

Dealing with Bullying - A Parents' Guide



Introduction

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. It can happen to anyone, anywhere including, school, in the street, on the internet and even at home.

It can take many forms but the five main types are:

- **Physical** (e.g. hitting, kicking, pushing, threatening gestures)
- **Verbal** (e.g. name calling, racist remarks, teasing, put downs)
- **Indirect** (e.g. spreading rumours, excluding someone from special groups/ activities)
- **Cyber bullying** (e.g. bullying by mobile phone or through the internet)
- **Extortion** (e.g. demanding money, food, schoolwork)

Tips to help prevent and tackle bullying

- Talk with your child about their life, friends and school whenever you get the chance. This will help you identify any possible problems.
- Be a good role model and show them what is acceptable behaviour and what isn't. Children who live in a home where people bully each other can learn to bully themselves or to think it's okay when other people bully them.
- Changing schools and finding new friends can be difficult for some children. If you are concerned, talk to their teacher and try to prevent any possible problems before they start.
- Children and young people have to learn about relationships and falling out is part of that process. However, there is a difference between the normal ups and downs of relationships and bullying.
- Teaching your child to fight back when they are being physically bullied is not helpful, in fact, it can lead to more bullying
- Bullying should never be ignored and children should not be left to handle a bully on their own. Adults need to take action straight away.

How can I tell if my child is being bullied?

Families are often the first people to notice the signs that a child or young person is being bullied. Common symptoms can include:

- Headaches / stomach-aches
- Appearing anxious, irritable, fearful or distressed
- Being quiet or withdrawn. Being shy around other children
- Low self-esteem or putting themselves down
- Difficulty expressing their thoughts
- Not wanting to go to or talk about school. Fear of walking to or from school
- Not wanting to leave the house
- Has 'lost' or damaged personal possessions
- Seems worried about using the internet or mobile phones
- Decline in academic performance.

If you have serious concerns about your child's emotional health, you should talk to your doctor.

If your child is being bullied:

- Listen to your child and assure them that they will be safe after 'telling'. Try not to judge them, even if you think they could have handled things better. They have done the best that they can. Try to record everything that has happened.
- Talk with them about what they want to happen next. Try and think of all the options – sometimes children and young people have the best ideas so make sure you involve them.
- Help them to think about the consequences of each idea. For example, they might suggest that they could retaliate but that could make things worse and they might get into trouble.
- Agree with them what the next steps will be. If they want to try something themselves, you need to keep checking with them to see how it's going. Your child needs to know that you will step in if it doesn't stop.
- Think of ways to build your child's confidence and self-esteem – doing fun things, learning self-defence, showing them that you love and value them can all help.

Bullying in schools

By law, your child's school must have an anti-bullying policy. Through the use of such policies, many schools have been successful in reducing and preventing bullying.

A good anti-bullying policy should be widely publicised and will tell you:

- how the school or agency define bullying, including specific reference to cyber bullying and prejudice-driven bullying;
- who the lead person is for anti-bullying work and what other policies link to it;
- what they will do to prevent bullying and how they will respond to it, e.g. support and sanctions, including any steps they may take in relation to bullying that happens outside school.

The government recommends that the anti-bullying policy should also include bullying of staff by young people.

As a parent or carer, you have a right to see this policy. It is as much for you as it is for staff and pupils. Contact the school for further details.

Strategies to tackle bullying

If you report that your child is being bullied then the school may ask for your input into which approach to take. You may want to ask about the following strategies which have been successful in many schools:

Prevention strategies

There are whole school approaches, classroom strategies and playground strategies. Whole school approaches can involve addressing anti-bullying through PSHE lessons or school assemblies. Confidential pupil questionnaires, or introducing bully boxes for children to post their concerns anonymously, will give the school a clearer picture of what is going on. Classroom strategies can involve addressing bullying through curriculum work, cooperative group work and circle time. Playground strategies may involve working alongside lunchtime supervisors, improving school grounds to prevent bullying. Other strategies might include resilience training for pupils and ensuring the schools anti-bullying policy is clear about acceptable behaviours and activities.

