not mutually exclusive. Looking at the participants' occupation reveals that the majority holds a management position or 10. Eight people are qualified preschool teachers or similar, 6 hold other positions and 4 are unqualified preschool teachers or assistant teachers or similar (see figure 1).

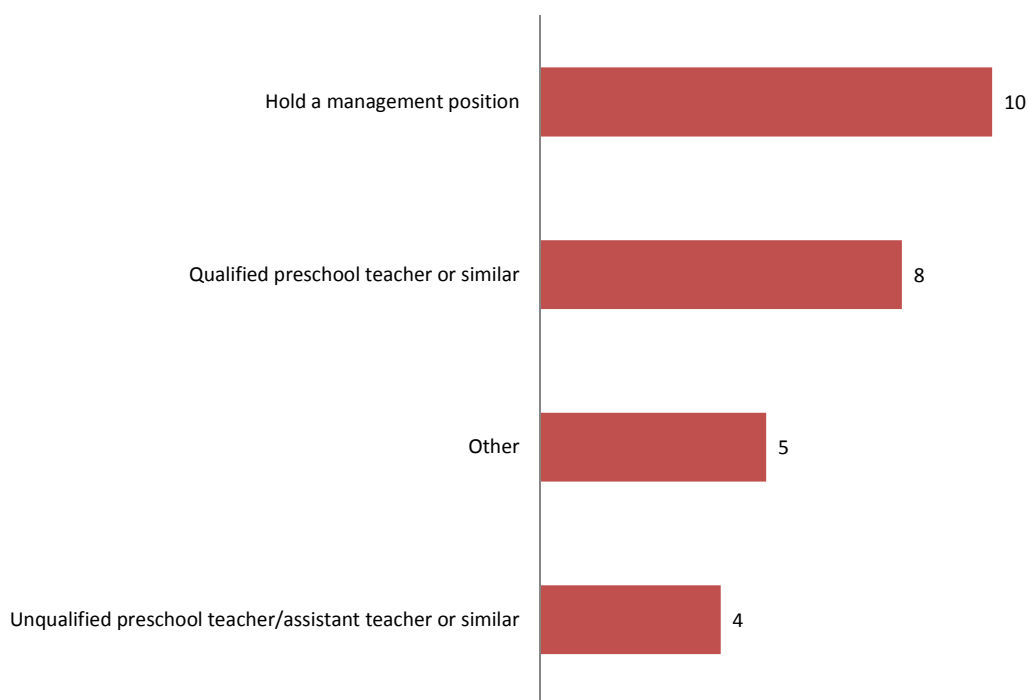
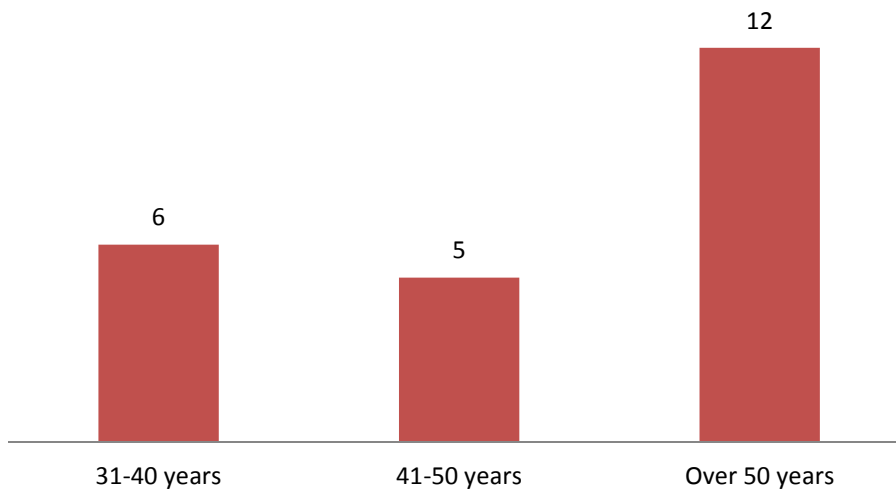


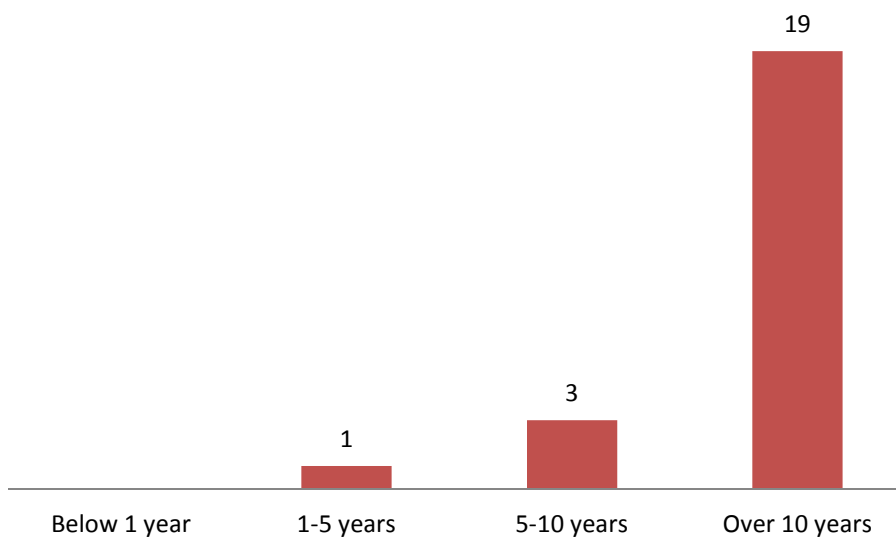
Figure 1: What is your occupation?

Twelve of the participants are over 50 years old, 5 of the participants fall in the age group 41-50 years old and 6 are 31-40 years old (see figure 2).



**Figure 2: How old are you?**

A vast majority of participants have extensive experience in the field and 19 have worked in the field for more than 10 years, 3 have worked 5-10 years in the field and 1 for 1-5 years (see figure 3).



**Figure 3: How long have you been working in this field?**

### 3 EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING

Four questions were asked in relation to experience of bullying: 1) Has your preschool focused on bullying in the past? 2) If you feel that your preschool works to prevent bullying in other ways, briefly state what and how? 3) Are there any areas that you feel that you and your colleagues could improve regarding how to deal with conflict and teasing among the children? 4) If yes, briefly describe which areas could be improved?

1) 22 of the 24 participants answered the multi choice question on previous focus on bullying. Only 6 of the participants reported that there had never been any focus on bullying in their preschool before getting involved in the program, 10 reported having been focused on bullying in connection with one or more specific incident, 15 of the participants reported that bullying had been discussed at staff meetings and 12 said that concerns about bullying are a part of the curriculum. One participant reported the subject of bullying being raised at meetings with parents, while 5 of the participants reported the existence of clear guidelines in place outlining what needs to be done should they encounter bullying situations (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Has your preschool focused on bullying in the past?

