

BULLYING

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



What is bullying?

Many of us will have experienced bullying at some point in our lives. There's no legal definition of bullying, but it is often described as: **'targeted and repeated verbal or physical behaviour by a person or group that is designed to hurt someone physically or emotionally over a period of time'**. Sadly, children and young people with special or additional needs are two or three times more at risk of being bullied because they:

- can be seen as 'different'
- can be seen as 'vulnerable' or 'easy targets'
- may misunderstand others' behaviour towards them
- may be misinterpreted or misunderstood by others

This fact sheet will give you suggestions on steps you can take to support your child, as well as links to organisations who can give you further advice and help.

Talking about bullying

It can be tricky for children and young people to talk about bullying because they feel embarrassed or somehow to blame. They may also worry that if the bullies find out they've told someone it will get worse. If you suspect your child is being bullied it's best to ask them, as the problem may be quite serious before they pluck up the courage to tell you.

Reassure your child that telling you is the right thing to do. Let them know that you will support them and contact the school. Don't try to confront the bully or their parents yourself – it is better to work with the school to find a solution.

Finding out that your child is involved in bullying someone else can be really upsetting. Many of the organisations listed below will also be able to support you and your child in this situation, as it is just as important to tackle this quickly, before it gets out of hand.

Speaking to the school

Keep a diary of incidents and make an appointment with your child's class teacher or form tutor so you can outline what's happening. Ask for a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy to see if there are any ideas that may help your child.

When you have your meeting, ask a friend or relative to come along to support you. Try to be specific about incidents – give dates and times as well as where they happened and who was involved. If you feel your child is being targeted because of their special needs or disability, remind the school that they have a duty to consider whether it is disability discrimination and respond to this. Ask the teacher/tutor what steps they will take to try to stop the bullying. Afterwards, write to the school listing the points discussed and the actions everyone has agreed to take.

If the bullying continues, write to the class teacher or head of year to outline your concerns and suggestions and ask for the letter to be added to your child's school file. If these steps don't resolve things, you should write to the head teacher detailing all the incidents. Make sure you ask the school



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how they will tackle the bullying and ask for them to reply to your letter in writing. Again, make sure the letter is added to your child's school file. If you need to you can also write to the school governors setting out your concerns.

You can also talk to your caseworker at the Local Authority if your child has an EHC Plan/Statement to see if they can talk to the school, too. If you feel that you have no other choice but to take your child out of school, make sure you talk to the head teacher and SENCO beforehand.

Bullying outside school

If bullying is happening outside school, the school still has a duty of care and should find ways to deal with it. Likewise, if your child is being bullied by children from another school, you can get help from a Police Community Support Officer or the community safety team at your local council.

Other help

It can be difficult for children to concentrate in class if they are being bullied, so it's important to make sure their teachers know what's going on. If your child is at a mainstream school make sure that you speak to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), who may be able to suggest other ways to support your child. Perhaps your child isn't getting the right support, or enough support at certain times of day, or they may need help to build their confidence and self-esteem.

If your child is so upset by bullying that they refuse to go to school, or talk about hurting themselves, make an appointment for them to see your GP. A letter from the GP to the school outlining the effect of the bullying can be useful. Your child may also be offered counselling or medication to help them.

Ask about

- **Anti-Bullying Works** – training and support for schools and settings. For more details go to: www.antibullyingworks.co.uk.
- **Behaviour Advice** – support and training for parent groups and settings. Find out more at: www.behaviouradvice.co.uk.
- **WSSC Action Against Bullying Helpline** – for parents/carers and professionals, it is open Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm). Tel: **0333 014 2904**.

Further reading and useful links

- **Making Sense of it All** – our handy parent/carer guide contains information and advice on local contact groups and much more. It is available to download or buy. For further information, visit our website: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- **Changing Faces** – www.changingfaces.org.uk or tel: **0300 012 0275**.
- **Childline** – www.childline.org.uk or tel: **0800 1111**.
- **Contact a Family** – www.cafamily.org.uk or tel: **0808 808 3555**.
- **Family Lives** – www.familylives.org.uk or tel: **0808 800 2222** (24 hours).
- **Government advice** on school bullying – www.gov.uk/bullying-at-school/the-law.
- **Kidscape** – www.kidscape.org.uk or tel: **020 7823 5430** (Mon–Tue 10am to 5pm).
- **Mencap** – www.mencap.org.uk or tel: **0808 808 1111** (Mon–Fri 8am to 6pm)
- **Think You Know** – CEOP's guide to staying safe online: www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