Strategies to tackle bullying (continued)

Peer support strategies

There are various types of peer support strategies such as buddy schemes, peer mediation, peer mentoring, and peer listening. These strategies can support pupils to explore various options and solutions themselves in a supportive environment and often offer a person they trust who they can turn to when incidents occur.

Reactive strategies

Reactive strategies are how schools may respond to bullying once it has taken place. Restorative work can involve informal conversations with those involved in incidents, meetings, an apology from the bully. Such approaches show bullies the impact of their actions and allow for amends to be made. Direct sanctions such as the use of verbal reprimands, parental involvement and withdrawal of privileges have been effective in many cases and can also be a deterrent to others. Support groups which put emphasis on all pupils involved taking responsibility for the incident and looking at ways to improve the situation are another way to address bullying.

Schools often will use a combination of all these strategies to prevent and address bullying, but if you have any concerns about how a bullying incident is being handled you can follow the complaints process.

The complaints process in schools:

If your child is being bullied at school, the complaints procedure outlined below should be followed:

- First of all, talk to your child's teacher to see if they are aware of the situation. Remember to try and stay calm.
- Check regularly with your child to see if things have improved. If not, make an appointment to talk with the head teacher at your child's school. Take any notes or evidence you have about what has happened.
- If after the meeting with the head teacher you are still unhappy, you can write formally to the school's Governing Body. Check your school's Complaints Policy for more information on how to do this.
- Finally, if you are unhappy with the Governor's response, you should contact Call Derbyshire on 01629 533190. However, the local authority will not look at your complaint until the school's governing body has been made aware of it.

What if my child doesn't want to go to school because they are being?

It is worth remembering that if your child misses school because of bullying you may get into trouble. Make sure the school are aware of what is happening. The best approach is one where parents, school, students and community work together to solve the problem.

What if I suspect my child is doing the bullying?

Children and young people might bully others for a number of reasons. For example, it might be that:

- They are being bullied themselves
- They feel unimportant
- They want to be accepted by a particular group or gang
- They want to get their own way
- They don't know that their behaviour is wrong
- They are copying people they admire

If your child is accused of bullying:

- Talk to them calmly about it. Try and find out what is going on
- If they are bullying, challenge them about it. They need to know that bullying is not acceptable
- Try and help them work out why they are bullying and how you can help make things better for them
- Help them to think about other ways of behaving where they will not feel like they are losing face
- Ask professionals for help. For example, at school or youth clubs etc

Sometimes the parents of children who are involved in bullying start to take it out on each other. Be careful! This sort of behaviour can make it worse and make it harder for schools to sort out.

Cyber bullying and prejudice-driven bullying

All bullying is unpleasant but there are two types of bullying that are of particular concern: Cyber bullying and Prejudice-driven bullying.

Cyber bullying

This is a growing problem as children and young people use technology more and more. According to research carried out for the Anti-Bullying Alliance in the UK, around half of young people reported being the target of cyber bullying. The real worry about cyber bullying is that it can affect people anywhere and can have a very wide audience. So, what is cyber bullying?

Cyber bullying is the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet to deliberately upset someone else. For example:

- Sending nasty or threatening text messages
- Sending horrible photos or video clips of someone to other people
- Making silent or threatening phone calls
- Sending unwanted emails to someone, sending hurtful emails about someone or sending emails from someone else's address
- Sending threatening or upsetting messages to someone in a chat room or through instant messaging
- Putting pictures, blogs, pages or messages about someone on social networking or other web sites.

Top tips on dealing and preventing cyber bullying:

People who cyber bully may be fined or sent to prison for up to six months!

- As with all bullying, your child should never retaliate, it could make the situation worse.
- Talk with your child about cyber bullying. Make sure that they know they should always tell you if and when they are being cyber bullied.
- Your child is as likely to cyber bully as to be cyber bullied, simply by not thinking about what they are doing. Make sure that your children know they must guard even the most casual text message and watch their own written words.
- Save the evidence – text, emails, records of chat conversations will all help if there is a problem. You can keep a copy of any bullying message by using the “Print Screen” key on your computer keyboard and copying the message into your word processing program.
- Report any problems – it is important to let your child know where and how to report if they are the victim of cyber bullying, for example, the school, the service provider or even the police.
- Learn about the technology and the safety precautions that are available. Do this with your child if you can – they probably know more than you and it provides a good opportunity to talk about the issues. Some things you need to find out include:
 - How to set things to ‘private’
 - How to ‘block’ people
 - How to report problems
 - How to keep records of online conversations
 - What sites and services your child likes to use
- Finally, remind them to treat others how they want to be treated online and on their phone.