2) When analysing the answers to what kind of methods are used in the preschools to prevent bullying it is quite clear that most participants emphasize *friendship* and *teaching children about the meaning of friendship*. To achieve that goal participants use for example stories about friendship and hold so called friend-meetings. Cooperation *within the preschool* is also very important as a tool to prevent bullying.

“We work together, find solutions together all the time in compliance with a treaty about how we want communication to be conducted”.



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A few of the participants reported using PBS (STM) school skills.<sup>1</sup> Participants also find it important to work with *emotions* and how to deal with different emotions in different situations.

“We frequently talk to children about emotions in specific situations; we use emotion dolls, read books about bullying and emotions”.

3) The participants emphasized the importance of having a clear plan/strategy that everyone understood and could follow when the need to deal with bullying occurred. In some cases this was lacking. The plan needs to be simple and have the ability to mobilize everyone in finding a solution to the problem. It was also thought to be very important to promote positivity and give the children praise when possible. Bullying can be hard to spot and that is why caretakers and educators need to be alert and unified in counteracting bullying.

4) It seems that improvement can be made in the way bullying and teasing is dealt with as 16 of the participants feel that they and their colleagues can improve in that area. Three participants feel that they could not improve in how they deal with bullying and teasing and three are indecisive (see figure 5).

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<sup>1</sup> „Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) is an empirically validated, function-based approach to eliminate challenging behaviors and replace them with prosocial skills. Use of PBS decreases the need for more intrusive or aversive interventions (i.e., punishment or suspension) and can lead to both systemic as well as individualized change. PBS can target an individual student or an entire school, as it does not focus exclusively on the student, but also includes changing environmental variables such as the physical setting, task demands, curriculum, instructional pace and individualized reinforcement. Thus it is successful with a wide range of students, in a wide range of contexts, with a wide range of behaviors. Blending behavioral science, empirically validated procedures, durable systems change and an emphasis on socially important outcomes, PBS always involves data-based decision making using functional behavioral assessment and ongoing monitoring of intervention impact“(Cohn, 2001).

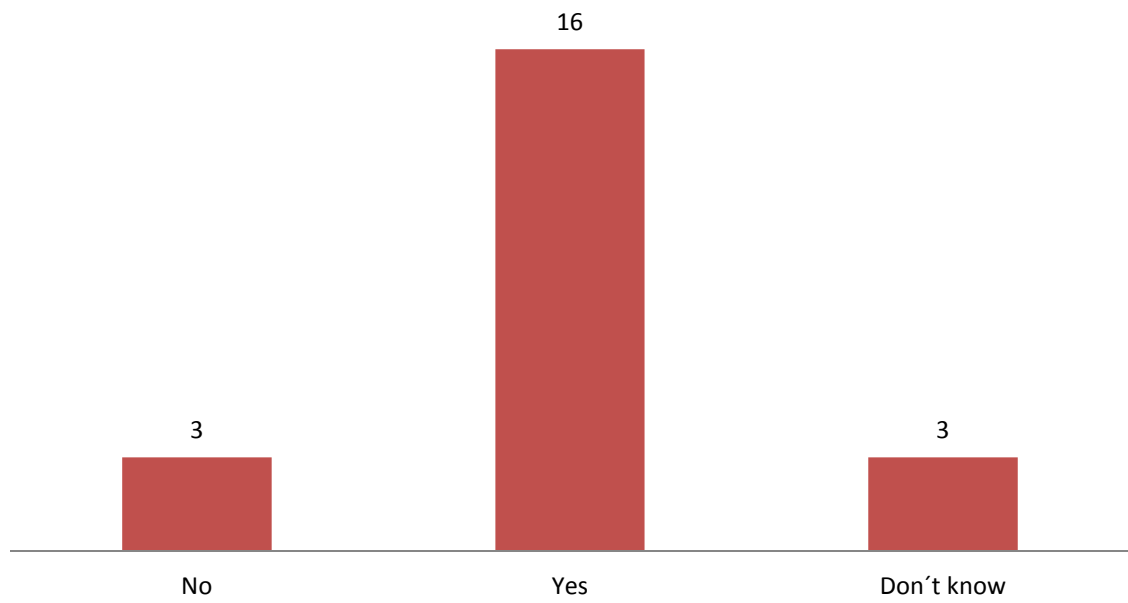


Figure 5: Are there any areas that you feel you and your colleagues could improve regarding how you deal with conflict and teasing among the children?

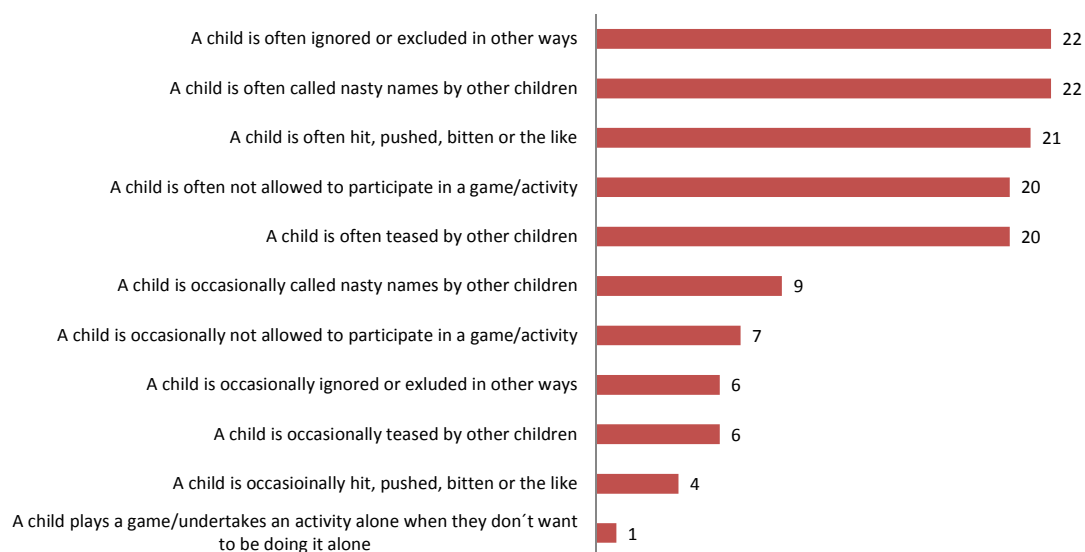
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## 4 INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTION OF BULLYING

### 4.1 Interpretation of bullying

Two questions were asked in relation to interpretation of bullying. 1) What is your interpretation of bullying? 2) Describe in your own words what you interpret as bullying.

