



Safe
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Bullying

Guide for parents and carers



What is bullying?

Bullying is both behaviour and impact. It involves both the actions someone takes and the effects those actions have on you, affecting your sense of safety and self-control.

Bullying can occur both face-to-face and online and may include:

- Being called names, teased, or made fun of
- Being hit, pushed, or kicked
- Having your belongings taken or damaged
- Being ignored, excluded, or having rumours spread about you
- Being humiliated
- Receiving abusive messages or nasty comments
- Being targeted because of who you are or how others perceive you

Bullying can also look like this:

- Cancelling and avoiding
- Fleeting or dirty looks
- Selectively greeting people
- Removing and adding people to group chats
- Being overly critical
- Manipulation



When is it not bullying?

It is crucial to distinguish between bullying and other types of behaviours. Children and young people will tease each other and sometimes fall out. They won't always get along, but not every disagreement is bullying. It's important to keep in mind that a child might feel bullied even if bullying didn't actually occur. For instance, they might feel hurt if they weren't chosen for a team or didn't get a party invite. Whilst we should acknowledge the impact this has had and support them with their upset, there is no need for further action.

Sometimes behaviour can be perceived as bullying when incidents are in fact very serious, and a criminal offence may have taken place.

If your child is physically beaten or attacked, this is assault, not bullying. If someone films the incident and posts it online, it serves as evidence of an assault.

If your child is coerced or pressured into doing something sexual or is touched inappropriately, this is not bullying. This is sexual assault or abuse and a form of gender-based violence. Laws exist to protect children and young people from this very serious behaviour.

If an adult targets or grooms a child, either face-to-face or online, this is child sexual exploitation.

In Scotland, sharing private sexual materials of another person without their consent, intending to cause distress, is commonly referred to as "revenge porn." It is an offence under the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016.

Additionally, creating or sharing explicit images of someone under the age of 18 is considered a serious crime, even if the person sharing the images is also a minor.

Hate crime is defined by law as a crime motivated by malice or ill-will towards individuals due to their actual or perceived disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, or transgender identity. Hate crimes can take various forms, potentially amounting to criminal harassment, and should be treated as such. Both adults and young people can seek advice and guidance from Police Scotland if they believe a hate crime has occurred.

How do I spot the signs of bullying?

Children and young people are often reluctant to tell adults that they're being bullied. This might be because they are afraid of an over-reaction, they feel embarrassed, or they worry that telling someone might make the situation worse.

However, there are several signs you can look out for if you're concerned your child is being bullied:

- ❗ Frequent headaches, stomach aches, or other unexplained physical ailments.
- ❗ Becoming easily upset, tearful, anxious, or displaying mood swings.
- ❗ Acting out of character, such as being more aggressive or withdrawn.
- ❗ Reluctance to go to school, participate in social activities, or use digital devices.
- ❗ Bruises, cuts, or other physical marks without a clear explanation.
- ❗ Missing or damaged belongings, like clothes, books, or gadgets.
- ❗ Sudden changes in appetite, either eating much more or much less than usual.

Of course, this list is not exhaustive, and exhibiting some of these symptoms doesn't necessarily mean your child is being bullied. But as a parent or carer, you know your child best. If there's an unexplained change in their behaviour, it's important to explore the cause further.



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How do I respond if my child tells me they are being bullied?

Children and young people are often reluctant to tell adults that they're being bullied. This might be because they are afraid of an over-reaction, they feel embarrassed, or they worry that telling someone might make the situation worse.

If you discover that your child is being bullied, try to remain calm, listen and let them know that they did the right thing by telling you. Reassure them and let them know that things can get better. Tell them it's not their fault.

Things to remember

Don't panic!

Staying calm supports good listening and reassures your child.

Give your full attention

This shows you are taking them seriously and reassures them.

Explain your concern

Gently explain what you have noticed. This can help your child understand the impact of bullying.

Ask what they want you to do

Find out what your child wants to happen next. Help to identify the choices open to them, the potential next steps to take, and the skills they may have to help solve the problems. This makes your child feel valued and restores feelings of safety and control. It helps you understand what support they need.

Keep listening!

If they are hesitant to talk immediately, remind them you are always available to listen, and they can talk to you at any time.



Don't encourage retaliation to bullying - such as violent actions. It's important for children to avoid hitting or punching anyone. Reacting that way has negative and unpredictable results - they may be hurt even further.

How can I help?



Explore solutions together

Ask questions

Engage your child in the problem-solving process by asking questions like, “What do you want to happen?”, “What have you tried so far?”, “What would you like me to do?”.

Listen to their concerns

If your child is worried that you might make things worse, consider alternative approaches.

Suggest options

Propose different actions, like talking to the other parent or finding someone at school/club they feel comfortable to report it to. Are they happy for you to contact the school?

Build confidence

Encourage your child to get involved in activities that boost their self-esteem and help them to form friendships outside of school (or wherever the bullying is taking place).

