

- ✓ Recognise the signs of bullying
- ✓ How to handle bullying
- ✓ When your child is bullying others



How to deal with **bullying**

AT A GLANCE



How to deal with bullying

- Bullying can be physical, verbal or indirect.
- Look out for signs of bullying such as your child's things going missing from school, more bruises than usual or signs of stress.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about what is happening – they may feel ashamed or that it's their fault.
- Talk to your child's school about what is going on.
- There are things you can do if the school is unable to deal with the problem.
- Bullying by mobile phone is a growing problem, you can take steps to prevent it.
- What if your child is bullying others? Parents can help by talking and listening.
- Help build your child's confidence and self-esteem, it really helps, whether your child is bullied or is bullying others.

Did you know?

Schools must have an anti-bullying policy, designed to stamp out bullying in the school.

What is bullying?

Bullying is when someone is deliberately hurtful to others over a period of time. The person being bullied usually finds it difficult to defend themselves.

There are different types of bullying, but these are the main ones:

- **physical – hitting, kicking, taking belongings**
- **verbal – name calling, insulting, making offensive remarks**
- **indirect – spreading nasty stories about someone, not including them in social groups.**

Worried your child is being bullied?

Bullying is a very serious problem and upsetting for both you and your child. Children may find it hard to talk about being bullied or bullying others, and you may not be sure that your child is being bullied. But there are some signs that may suggest there is a problem. Look out for:

- excuses to miss school, such as stomach complaints or headaches (or your child may be skipping school altogether)
- torn clothes, school things that are missing or broken, or lost money
- more bruises and scrapes than usual
- signs of stress – being moody, silent or crying, or bullying a younger sibling or friend
- bed wetting (in younger children)
- a change in eating habits.

There could be other reasons for these symptoms, so try to avoid jumping to conclusions. Is there anything else bothering your child? Have there been changes in your family like a new baby, a divorce or a separation?

Encourage your child to talk about bullying. Let them know that no child deserves to be bullied and that threats, verbal abuse, racist, homophobic or sexist name-calling, being left out and ignored or any harassment, are all forms of bullying. Physical bullying includes kicking and hitting.

In the pages that follow, you'll find many useful tips for dealing with bullying. These have been provided by Parentline Plus, which produces information and help on a wide range of parenting issues.

What to do when bullying is a problem

- Listen and talk to your child. They may feel out of control and ashamed – whether they are being bullied or bullying. Let them know you love them and want to help.
- Be clear that it is important for the bullying to stop and that the school will need to be involved.
- If your child is bullying others, think about what might be behind it – are they trying to get attention or fit in with the crowd, or are they unaware of how they are hurting others?
- Talk to the school as soon as possible.
- If you think things are not getting better, ask to see the school's anti-bullying policy and make an appointment to see the headteacher.

- Encourage your child to keep a journal in which they can draw pictures or write about the bullying – this can help to release painful feelings and will be a record of what happened and when it happened.
- Take care of yourself. Coping with your child's bullying may be very stressful, especially if it brings back memories of your own experiences. Try to take time for yourself or talk over what you feel with a friend or another family member.



Talking to your child's school

Schools are determined to stamp out bullying and most have anti-bullying policies to help the school, children and parents work together. You may feel a bit nervous about going into your child's school, especially if you had a bad experience at school yourself, so it's important to trust the school when it says its policy is to stamp out bullying. Here's some helpful advice on how to approach the school:

- Plan what you want to say and talk to your child about what is happening.
- If you feel nervous about going to the school, ask a family member or a friend to come with you.
- Start by making appointments to see the right people – begin with your child's teacher. If you are not satisfied with the teacher's response, move on to the year head, the deputy head, the headteacher and then the school governors.
- Before you talk to anyone at the school, count to 10 and take a deep breath – avoid doing anything in the heat of the moment.
- Focus on feelings rather than trying to prove who did what – if a child is upset, that has to be taken seriously.
- Ask for everyone involved to be partners in solving the problem.
- Ask what action will be taken and write down what is said.

- You may not get instant results. Take things one step at a time, and arrange to talk again in a few days' time to check progress. Say you will ask your child for a progress report each day.
- Find out if there are people your child can talk to of the same age. As part of their anti-bullying programme, many schools run programmes where pupils support other pupils.

If you are not satisfied with the school's response

What if your child continues to be bullied and you are unhappy about the lack of progress at the school? You may want to do more. Sometimes this will be a long and difficult process, but you and your child have rights too.

Follow these steps carefully until you feel that the situation is being dealt with:

- Check that the school has an anti-bullying policy and that procedures are being followed.
- Contact the headteacher and ask for a meeting to discuss what can be done.
- Write a letter of complaint to the school (maybe with a solicitor's help).

- Write to the chair of school governors with a copy of the letter of complaint. Set out your concerns and what you would like to be done.
- Contact the director of education at your local authority.
- Lastly, complain to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

- If you decide to make a formal complaint that the school is failing in its duty of care towards your child, ensure that you follow the school's complaints procedure. Keep copies of your correspondence – you may need to refer to it later. If there are no procedures, write to the chair of governors. (You could ask a solicitor to write your letter of complaint.)

What to do when bullying is very serious

If the bullying is so bad that your child is too frightened to go to school or if you fear for their safety, there are a number of steps you can take:

- You may decide to keep your child off school until the matter is resolved. Legally you must send your child to school regularly. If you keep your child at home, you will have to write to the head with your reasons and provide a doctor's sick note to show that your child is unwell.
- If the bullying is extremely serious (either physical or verbal), the police may need to be involved. The laws that they can use against pupils of 10 years and over are laws against assault or harassment.



