

BULLYING

What can parents do?

What is bullying?

"The things they say feel like a dagger in my back." Mark, 10

Experts disagree about what bullying means. Is it any hurtful, intimidating behaviour (such as a shove on the playground), or does bullying imply a long-running series of deliberate actions (such as name-calling day after day)? Whatever the definition you agree with, it's important to note that children are often disturbed enough to call ChildLine after only a single incident.

In 2003/04 more than 31,000 children and young people called ChildLine about bullying, making it the most common problem we were contacted about. A survey commissioned by ChildLine in 2003 found that **half of primary school children and more than one in four secondary school students said they had been bullied during the term.**

These are some of the types of bullying that children and young people have called us about:

- being teased or called names
- being hit, pushed, pulled, pinched or kicked
- having bags, mobiles, money or other possessions taken
- receiving abusive text messages or emails
- being ignored or left out
- being attacked or abused because of religion, gender, sexuality, disability, appearance, or ethnic or racial origin.

Who gets bullied?

"What hurts me so much is that she used to be my friend." Louise, 15

Bullying can happen anywhere, and children with obvious differences aren't the

only ones who suffer many others are bullied for no obvious reason.

What bullying does to children

"I am at the stage of wanting to die instead of going to school."

Alex, 11

Bullying breaks children down. It's humiliating and frightening, and young people often feel powerless to stop it. And it doesn't just affect children's social lives. Concentration lapses and skipped lessons are not uncommon for bullied children, even those who have always performed well in school. Sometimes the thought of going to school is so terrifying that children pretend they are ill or refuse to attend. A very few find life so unbearable that they attempt suicide. Many more carry the effects of bullying long into their adult lives.

Is your child being bullied?

There's no way to know for sure that a child is being bullied, but there are some signs to look out for. Has your child been:

- coming home with damaged or missing clothes, without money they should have, or with scratches and bruises
- having trouble with schoolwork for no apparent reason
- using a different route between home and school
- feeling irritable, easily upset or particularly emotional?



How to help a bullied child

"I don't want to tell my mum and dad – it would upset them too much." Sunita, 16

As a parent, you may feel angry and upset if you discover that your child is being bullied. Children tell ChildLine that sometimes they keep the bullying quiet for fear of upsetting their parents. They also tell us they are afraid their parents won't take them seriously, or will tell them to stand up for themselves. So they frequently carry the double burden of being bullied and feeling they can't turn to their parents for help.

Here are some pointers for parents:

- If a child tells you they are being bullied, the first and most important step is to listen. Allow them to tell their story in their own words. Don't respond by dismissing their experience as part of "growing up".
- Adults don't put up with being hit or insulted when they go to work. Children shouldn't have to, either. If a child has plucked up the courage to tell a parent or teacher about bullying, it can be crushing to be told to "sort it out yourself", or "don't be silly, they're just teasing".
- You may suspect that your child is being bullied, but is afraid to say anything. Is there a way of raising the subject? Can you, perhaps, ask one of your child's friends if something is wrong?
- If your child refuses to talk to you, suggest that they talk to another adult, such as someone else in the family or a teacher. Before they speak to their parents or teachers about being bullied, children often phone ChildLine; after speaking to a counsellor, they may then feel more able to talk to someone they know.
- Your child has told you about bullying – what you do next is very important. Do not rush in demanding to see the head teacher, the bully, or the bully's parents. It may be the very response your child was dreading. Although it may be tempting to try to sort the problem out yourself, your reaction could make your child's problem worse. Children are often scared of revenge from bullies, and some children have told ChildLine's counsellors that their fears were justified – the bullying grew worse after they told someone.
- Instead, talk to your child about what to do next. It's a good idea to suggest that they keep a diary of bullying incidents, so they have concrete facts to show the school if necessary.
- Make an appointment to speak to the teacher with your child. Ask the school to provide an interpreter if you would like one – they should be able to do so. Your child may feel more comfortable talking to a teacher other than their class teacher. If it's possible, make an appointment with the teacher your child feels most at ease with.
- It may be that the bullying doesn't stop straight away. Encourage your child to keep telling. Parents may have to be persistent with the school.
- However, nobody can do it all on their own. Tackling bullying effectively has to involve teachers, other school staff, parents and, above all, the children themselves.
- If you are not satisfied with a teacher's response, don't give up. Don't feel that you are being a troublemaker or needlessly taking up teachers' time. Your child's welfare is important and, if your child is being bullied, then other children probably are too. It is in the interest of the school, as well as your child, that parents keep telling the school what's happening.
- There are other steps you can take, and other people you can talk to. You

could ask to speak to the head or deputy head teacher. The next step would be to write formally to the Board of Governors (School Boards in Scotland). If you feel strongly that the school is turning its back on the problem, you can contact the local education authority.