1) Participants were asked to take a stand on whether certain behaviour could classify as bullying or not, 22 individuals answered the question. Everyone agreed that if a child was often called nasty names by other children that would classify as bullying. There was also a perfect consensus that a child was being bullied if it was often ignored or excluded in other ways. Majority of participants believed that a child was being bullied if it was often teased by other children, if it was often not allowed to participate in a game or activity and if a child was often hit, pushed, bitten or the like. Nine of the participants answered that if a child is occasionally called nasty names by other children that would qualify as bullying, seven people answered that bullying is taking place when a child is occasionally not allowed to participate, six believed bullying is occurring when a child is excluded in other ways and the same number believed that bullying is happening when a child is occasionally teased by other children. Four of the participants believed bullying is taking place when a child is occasionally hit, pushed, bitten or the like and only one thinks that bullying involves children playing a game or undertaking an activity alone when they don't want to be doing it alone (see figure 6).



**Figure 6: What is your interpretation of bullying?**

2) Participants were asked to describe in their own words what they interpret as bullying. The most common response was that bullying involves *frequent exclusion, teasing, and violence*. The exclusion does not only involve being left out of games or other activities but also being excluded from conversations. Other children don't listen to what the child has to say, his or her ideas and opinions. The child repeatedly experiences negative attitude towards him or her on behalf of the group which leads to distress and misery/sadness for the child. Bullying can also involve children making the bullied child act against his or her will. Bullying is not necessarily performed by a group of children but can also be performed by only one child.

“When a child is repeatedly degraded and humiliated resulting in distress for example teasing, violence or exclusion from the group”.

## 4.2 The difference between bullying and teasing

Two questions were asked on the difference between bullying and teasing. 1) Do you believe there is a difference between bullying and teasing? 2) If yes, briefly state what the difference is.

Regarding the former question, 23 individuals answered and the majority of them believed there is a difference between bullying and teasing. Only one believed there to be no difference and two were uncertain (see figure 7).

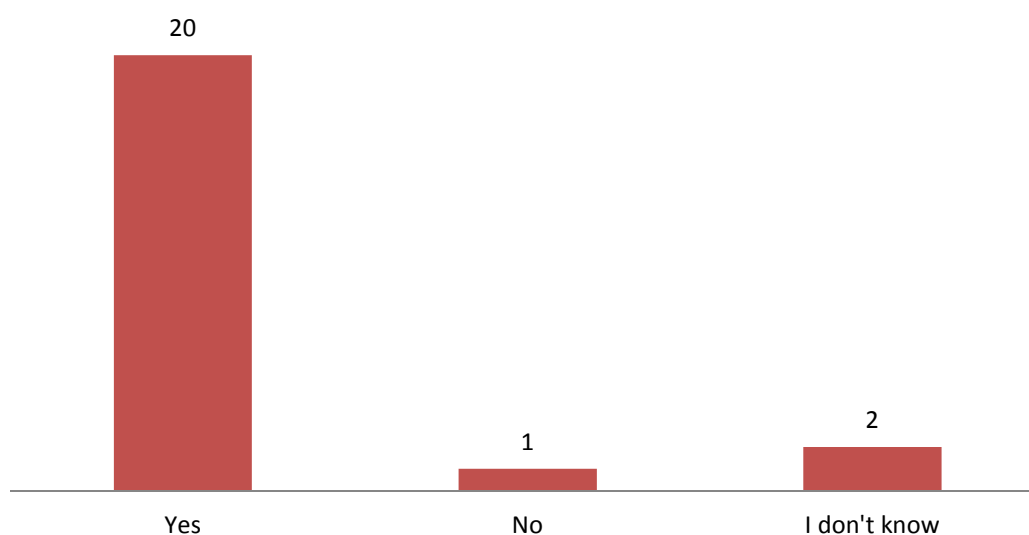


Figure 7: Do you believe there is a difference between bullying and teasing?

2) Participants were asked to state briefly in their own words what the difference is between bullying and teasing. A summary of their answers reveals that the main difference was thought to be frequency of occurrence; in a way that bullying is something that happens to the same individual repeatedly over a given period. While teasing occurs more irregularly and can be an isolated incident and does not necessarily involve the same individual victim. Teasing is usually not as harmful as bullying and often the victim does not experience as much emotional pain or distress.

“Teasing happens less often than bullying. Teasing has many victims while bullying normally only has one”.

## 5 BULLYING WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE PRESCHOOL

Four questions in the questionnaire were directed at bullying within and outside the preschool. 1) Do all of the children in your preschool have playmates, or is anyone left out? 2) Do some of the children in your preschool bully each other? 3) In what ways do the children usually bully each other? 4) Do you have the impression that bullying/teasing is a problem when children are not attending preschool?

1) When participants were asked if all the children in their preschool had playmates or if anyone was left out, 12 answered that there are certain children that occasionally do not have anyone to play with, eight answered that all the children have someone to play with, two people answered that certain children are often not included in games and one that certain children are never allowed to join in games (see figure 8).

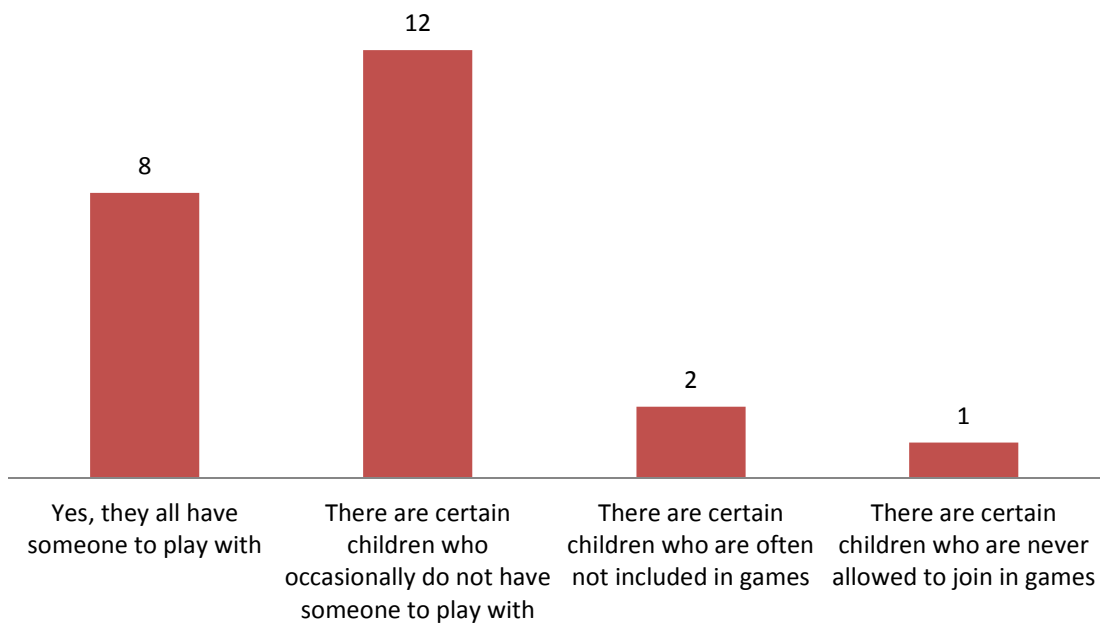


Figure 8: Do all the children in your preschool have playmates, or is anyone left out?

