

Question Time Debate – The right to be safe from bullying

Lesson plan for students 16+

The BBC's 'Question Time' is a televised debate in which members of the public are invited to ask questions about current affairs to a panel representing different political and social interests.

Prior to beginning the debate it would be helpful to show your students a short clip of Question Time so that they are familiar with the format.

Set Up

Divide students up into roles:

- One person as the Chair of the debate
- Six panel members: Cabinet MP, Head Teacher, Police, CEO of Beatbullying, Journalist writing on young people's issues, Human Rights Lawyer
- Audience members to ask questions, and respond to debate

The Chair and panel members each receives a piece of paper with their role description to read prior to beginning the debate. Audience members are given questions to ask, but are told they may also come up with their own questions related to the topic.

The panellists sit in front of the audience with the Chair in the centre.

Role descriptions

Chair:

You must introduce the panel and the debate on whether the government should support adding “freedom from bullying” as a principle “right” of every child. Take questions from the audience, ensure panellists stay on topic and stop anyone from talking for too long.

Cabinet MP:

You know that bullying is an issue important to a lot of voters so are happy to pay lip service to anti-bullying policies. However, in the middle of a recession, you fear that recognising freedom from bullying as a right of children in the UK would commit your government to spending more in schools and on the police. You are willing for the government to see freedom from bullying as a human right, but will refuse to commit any money to this area.

Head Teacher:

You realise that bullying has serious consequences for young people through your teaching experience. However, with many competing demands you’re not sure how best to tackle the bullying in your school and are concerned the government will blame teachers for failing to do more. If the government put pressure on schools to do more, you want assurances that you’ll have increased funds for anti-bullying staff, policies etc.

Head of Police:

Violence between children is on the rise in your area, and so an important concern of yours; however, much bullying, such as verbal and cyber, is very difficult to police. You would support government recognising bullying as a more serious issue, but only if you know you’ll receive greater resources and powers to deal with it.

CEO of Beatbullying:

You strongly believe that every child has the right to be safe from bullying. You want the government and services dealing with young people to take more action against bullying, and for increased funds to be devoted to this area to ensure this happens. You are aware of many case studies that highlight the serious consequences bullying can have on young people's lives, and that it is not just physical attacks that are important, but also verbal abuse and cyberbullying.

Journalist:

You're a journalist famous for their outspoken remarks about young people and belief that they are treated too softly these days. You think children should learn to defend themselves rather than expecting their teachers or the police to get involved, to toughen them up. You like sentences which begin 'When I was a child...'

Human Rights Lawyer:

As an expert in human rights you know that the Convention on the Rights of the Child says anyone under 18 has a range of rights, for example: protection from all forms of violence, the right to privacy etc. But bullying isn't mentioned. You want to see the human rights of children well protected and defined more clearly in the UK - and for more children to know about their rights.

Audience Questions

- This is all well and good in theory, but is it just another empty promise - what difference will it make in practice?
- Current laws already make it illegal to physically harm another person - why do we need to bring human rights into the issue of bullying?
- I'm a parent of a child that's been bullied for a number of years - in the end she had to move schools because it wasn't dealt with. What could schools do to tackle bullying more effectively?
- Isn't this a police issue - why are they not better at preventing criminal behaviour between children?
- Why aren't the government taking this issue more seriously?

Start

The Chair introduces the panellists and the debate, then takes a question from the audience and asks panellists to respond. The Chair may also ask audience members to respond to the debate.

You may wish to swap roles part way through to give students a chance to be involved in both asking/answering questions.

Discussion

- What arguments did students find particularly convincing?
- What are the obstacles in getting freedom from bullying incorporated into the rights of the child and government policy?
- What ideas came out regarding how bullying could be better dealt with?