

WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

Part of the BE SOMEONE TO TELL series



Free Parentline
0808 800 2222

Free Textphone
0800 783 6783

Website
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Email
parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

 **Parentlineplus**
because instructions aren't included
0808 800 2222
www.parentlineplus.org.uk



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 school things going missing, 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.
- Help build your child's confidence and self-esteem – it really helps whether your child is bullied or a bully.
- What if your child is a bully? Parents can help by talking and listening.

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 serious problem and can be very 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?

WHAT TO DO WHEN BULLYING IS A PROBLEM

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.

📌 Parentline Plus tips

Here are some ideas to help you listen and talk to your child about being bullied and bullying:

- ✔ Listen and talk to your child. They may feel that the situation is beyond their control or feel 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 for this to happen the school will have to be involved.
- ✔ 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 your child's teacher.
- ✔ Encourage your child to keep a journal in which they record each incident of bullying. They could also 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.

- ✔ 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?
- ✔ 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. By law headteachers must determine measures to prevent bullying among pupils and to bring these procedures to the attention of staff, parents and pupils. This helps the school, pupils 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.
- 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 or deputy head or headteacher.
- If you feel nervous about going to the school, ask a family member or a friend to come with you.
- Before you talk to anyone at the school, count to ten and take a deep breath – avoid doing anything in the heat of the moment.
- Focus on your child’s feelings – if a child is upset, it 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 policy, many schools run programmes where pupils support other pupils.

Ask for everyone involved to be partners in solving the problem. Plan what you want to say and talk to your child about what is happening.

IF YOU’RE 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 do have rights.

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

- Your child’s school must have measures in place to prevent bullying among pupils, called an anti-bullying policy. You should ask to see this to be certain that the correct procedures are being followed.

- Contact your child's teacher and ask for a meeting to discuss what can be done. If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome, you can always speak with a more senior teacher.
- Write a letter of complaint to the headteacher of the school.
- If you remain unsatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, write to the Chair of Governors with a copy of the original letter of complaint, setting out your concerns and what you would like to be done.
- If there is no satisfactory action following your complaint to the school, you should write to the Director of Children's Services 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.

"I talked to the class teacher but the bullying still went on."

A parent from Hampshire

- As a last resort, you can write to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, who has powers to direct schools or local authorities what to do (usually to deal with the complaints as they are supposed to) but will not normally intervene unless you have exhausted all the other avenues of complaint without success.

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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.

- If the bullying is extremely serious (either physical or verbal), the police may need to be involved: children aged 10 or older can be charged with assault or harassment.
- If you decide to make a formal complaint that the school is failing in its duty of care towards

your child, ensure that you have followed 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.

- If you feel that the outcome is unsatisfactory you can contact your local authority. Details given on previous page.
- As a last resort, you can write to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. Details given on previous page.

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. A recent trend is to send a video message of an innocent person being hit or bullied to friends. This is known as 'happy slapping'.

Texting is another way of bullying using a mobile.

Have you seen our leaflet 'Bullying – via internet and mobile phones'? This is also part of the 'Be Someone to Tell' series.

DEALING WITH BULLYING TEXT MESSAGES

Encourage your child to follow these tips:

- Don't reply – it could be to the wrong number! Show the messages to someone you trust, such as a 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.

"She gave me her mobile, crying her heart out. There were 27 vicious texts from that gang of girls, sent over just one week."

Parent contacting Parentline

Parentline Plus 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 who sent the bullying messages and they are at the same school, contact your child's 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 mobile phone.

Parentline Plus tips FOR CHILDREN

- ✓ Don't give out any information about yourself (phone numbers, address etc) unless you know and trust the caller.
- ✓ Don't leave alternative contact details as part of your mailbox greeting.
- ✓ 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, put your phone near loud music or traffic noise.
- ✓ 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.

**"We say 'toughen up', but he's
so scared it makes me cry."**

A parent from Liverpool

HELPING YOUR CHILD OVERCOME BULLYING

The most useful thing you can do for your child is to help them to resist bullying on their own. When a child has self-confidence and high self-esteem they are less likely to be bullied or to become a bully themselves. A young person who knows they are worthwhile, loved and respected doesn't need to push others around and can cope better when someone tries to do it to them.

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.

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 11 11**
- **www.childline.org.uk**

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.