2) Only one of the participants believes that the children in their preschool never bully each other, 10 said that it rarely happened and according to 12 of participants it sometimes happens (see figure 9).

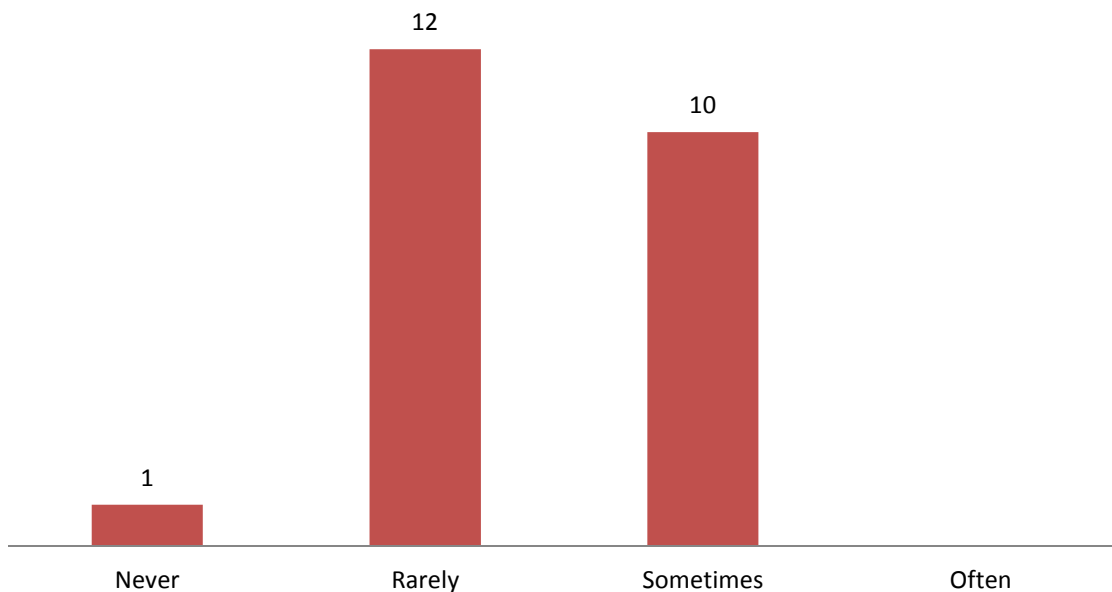


Figure 9: Do some of the children in your preschool bully each other?

3) In addition, participants were asked to describe in what ways the children usually bully each other. A summary of their answers reveals that the most common way in which children are being bullied is by some type of exclusion. Children are left out of games and some children don't want to play with particular children. Children are not accepted to sit next to certain children and are repeatedly excluded from games and other school activity. Sometimes children are harassed, physically or mentally. Mental harassment involves for example degrading and hurtful comments, while physical harassment involves for example the child being pushed or beaten.

“Repeated teasing, comments or other behaviour that the victim experiences in a negative way”.

4) Participants were also asked if they thought bullying was a problem among children when they are not attending preschool. Four people believed bullying to be a problem when children are not attending preschool, 10 of the participants believed that bullying outside of preschool is not a problem and eight of them didn't know (see figure 10).

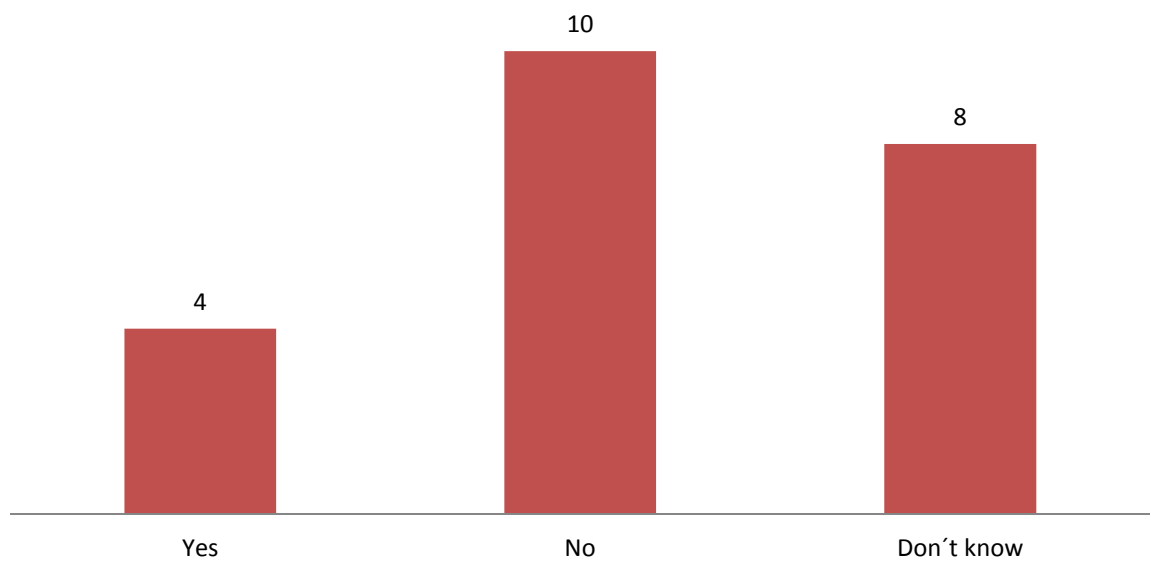


Figure 10: Do you have the impression that bullying/teasing is a problem when the children are not attending preschool?



## 6 RESPONSIBILITY

One question was on responsibility: Who is responsible for any bullying that takes place among the children?

When asked about responsibility almost all of the participants agreed that teachers are responsible for any bullying taking place among the children. A vast majority of the participants also agreed that parents were responsible and 17 believed the individual child to be responsible for bullying, 14 people think the preschool management is responsible and 13 of the participants think the responsibility may also be traced to the children's group (see figure 11).