- If there is no satisfactory action following your complaint to the school, you should then write to the director of education at your local authority – some local authorities have dedicated anti-bullying officers who can work with you, your child and the school to resolve issues of bullying. As a last resort, you can write to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. The department will not investigate unless you have exhausted all the other routes, and your child remains on the roll of the school where the bullying occurred.
- You could speak to a solicitor about legal action. However, be aware that such actions are a long, uphill struggle that can be an emotional and financial drain on all the family, with no guarantee of a positive result.

If the school seems incapable of stopping the bullying, you may want to think about sending your child to a different school. Before you do this, be sure your child is feeling more confident. Otherwise, their vulnerability may be spotted and the problem could begin again at the new school.

How to avoid mobile phone bullying

More and more children are using mobile phones to bully others. The most recent – and very worrying – trend is to send a videophone film of an innocent person being hit or bullied to friends. This is known as ‘happy slapping’. Other ways of bullying using a mobile phone include messaging and texting.

Tips for parents

- Always encourage your child to talk about how they use their mobile. If they seem worried about phone calls, bring up the idea of malicious calls and messages.
- If your child knows the sender of bullying messages and is at the same school, contact their class teacher as soon as possible, even if the phone calls and texts happen outside of school hours.
- Keep a record of the calls and texts to show the school.
- Arrange for the number to be changed as soon as possible.
- Talk to your service provider. Most providers operate a Malicious Calls helpdesk as part of customer services.
- Report ‘happy slapping’ to the police if you are at all concerned about the level of violent information sent to your child’s video phone.

Tips for children

- Don't give any information about yourself (phone numbers, address etc) unless you know and trust the caller.
- Don't leave alternative contact details as part of a mailbox greeting.
- Do check the caller ID – if there is an unknown number or no number is displayed, you should not answer the call.
- If you do answer a bullying call, if possible place your phone near loud music or traffic noise.
- Do divert calls to a mailbox without answering them. Any message left can then be used to prove the bullying.
- Be very careful who you give your number to and ask those you have given it to not to pass it on.

Dealing with bullying text messages

- Don't reply – it could be to the wrong number! Show the messages to a trusted family member, teacher or parent.
- Keep the message as evidence of the call being made.
- Make a note of the sender's number or originating details at the end of the message.

ChildLine

Sometimes your child may want to talk to someone completely different from you or the school. ChildLine offers free and confidential support to kids ringing about bullying. Make sure your child knows the ChildLine number and website address: **freephone 0800 1111**
www.childline.org.uk

Building your children's self-esteem

- Listen to your children – value their feelings and opinions.
- Accept and acknowledge feelings and needs – yours and theirs.
- Take time to be with your child and focus on them.
- Value your children for who they are and show you love them.
- Give them choices and responsibility they can manage.
- When something upsets you make it clear that it's their actions that are the problem and not them.
- Appreciate what they do.

How bullying can affect you as a parent

Wanting your child to be safe and happy is natural. If your child is being bullied or is bullying others, you may feel angry, hurt, guilty, helpless or afraid. Memories of your own childhood may complicate your feelings about what is happening to your children. You may find yourself wanting to take some of these feelings out on the other children involved or on the school, but this won't help your child.

What can help

- Acknowledge that the bullying is very painful for you too.
- Accept that you need support to deal with your own feelings about it, so that you can support your child.
- Talk to another adult about the feelings or memories that have been triggered.

What if your child is bullying others?

If your child is bullying others, ask yourself what might be behind it – are they trying to get attention or fit in with the crowd. Maybe they don't realise that they are hurting others.

If your child is bullying others

- Sit down with your child and find out what has been happening.
 - Ask your child how they think the bullying can be stopped. They may need help from you and the school to change the situation or the way they are acting. Let your child know that you still love them as a person – it is their behaviour you want them to change.
 - Your child may be going through a difficult time, either at school or at home, and acting out aggressive feelings. Try to get to the root of the problem, and find out what is upsetting them. Talk through any family problems and talk to the school about any educational support that could help.
- Try to take a firm yet gentle approach – be willing to listen to your child's side of the story while also insisting that the bullying has to stop. If you are too harsh, your child will not feel like talking.
 - Explain what is wrong about any kind of bullying – whether physical or verbal, such as name calling, or nasty teasing or leaving someone out of doing things. Give examples of how hurtful this can be.
 - If they don't want to talk at first, let them know that you are ready to listen when they are ready to talk, and that you will do what you can to help them change their behaviour or the situation.
 - Is there a bigger problem? Is your child involved with a group of children who are bullying others? Your child may be frightened about what will happen if they tell on the group. Maybe your child has also been bullied and is scared to talk.

Want to find out more?

Need someone to talk to, try the Parentline Plus free helpline service:

 **0808 800 2222** or the free textphone **0800 783 6783**.

Email helpline: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

Parentline Plus produces information and materials on a range of parenting issues. Check out www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Other sources of information

Advisory Centre for Education

Independent advice and information for parents on all matters concerning schools, including bullying.

 **Advice line 0808 800 5793**

www.ace-ed.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre

Advice and information on legal issues affecting a child. You can obtain a copy of the booklet, *Bullying and the Law*, from its website.

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Email: clcparenting@essex.ac.uk

Department for Education and Skills

The website provides information and advice for parents, children and schools.

www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying

ParentsCentre

Information and support for parents on how to help with your child's learning, including advice on bullying.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk/bullying

Anti-Bullying Alliance

The website provides information and advice for parents, children and schools on tackling bullying.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org

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