

Bullied children tell of their school hell

'The past week has been hell, which is perfectly normal.' But 12 year-old runaway Simon Hanson isn't alone in finding school a desperate trial.

"The past week has been hell, which is perfectly normal". Simon Hanson, 12, was found at Gatwick airport last Monday, 36 hours after disappearing from his home at Haslemere, Surrey. His father found details of Simon's torment by bullies in a book marked Do Not Read My Diary. It is personal.

Wendy Thompson, 12, was in hiding this weekend after a severe beating from school bullies. She was afraid to return to her school in Darlington, County Durham, or leave her home in case of further attacks.

Adults often regard bullies as merely an unpleasant fact of childhood, but they can ruin lives. A 1995 survey by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation found that 580 out of 1,000 had been bullied. Five members of Children Express talked about their experiences.

Georgina Drinkwater, 12, left her school in north London, on police advice, after an assault put her in hospital. At first, Janice [not her real name] would stand across the playground and give me dirty looks. Within two weeks, she attacked me and I got kicked in the head. A schoolmate said Janice was jealous of Georgina's friendship with a boy.

Georgina's assailant was not expelled because the headteacher was trying to keep the school's exclusion rates down. The bully has since received counselling.

Victoria Barrow-Williams, now 13, was 12 when she started to be bullied at her school in Islington, north London. "The bully said I was fat, so I went on a diet and got in trouble with my mum."

"I'd been knocked over by a car and broke my ankle. Everyone was friendly and sympathetic, but this group of girls bullied me, because they were jealous of the attention I got."

Selina Gibson, 13, was bullied by a gang of boys while in primary school in Hackney. "I was a real tomboy", she said. "At first, I was friends with this group of boys. One of them started to bully me for no reason. I told him how I felt about it, but it got worse. They all joined in."

Selina's mother visited the school and ordered the bullies to go to the head's office, but, after a break, the bullying started again. "If you're being bullied you have to sort something out yourself", Selina said.

"It is vital that adults take bullying seriously", says Rachel O'Brien, of the Children's Society. "It is one of the most common reasons why people run away from home."

About the team

This roundtable was led by editor Julia Press, 16, with reporters Victoria Barrow-Williams, 13, Selina Gibson, 13, Senab Adekunle, 13, and Georgina Drinkwater, 12. It was published in [The Observer](#).

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