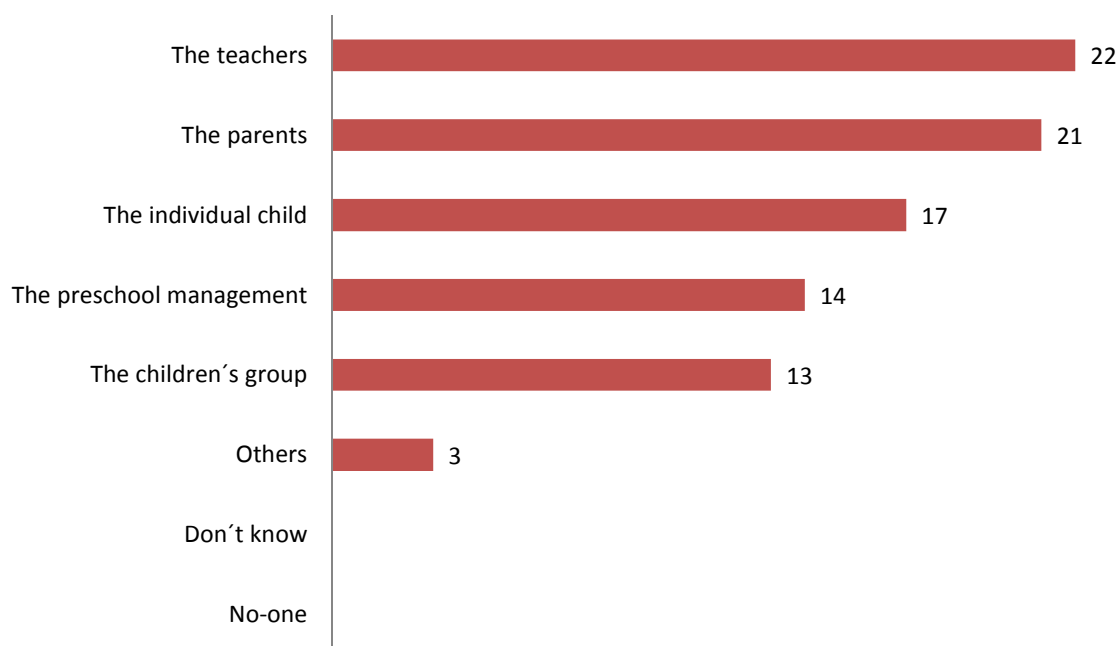


Figure 11: Who is responsible for any bullying that takes place among the children?

## 7 STAFF CONDUCT

### 7.1 Communication practices

Two questions involved communicational practices. 1) In your experience, does bullying – or a bad tone – exist among staff members at your preschool? 2) Do you feel that all members of the staff speak to the children in an appropriate manner? Some people believe that children mimic the social conventions of adults, and that bullying among the staff at the institution can therefore “rub off” on the children.

1) In light of that participants were asked if they believed bullying – or a bad tone – existed among staff members, 14 did not believe so and five people believed it existed but happened rarely, four think that bullying happened occasionally among the staff at their preschool (see figure 12).

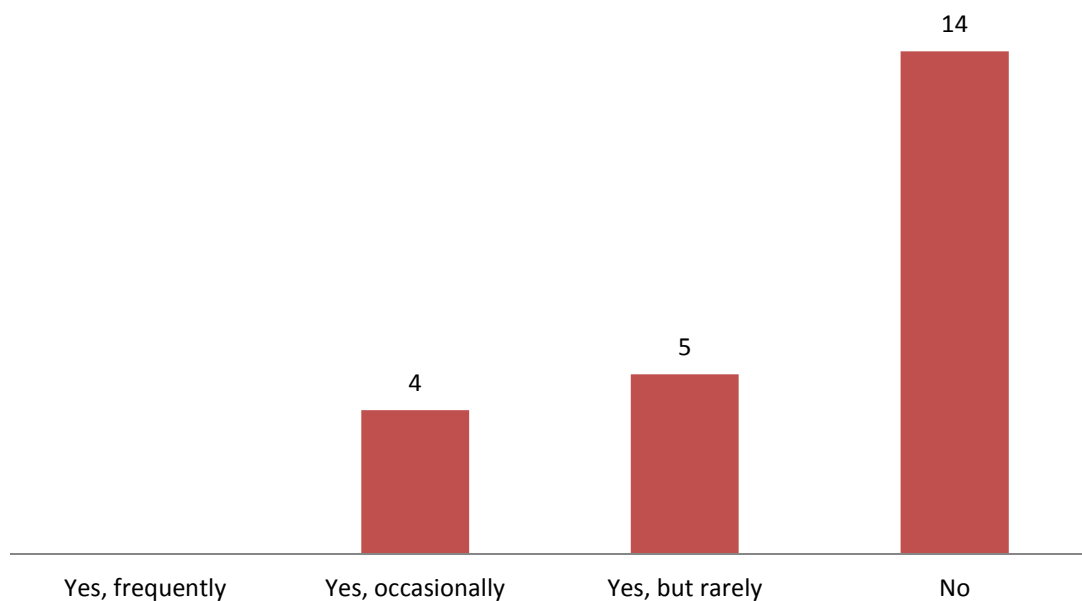


Figure 12: In your experience, does bullying – or bad tone – exist among staff members at your preschool?

2) Participants were also asked if they felt that staff members spoke to children in an appropriate manner. The vast majority or 21 of the participants felt that most staff members do so. Only two felt that there are some staff members who frequently do not speak to the children in appropriate manner (see figure 13).

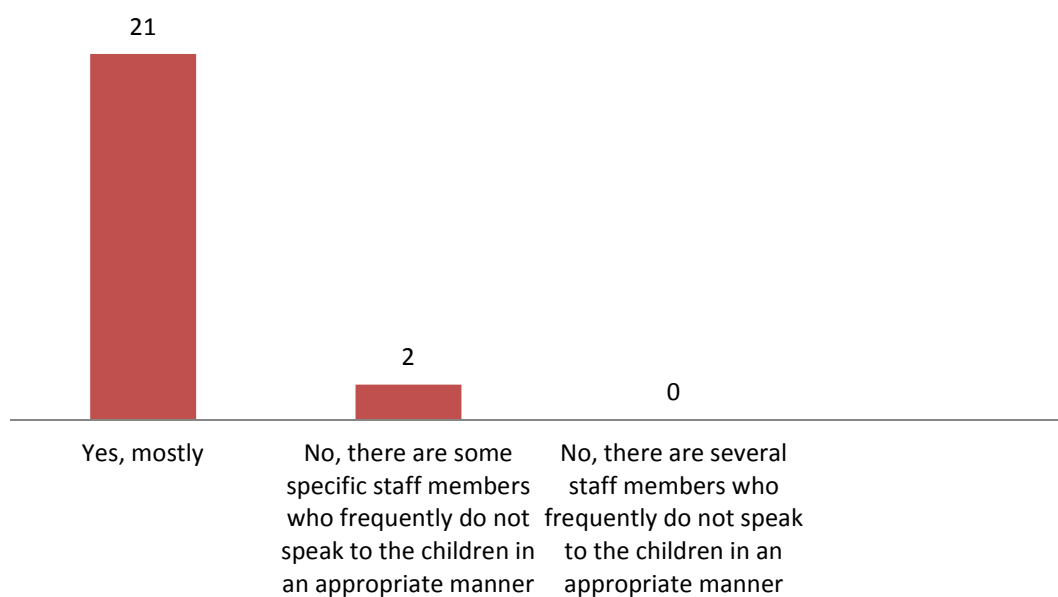


Figure 13: Do you feel that all staff members speak to the children in an appropriate manner?

