

Bullying

Bullying can isolate and damage a young person's self-confidence. Ongoing bullying can have negative long-term effects on children, leading to depression and even suicidal thoughts and actions.

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School days are a time when the influence of other children is very important and fitting in is seen as essential. If children are thought of as different for any reason, they can be picked on and bullied. Sadly, we still live in a society in which to be different in any way can lead to ridicule and bullying and this can lead to prejudice continuing into the next generation. It is crucial to be alert to the possibility of bullying and make sure you know the tell-tale signs.

You may think that your child is unlikely to be bullied but the reality is that bullying can happen at any

time and to any child. Bullies who continually harm other children need support and help as well. They may have experienced difficulties of their own, which may have led to their actions. Reporting concerns may help them get help as well.

- Bullying can happen anywhere but most commonly it starts in school
- Bullying can take many forms, including verbal abuse, physical attack and on-line (known as cyberbullying)
- Bullying is the repeated abuse of a child by one or several people
- Bullies are not always older than the child they harm
- Most bullying is done by children who are the same age as the victim

If your child tells you about a friend or any other child who is being bullied – listen carefully and take this seriously. That child may not be able to say for themselves what is happening.

Today all schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy. However, school action alone cannot guarantee success. It is important that parents and schools work together in partnership to secure support and protection for the child for both the present and the future. However, before you dash off to speak to the head teacher, the bully or the bully's parents, think carefully about what information you have and how this approach might impact the bullying; it could make it worse!

- As hard as it will be, listen to your child without getting upset, and show them you are listening by summarising what you have heard. Then ask them how you can help, don't just take over. If your child feels excluded from the process of how to deal with the situation, this could make them even more stressed and anxious about the situation and less willing to go to you about it.
- Put your child's mind at rest that it's not their fault, you could talk about how some celebrities have been bullied and try to encourage them to appear confident, even if they don't feel it. Try practising some body language moves:
 - Keep your hands out of your pockets
 - Fidgeting is a sign of nervousness
 - Keep your chin up and your eyes forward
 - Standing up straight is perhaps the most important way to show you are confident
- Roleplay some bullying scenarios, and talk about how our faces, voices and bodies can all show someone if we are feeling confident or not
- While all this is going on, perhaps take the pressure off less important issues, like leaving a dirty cup in the lounge

Please don't ever tell your child to ignore it, or that it's all part of growing up. What this says is that bullying must be endured and not stopped. Some children may want to talk to another adult about the bullying, sometimes this is the case because they don't want you to become upset. It is essential that parents make contact with their child's school as soon as they become aware of any problems before they become huge.

What should I do if my child is bullied online?



It is hard for parents to know the best way to react if their child is bullied, online or offline. Here are a few tips:

- If you think it's a good idea to take away your child's gaming equipment or phone, think again; even though you are considering this with all the best intentions, it will probably be taken as a punishment and may further alienate them from their peers and your child may be less willing to tell you about bullying situations in the future
- If you can get a screenshot of any online bullying, do it, and save it, just in case you need to produce any evidence in the future
- As with earlier advice, talk with your child about the bullying
- Most social media platforms have a process for reporting bad behaviour. If a classmate is bullying, you can report it to the school, regardless of whether the bullying is taking place on school grounds or during the school day. If the bullying involves threats of physical harm, you can consider reporting to the police

Getting support from the school



All schools are legally required to have an anti-bullying policy. Many also offer different forms of peer support where certain children are trained in active listening or mediation skills to help bullied children. In secondary schools they may be called peer mentors, supporters, counsellors, listeners or mediators, while in primary schools, they might be called friendship or playground buddies, playtime pals or peacemakers.

Lyndall Horton-James, Bullying Prevention and Education Consultant offers the following tips on how to get support from your child's school:

- Before you approach the school, list to all the facts: What happened? Who was involved? When did it occur? Who witnessed it? Was there anything your child did that may have provoked the incident and was it a one-off or series of events.
- Don't arrive at the school unexpectedly: Make an appointment with the class teacher or head of year.
- Aim to work together with the school and make it clear that you are seeking the school's help in finding a solution.
- Avoid accusing the school: Remember that teachers are usually the last to find out that bullying is happening at school. The sequence is "friends first, then parents, lastly schools".
- Be patient: Allow the school time to deal with the problem but stay in touch with them and arrange a follow up meeting to see how the situation is being resolved.

If things don't get any better, keep a bullying diary. Write down every incident as soon as possible

after it happens. Include the date, what happened, who did it and who saw it. Include the effect on your child, whether your child told anyone, what they said or did and any later effects.

Tell the school each time. Write down what they say or do and any effect their actions have. If your child is hurt, take photographs and see your doctor, and the police if the assault is serious.

Schools have a variety of options for dealing with bullying. These can include a warning, seeing the bully's parents, detention, internal exclusion within the school, fixed term exclusion and permanent exclusion.

If you're not satisfied with the school's response, don't give up or be made to feel like a time-waster or troublemaker. The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) offers step-by-step advice on how to deal with the school, from how to write a letter to your options if you need to take things further. Their advice line is 0300 0115 142. You can also use our template letters to write to the Head, Governors, Education Dept and Ofsted. Remember, unless you are home teaching, you can face prosecution if you take your child out of school. If your child is too frightened or stressed to go, contact the LEA education welfare officer/social worker and ask them to intervene with the school.

If you would like support and advice, you can talk to a Family Support Worker at Bullying UK on 0808 800 2222.

Remember to look after yourself too and make sure you talk with a trusted, non-judgemental friend about the situation.

The following templates have been taken from Bullying UK website (part of family lives), download them below.

[Bullying UK](#) have useful template letters for contacting your child's form teacher/head of year, head teacher or chair of governors. You can get the relevant name from the school office and send the letter to the school address.

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