Inform yourself

Gather the relevant school policies such as the school’s Anti-Bullying policy. This will outline the reporting procedures and how your child’s school prevents and tackles all forms of bullying behaviour. Schools have a legal duty to ensure that bullying behaviour is tackled, and that young people are safe from harm.



The impulse to quickly resolve the situation is natural, but it’s crucial to pause and reflect: “How can I restore my child’s sense of control?” because it’s that sense of being in control that has been taken from them.

What is cyber bullying?

Online bullying is often referred to as cyberbullying, meaning bullying via electronic means. This could be via a smart phone, computer, laptop, tablet, or online gaming platforms. It can take place on a range of online or mobile services, such as text, email, social networking sites, video-hosting sites, messenger, photo sharing services, chat, webcams, and online games.

Here's some practical steps you can take:

Familiarise yourself with the social networking sites they're using. Make sure your child knows how to block someone online and how to implement security settings. Ask them to take screenshots or save any inappropriate messages.

It's important to set boundaries and let your child know how you expect them to behave online. Discuss how they react to things and how they communicate with others, just like you would if they were starting a new club or heading out with friends.

Remember, their online interactions are an extension of their social life, often involving the same people. It's about guiding them to make good choices in both worlds.

If you discover misconduct between your child and someone online, stay calm, investigate the facts, and seek help.

If someone has acted inappropriately towards your child, or someone they know (such as sexual chat, or asking them to meet up) contact the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

Talk to your child about who they're talking to online and only accept friend requests from 'genuine' friends.

Encourage them to think before they share things online and always keep profiles private.



What if it is my child that is displaying bullying behaviour?

It can be worrying if you think your child might be bullying others. Many parents face similar challenges, and it's not uncommon for children to engage in bullying behaviour at some point. What matters most is how you respond to it, and seeking guidance shows your commitment to helping your child learn and grow from this experience.

If you believe your child might be bullying another child, it is important to explain to them that bullying behaviour is not acceptable, and that it can be really upsetting and hurtful. Make sure they understand what bullying behaviour is and why it is wrong.

It's important to understand that there are many reasons why children (and adults) might bully others:

- They may not realise that their actions are harmful and that their behaviour is hurting others
- They could hold prejudices against certain groups or individuals.
- They may feel pressured to participate as part of a group and go along to avoid embarrassment.
- They have been bullied themselves and are trying to avoid becoming a target.
- Your child may be upset or angry about a situation and be trying to regain some control.

If the school contacts you about your child's involvement in a bullying incident, remain calm and gather all the details related to the incident. Ask for a copy of the school's anti-bullying and behaviour policies to ensure proper procedures are being followed. Take the time to listen to your child's perspective on the matter, whilst keeping an open mind.

If the school presents information that surprises you (children sometimes behave differently away from their parents), remain calm, and discuss the incident with your child. Avoid viewing the behaviour as a permanent reflection of their character, but clearly communicate the need to change. Do not label them as a bully, they may be bullying somebody, which is a behaviour, but it doesn't define them.

What can I do to support my child to change?

Encourage your child to think about how their actions affect others. How would they feel if they were the ones being bullied? Imagine feeling anxious and fearful whenever they went to school. What if they dreaded checking their phone because they were afraid of hurtful messages waiting for them? Help your child understand the impact on the other person.

Discuss what it really means to be a good friend. What qualities make a good friend? How do they resolve conflict with friends in a healthy and respectful manner? Encourage understanding and empathy in their interactions.

Talk to them about differences and why it is important to respect and celebrate differences. Challenge any prejudiced attitudes they may have and make it clear that you do not tolerate the use of disrespectful and hurtful language and behaviour as a family.

Help them find a way forward that gives them the chance to make amends or repair relationships with the other person. Discuss ways they can apologise sincerely and take steps to improve their behaviour.

Role model good behaviour. You are a role model to your child, and they will learn from you, if you are calm, reasonable, and respectful of others, they can learn to act in the same way too.



Useful links

For further information visit

www.safestrongandfree.org.uk

Contact us info@safestrongandfree.org.uk

Childline

Childline is a free, confidential helpline for children and young people in the UK. You can call them at **0800 1111** to talk about any problem, including bullying. They offer support and advice 24/7.

Police Scotland

In serious cases of bullying, especially if it involves threats or physical harm, you can contact the police for assistance. Dial **101** to reach Police Scotland's non-emergency number.

Young Minds

Young Minds offers practical advice for parents on creating safe and nurturing environments, while providing children and young people with tools to manage their mental health, build self-esteem, and form positive relationships.
www.youngminds.org.uk

Ditch the Label

Ditch the Label provides informative advice, research and engaging content tailored to young people aged 13-25 aimed to reduce the prominence and harmful effect of bullying. Ditch the Label also offer email support as well as drop-in chat sessions via the social networking platform Habbo Hotel.
www.ditchthelabel.org