## 8 COOPERATION

Two questions pertain to cooperation. 1) How satisfied are you with the way your staff group works as a team? 2) How would you rate your collaboration with parents?

1) When asked about teamwork responses reveal that most of the participants were satisfied about how the staff members work together as a team, or 16 people. Five were very satisfied while one was neither satisfied nor unsatisfied (see figure 14).

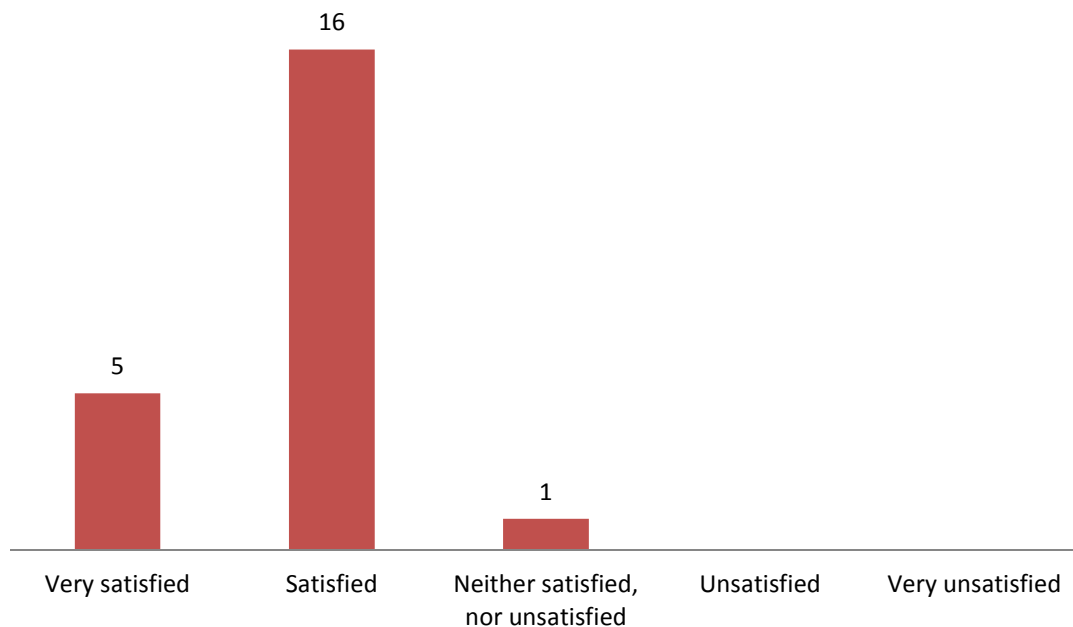


Figure 14: How satisfied are you with the way your staff group works as a team?

2) All the participants expressed positive feelings regarding collaboration with the children's parents. The majority felt that it was very positive while the remaining participants believed it to be mainly positive. The division into these two groups was rather equal (see figure 15).

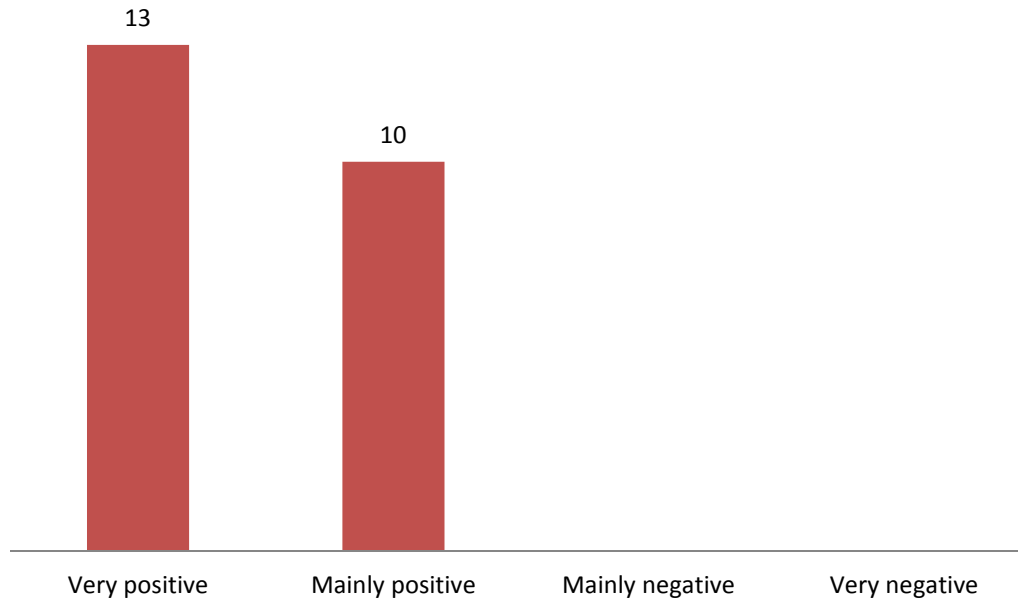


Figure 15: How would you rate your collaboration with parents?

### 8.1 Preventing bullying

Three questions are meant to shed a light on preventive measures for bullying. 1) Do you think it is possible to prevent bullying? 2) Do you think parents can take steps to prevent bullying? 3) Do you think children can take steps to prevent bullying? All of the three questions had also an open answer option.

The main purpose of the project Free of bullying is to prevent bullying. The participants were asked if they believe that it is possible to prevent bullying and 15 of the participants thought that you can definitely prevent bullying. Eight of them thought that you could probably prevent bullying. Nobody was uncertain or thought that bullying could not be prevented (see figure 16).

Most participants had similar ideas about what could be done to prevent bullying. Good and effective communication was believed to be very important and to talk about different emotions in diverse situations. Children need to learn about compassion and tolerance towards everyone independent of appearances, origin, and cultural differences. It is also essential to promote positive atmosphere that is characterized by joy and friendship. Children need to internalize different feelings

and learn how to demonstrate empathy towards other children. The teachers need to be educated about bullying. They need to be observant and prepared with a clear and simple plan to follow if bullying should occur.