Prejudice-driven bullying

Prejudice-driven bullying is any type of bullying that happens because people make judgements about someone without really knowing them, for example, because of their religion or because they are disabled. Prejudice-driven bullying can affect anyone because it is based on what people think about someone, whether it is true or not.

There are different things that people have prejudices about, and that means there are different types of prejudice-driven bullying.

The three main kinds are:

- **Racist bullying** – bullying someone because of their ethnic background, nationality, religion or skin colour
- **Sexist and homophobic bullying** – bullying someone because of their gender or sexual orientation
- **Bullying because of disability** – bullying someone because they are disabled or have special needs

These three main types of prejudice-driven bullying are against the law – they are called '**hate crime**' – so even if the bullying is between children or young people, the police might get involved.

If my child is a victim of prejudice-driven bullying, what should I do?

All bullying is unacceptable, but bullying that is driven by prejudice can be particularly nasty. If it is happening to your child you should:

- Reassure them that it is not their fault and that no one deserves to be bullied.
- If it is happening in school, it is important that the school knows about it. All schools should have procedures in place for dealing with such issues, but may not be aware that your child is being bullied unless you tell them. Schools also have a legal duty to report all racist incidents to the local authority.

- Try and keep a record of everything that happens. You can download a 'Bullying Diary' from <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/80267137/BullyingDiary.pdf>. Save copies of any texts or emails that your child gets as they can provide good evidence of what has happened.
- If it is racist, sexist or bullying because of a disability happening outside of school, tell the police. They take hate crime very seriously. For more information go to <http://www.derbyshire.police.uk/Contact-Us/Hate-Crime/What-is-Hate-Crime.aspx> or ring Stop Hate UK on 0800 138 1625.

Support for parents:

Finding out that your child is being bullied or is bullying others can be a distressing experience. It can stir up feelings of anger, confusion, fear and guilt. It may also bring back memories of things that happened to you.

Think about your own support needs. It may help to talk things through with family or friends. The Useful Contacts section below also provides information about agencies that might be able to support you.

Useful contacts

National helplines:

Advisory Centre for Education - A free phone help and advice line for all matters concerning schools. Call 0808 800 5793 (Monday to Thurs 10am – 1pm).

Kidscape – A helpline for the parents, guardians or concerned relatives of bullied children. Call 08451 205 204.

ChildLine – Free confidential helpline for children and young people only, Call 0800 11 11 at any time.

Family Lives - A free confidential helpline for anyone looking after a child. Call 0808 800 2222 at any time.

National Websites:

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

A network of organisations working to prevent and stop bullying and bring hope to thousands of children and young people affected by bullying each year.

www.bullying.co.uk

Bullying UK is an award winning anti-bullying charity providing information, help and advice to the victims of bullying, their parents and carers as well as providing resources for schools.

www.childLine.org.uk

ChildLine is a free, confidential 24-hour counselling service for children and young people who are in trouble or danger. The site contains information, advice and publications on the subject of bullying for both children and parents.

www.kidscape.org.uk

Kidscape is a UK charity set up specifically to prevent bullying and child abuse, providing information, resources and practical skills to help keep children safe from harm.

www.childnet.com

Childnet International's website provides information, advice and resources on how to keep your family safe from the dangers of cyber bullying via the internet, mobile phones, chat rooms and social media sites.

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Ensures that children, parents, carers and professionals can get accurate information on child law and access the support and services to which they are entitled.

www.beatbullying.org

Provide information, advice and support to children and young people affected by bullying and to professionals working with the victims of bullying.

www.bbcllc.com

Help and support young people who are being bullied, re-educate and change the behaviour of bullies and help prevent bullying in schools and communities.