- Finally, do the obvious. Tell your children you love them and do what you can to make their lives outside school fun and enjoyable – it will help them feel good about themselves.

Is your child bullying others?

"It was only a bit of fun really – I didn't mean him to take it seriously." Jay, 15

It can be very upsetting to be told that your child is bullying other children. But all children can be nasty from time to time. However, if a child finds that bullying leads to greater power in the playground or causes fear (or admiration) in other children, then the problem can get much worse.

Your first instinct might be immediately to punish a bullying child. But it is worth pausing for a moment. Could there be a reason your child is acting this way? Sometimes children begin bullying as a reaction to negative events. Has there been a recent change or disruption? Is life difficult at home? Is your child involved with a group of children who may be encouraging or condoning bullying behaviour? Or is your child being bullied too? Perhaps surprisingly, the bullied and bullying aren't always two distinct groups.

If your child has been bullying others, obviously that behaviour has to be stopped. Talk to your child and try to find out what's going on. If the bullying is a one-off, you may need to do no more, but some children need help and guidance to alter their behaviour. If your school has a good anti-bullying policy, your child will be able to seek help there. Try to ensure that your child is not hauled up in front of the

class or at assembly, but that the teacher seeks a less confrontational approach, perhaps talking individually to those involved. Measures like the no-blame approach can help children change their behaviour.

Is your school tackling bullying?

Bullying is persistent and widespread, and eliminating it is a daunting task. But many schools are serious about tackling bullying. Is this true of yours?

- Does your school know if bullying happens? Have they tried to find out – by asking children, by questionnaires or by discussions?
- All schools have a legislative responsibility to have a written anti-bullying policy. Is yours an active part of school life or gathering dust on a shelf somewhere?
- Do you know who to go to if your child is being bullied?
- Are there books and other information sources about bullying in the library?
- Has bullying been discussed at parent teacher meetings?
- Are all school staff involved in training on bullying, including administration and auxiliary staff?
- How does your school help children who are being bullied, as well as children who are bullying?

Different schools have tried different ways of tackling bullying. Here are some approaches that have been successful:

Prevention. Schools can do much to reduce the opportunity and the general culture of bullying. For example, finding out how widespread bullying is through confidential questionnaires will give the school a clearer picture of what is going on.

www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111

ChildLine is a service provided by the NSPCC.

Registered charity numbers
216401 and SC037717.

Please note – all names and identifying details have been changed to protect young people's identities.

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General behaviour policy. Behaviour policies can be used to influence the culture of a school. These can include anti-bullying statements as part of a general expectation of standards. Education about bullying and promoting positive relationships between children can take place throughout the school through displays and literature.

Whole school approach. Some schools adopt a non-punitive, non-confrontational approach to tackling bullying. This involves teachers and children discussing a bullying problem and trying to find a solution that all can agree.

Peer support. Schools are increasingly looking at different forms of peer support as a means of helping children. Certain children are trained in active listening or mediation skills to help children who have been bullied or who need help with other problems.

Peer mentoring for children going from primary to secondary schools.

Many children fear they will be bullied when they go to secondary school. Groups of schools now operate schemes where older pupils look out for and look after younger children when they arrive at secondary school. Some schools, for example, have older children walk to school with younger ones during the first few weeks of the year.

Who can help?

Young people can call ChildLine free, at any time, on **0800 1111** for confidential information and advice about all problems, including bullying. Young people who live in Scotland can also call ChildLine Scotland's bullying line on **0800 44 11 11** (3.30pm to 9.30pm, Monday to Friday).

Children who are deaf or find using a regular phone difficult can try our textphone service on **0800 400 222**. To read more about bullying, visit ChildLine's website at **www.childline.org.uk**

There is a great deal of information, advice and guidance about bullying. The list below offers a small selection.

ChildLine's website offers information, advice and true stories about bullying. Visit **www.childline.org.uk/bullying.asp**

Kidscape produces leaflets and booklets on bullying, and runs a helpline on **08451 205204** (10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday). For information visit: **www.kidscape.org.uk**

Parentline Plus is a free, confidential, 24-hour helpline for parents concerned with a wide range of issues, including bullying. Call **0808 800 2222** or visit **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**

The Advisory Centre for Education publishes information sheets on bullying and runs a helpline on **0808 800 5793** (10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday). You can purchase and download a booklet entitled Tackling Bullying at **www.ace-ed.org.uk/advice/booklets/bullying.html**

Lucky Duck at **www.luckyduck.co.uk** promote a no-blame, support group approach to problems, including bullying behaviour.

The Department for Education and Skills produces Bullying – don't suffer in silence. Every school should have a copy. If your school doesn't, ask for it.