“Promote understanding about diverse needs, culture, interests, health, lifestyle and philosophy. It is also important to increase understanding about diverse feelings”.

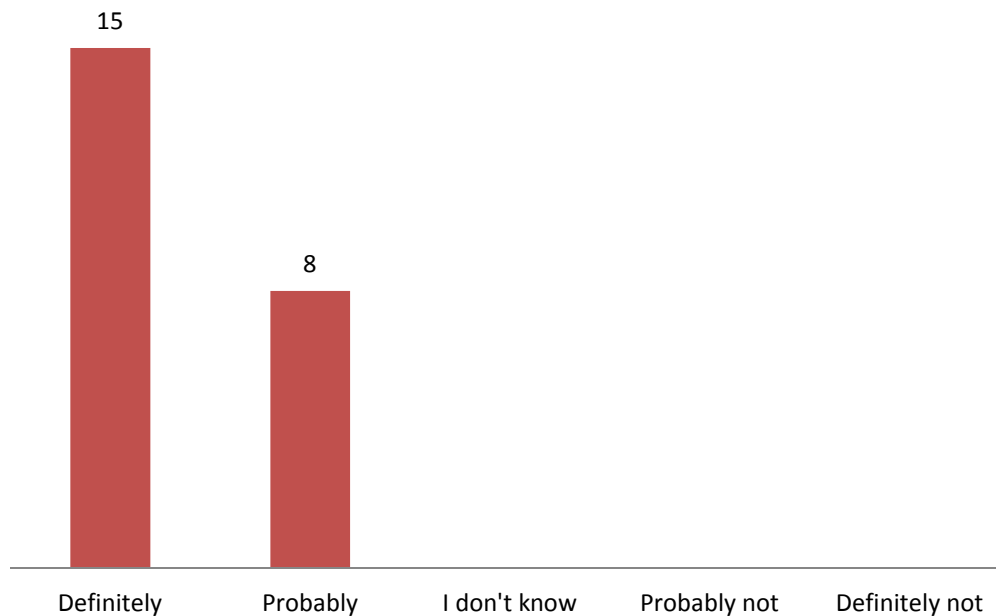


Figure 16: Do you think it is possible to prevent bullying?

2) Participants were also asked if they believed that parents could take steps to prevent bullying. Almost all the participants believe that parents can contribute to the prevention of bullying. Only one of the participants was uncertain (see figure 17). When they were asked how they believed parents were able to contribute to the prevention of bullying the answers were somewhat similar. Participants felt that it is imperative that parents are good role models and set a good example for their children, for example by not taking part in slander or defamation of character. It is also important that they speak to their children and teach them how to treat others with respect, dignity, tolerance and caring. Parents need to be aware of what is happening in their children's life and maintain contact with other parents and teachers.

“Parents need to teach their children how to treat others with respect and care. They need to be aware of what is going on within the children’s group”.

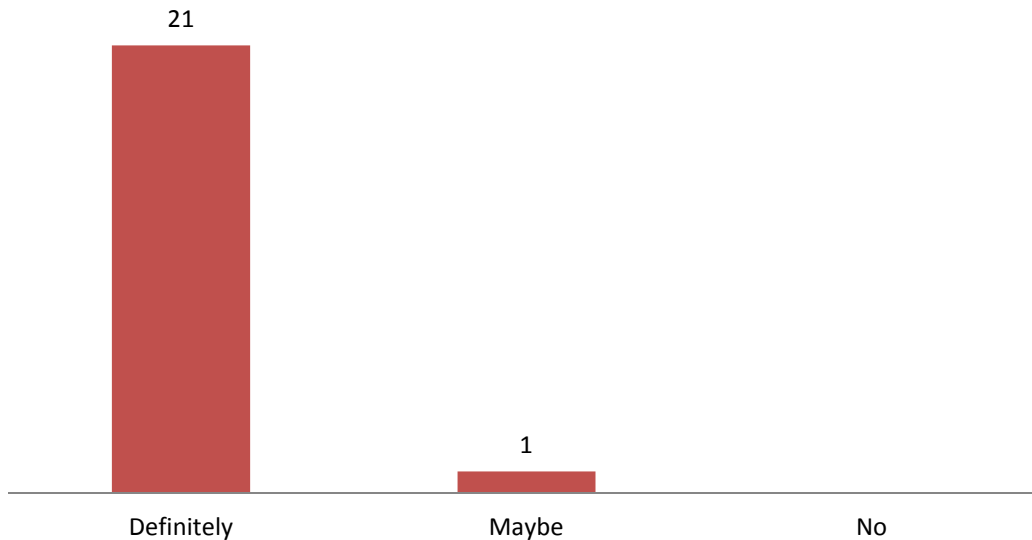


Figure 17: Do you think parents can take steps to prevent bullying?

3) Fewer participants believed that children can take steps to prevent bullying but even so it was still a vast majority that believed so, or 17 participants. Four of the participants were uncertain whether children can contribute to the prevention of bullying (see figure 18). When asked about their opinion on what children might be able to do to prevent bullying the most common answer was that children needed to have self-confidence and courage to be able to stand up for themselves and those that are at a disadvantage and inform teachers and parents of the situation. It might contribute to the prevention of bullying if children are able to show compassion, tolerance and care for other children.

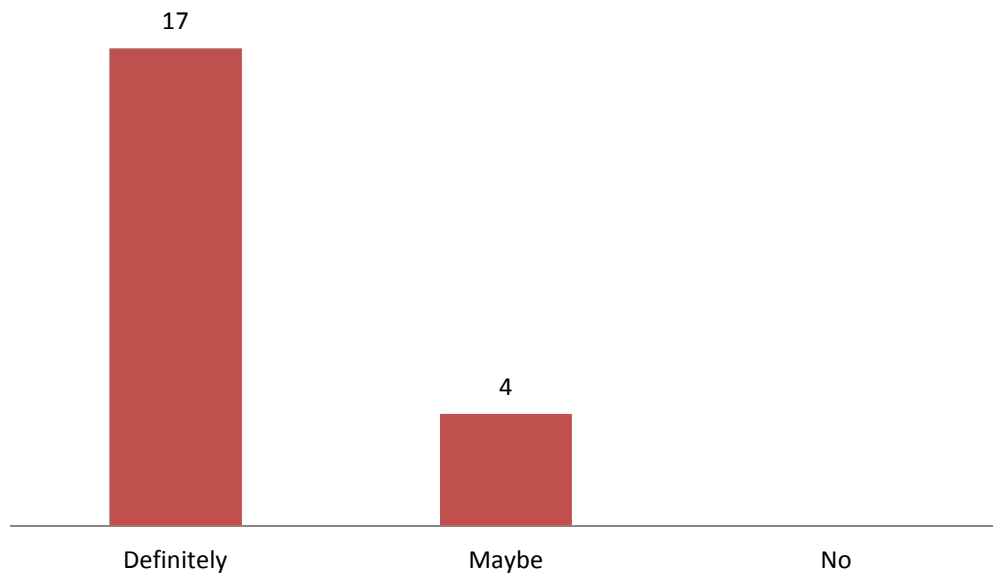


Figure 18: Do you believe that children can take steps to prevent bullying?