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.

You may want to take your feelings out on the children involved, but this won't help your child. 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.

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.

- 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 to your child that all forms of bullying are wrong – 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.
- Is there a bigger problem? Is your child involved with a group of children that is 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.

FURTHER HELP

Parentline Plus

- Free*, confidential, 24-hour Parentline: **0808 800 2222**
- Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: **0800 783 6783**
- Email support: **parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk**
- Website: **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**
- Website: **www.besomeonetotell.org.uk**

→ NEW WEBSITE

www.besomeonetotell.org.uk

Parentline Plus has just launched a new website for parents who are concerned about bullying in their child's life, both outside and within school. It has been designed to help you support your child build healthy friendships and be safe at every stage of their life. Whether your child is getting bullied or bullying others, we are here to help.

*Free from landlines and most mobile networks.

Advisory Centre for Education

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

- Advice Line: **0808 800 5793**
- Website: **www.ace-ed.org.uk**

Anti-Bullying Alliance

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

- Website: **www.anti-bullyingalliance.org**

Bullying UK

Useful information and links for parents and children on how to deal with all types of bullying, including racist bullying.

- Website: **www.bullying.co.uk/parents/racism**

Children's Legal Centre

Advice and information on legal issues affecting a child.

- Email: **clc@essex.ac.uk**
- Website: **www.childrenslegalcentre.com**

Contact a Family

UK-wide charity providing advice, information and support to the parents of all disabled children.

- Website: www.cafamily.org.uk
- Helpline: **0808 808 3555**

Department for Children, Schools and Families

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

- Website:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/bullying/

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Champions equality and human rights for all, working to eliminate discrimination, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

- Website:
www.equalityhumanrights.com
- Helpline:
for England **0845 604 6610**
(for Scotland and Wales please see website)

Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Dedicated to supporting parents and their gay, lesbian and bisexual sons and daughters.

- Tel: **0845 652 0311**
- Website: www.fflag.org.uk

Mencap

UK charity for people with a learning disability and their families.

- Website: www.mencap.org.uk
- Helpline: **0808 808 1111**

ParentsCentre

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

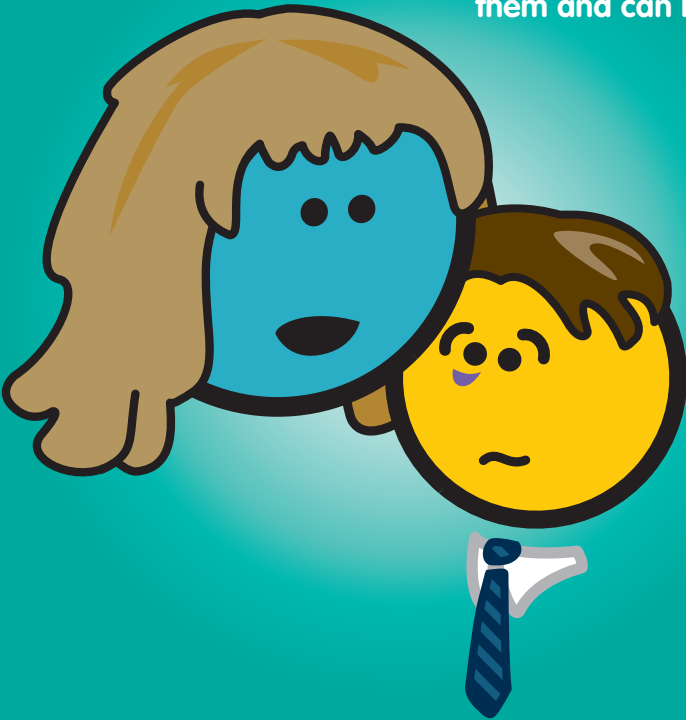
- Website:
www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Schools Out

Provides a support network to raise the issue of homophobia and heterosexism in education.

- Website:
www.schools-out.org.uk

Finally, listen and talk to your child. Let them know that you are there for them and can help them.



department for
children, schools and families



Parentline Plus: 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 1TL
Free* Parentline: 0808 800 2222

Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: 0800 783 6783
Web: www.parentlineplus.org.uk Email: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

For professionals: www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk
Be Someone to Tell: www.besomeonetotell.org.uk
Got a teenager: www.gotateenager.org.uk

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