

HEADLINERS

Are we safe?

10 year-old Alfred can't walk to school on his own because of bullies - and there are thousands more children just like him.

For some children, bullying gets so bad they're afraid to be on their own.

There are probably very few people reading this article who haven't heard stories about the "good old days". It's not fair that I have to stay indoors all the time, just because of a couple of stupid kids. That time way back when our parents were kids and could walk down the street without a care in the world.

If you think that sounds ridiculous, don't worry you're not alone. When we started researching this story, we were shocked to find not one young person who said they felt completely safe on the streets of London.

"I'm too scared to walk around on my estate on my own because there's a group of older kids who bully me," says Alfred, 10, who lives on a council estate in North London.

"I won't even walk to school on my own, which is just a few minutes away, because I'm afraid they'll be waiting around the corner for me."

Alfred has good reason to worry for his safety. He's been kicked and punched so many times by other kids on his estate he's lost count. On one occasion he says he was even taken to hospital in an ambulance after a boy who lives in the same block of flats head butted him.

"I was really upset after that happened. I just didn't feel safe any more. My Mum and Dad are really worried about me now. They won't let me set foot outside my door unless they're with me, or unless my older sisters go with me. They're scared that I'll get hurt again."

Understandably Alfred is angry and frustrated that he can't lead a normal life and go out without always wondering who's waiting for him. "It's not fair that I have to stay indoors all the time, just because of a couple of stupid kids."

Nearly everyone we spoke said they'd been the victim of bullying at some point in their childhood and early teens and it wasn't just in their own neighbourhood but at school, where you'd think we'd be most safe.

Jane, 12, started getting bullied at her school when she was in Year 4. "It didn't matter if I was in the playground or in class, kids would still push, punch or kick me," she says.

Although she didn't want to tell anyone, she finally built up the courage to tell a teacher she was being bullied. The teacher did tell the children off, but Jane said it made no difference. They just kept picking on her.

When Jane went on to secondary school she felt like she'd been given the chance to make a fresh start at a new school where no one knew her and where no one would bully her. But she was wrong.

"The bullying just got worse. Now there's a group of boys who do really nasty things to me. I wish I was back at primary school now."

Things are now so bad for Jane that a lot of the time she feels too frightened to go to school and reckons that if she had her own way, she'd just stay at home and never go back.

"I want to get good grades. But I hate getting picked on. I just want to have a happy life, where I can go wherever I like, without worrying about being called names and being hurt."

As if dealing with bullying wasn't hard enough, some of the young people we interviewed spoke of the abuse they suffered just because of their ethnicity or religion.

For Abdul, 12, it's not unusual to be verbally abused by people on the street simply because of the colour of his skin. He was once even called a "hungry Somali."

"It's usually white people who say things like that to me and it makes me angry because there's not a lot I can do back to them, except cuss them."

Not only does Abdul get discriminated against because of the colour of his skin, he also had to deal with the harassment he gets because he's Muslim and reckons the abuse has definitely got worse since the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11 last year.

Sam, 13, agrees: "I'm treated differently now by members of the public and kids at my school. They make fun and jokes about it and they think it's really funny to associate me with Bin Laden and terrorism, just because I'm Muslim."

Sam tries to take this kind of treatment in his stride but worries about the impact it's had on the Muslim community and how afraid it has made people feel.

"I've been going to the same mosque in Central London my whole life but recently I'm quite scared to go there because there have been so many things happening, like people coming in and shouting at us."

It bothers Sam that the ignorance of certain people has affected the way he goes about his every day life but he says he does not feel particularly frightened by the threat of terrorism in the UK, which the newspapers seem so focused on at the moment.

"Something like crime on my estate is a higher priority for me. Bin Laden can come and go. I don't really care."

"I do think young people are concerned about some of the things that Tony Blair has said, like they might not feel safe traveling on the tube after they heard those stories about poison gas but they're not so threatened that they're going to start wearing gas masks. Any way, not many people my age really travel on the tube. We catch buses more."

But while there are some who aren't worried about terrorism there are others like Nestor, 11, who says he is quite concerned that London will be attacked.

"It does worry me because I just want to have a good Christmas."

And fair enough! Is it really too much to ask that as young people we should feel safe and protected?

It seems so unfair that on top of all the other normal pressures we face as children and teenagers, that we now spend so much time worrying about things like bullying, racism and terrorism.

What's even scarier is that for of us – certainly the young people we spoke to - these worries aren't just imaginary things made to sound worse than they really are. They're very real and sadly now just a normal part of life for many young people growing up in London.

Some of the names in this article have been changed.

About the team

This story was produced by Tracey Jordan, 14, Ashleigh Jordan, 12, and James Jordan, 10. It was published on Sky television's [Reach for the Sky](#) website.

0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)
-

Built on [Cubik](#)
©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#)