## 9 LAUNCHING FREE OF BULLYING

Four questions were put forward regarding launching the project Free of Bullying. 1) How often will you inform your colleagues about Free of Bullying? 2) How will you inform the children's parents? 3) How often do you imagine working with Free of Bullying? 4) When do you imagine working with Free of Bullying? 5) What do you think will be the biggest challenge to working with Free of Bullying?

1) Most of the participants are going to use staff meetings to inform colleagues about the project Free of Bullying. Meetings with head of departments were also considered a suitable venue. Some said that they would use education and communication in a positive and entertaining manner.

2) When asked how they would inform parents of the project the most common answer was parent-teacher meetings, write on the information board and send an e-mail. In addition, several participants said they would most likely use the preschool's website to share information about the project and get the children to raise their parents' interest in the project.

3) 11 of the participants think they will work with Free of Bullying weekly and 10 imagine working with it daily (see figure 19).

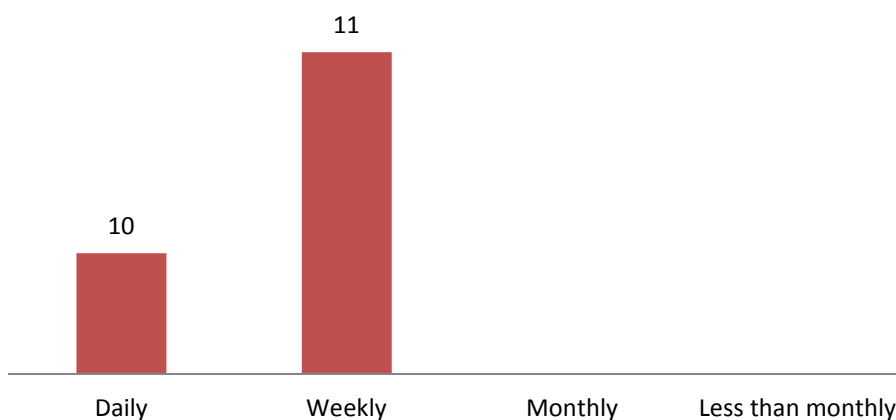


Figure 19: How often do you imagine working with Free of Bullying?

4) The majority of the participants they will be working with Free of Bullying according to the timetable when seven think they will work with the project when it fits into the given program for the day. Only one participant will work with the project as required or when there is a specific bullying situation to address (see figure 20).

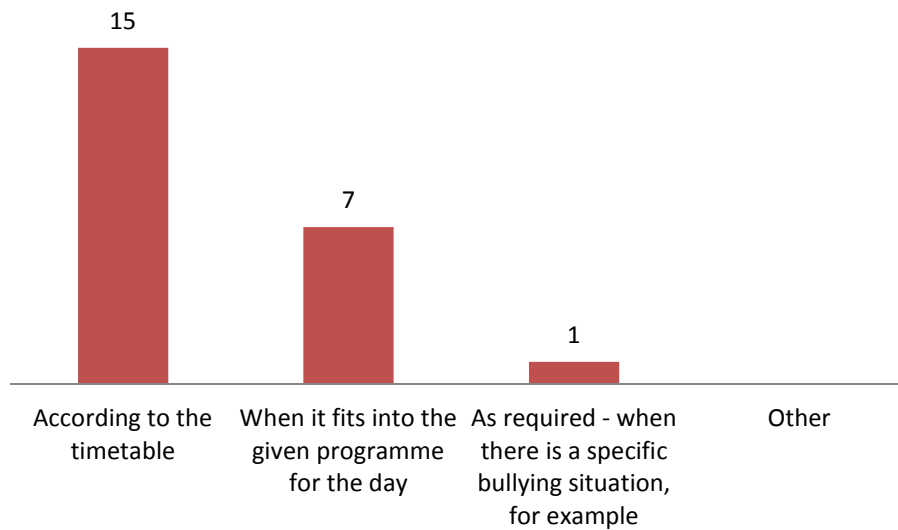


Figure 20: When do you imagine working with Free of Bullying?

5) Most participants expressed positive feelings towards the project. They feel it will be fun and rewarding, fit well with the preschool's curriculum and will be a worthy addition to other activities. Main challenges will be a lack of time, getting other staff members to join in the project, coordinate it with the daily routine and organize time for preparation.

## 10 SUMMARY

The study reveals that most participants have focused on bullying in the past and prior to entering the project even though it has mainly taken place at staff meetings. Very few participants said they had worked with parents on the issue and about one fourth of the participants have never focused on it. The tools that are used to prevent bullying are mostly teaching about constructive and positive communication and using extensive cooperation among teachers and children. Children and teachers find solutions and make decisions together in friendship and harmony. There is a strong consensus about the meaning of bullying. A vast majority also believes that there is a difference between teasing and bullying even though a few participants believe that teasing and bullying is the same thing. Bullying is seen as an unwanted aggressive behaviour that has profound negative effects on the victim. The behaviour is repeated over time and is directed at the same victim by a group of children or one specific child. Teasing is usually seen as playful and less harmful. It doesn't happen repeatedly and is more arbitrary. According to participants bullying is very uncommon in the preschool but even so there are a few children that are very often excluded from games. There were different views about bullying outside the preschool, some believed it to be a problem, while others didn't and many weren't certain if it existed. There was also a strong consensus about responsibility and almost everyone believed that teachers and parents are responsible for bullying among young children. Bullying and bad tone existed among staff members but was not very common and a vast majority of participants felt that staff members speak to children in an appropriate manner. According to a vast majority of the participants, cooperation between staff members and parents is very good and almost everyone is very satisfied with the way staff members work as a team. In regards to preventing bullying there was a strong agreement that prevention is possible and parents' contribution to prevention is very important. Participants also believe children can contribute to the prevention of bullying but it is not as significant as the parents' contribution. The atmosphere surrounding the launching of the program is positive. The project is believed to be exciting, fun and rewarding. The challenges will be

finding time to prepare for the project and fitting it into the preschool's daily routine.

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