

## **What is bullying?**

Bullying can mean many different things. Bullying can take many forms, but its aim is always to make a person feel upset, intimidated or afraid and if this happens again and again it is bullying.

These are some ways children and young people have described bullying:

- being called names
- being teased
- being pushed or pulled about
- being hit or attacked
- having your bag and other possessions taken and thrown around
- having rumours spread about you
- being ignored and left out
- being forced to hand over money or possessions.

### **Children get bullied**

- at school – in the playground, in class or in the toilets
- on their way to and from school
- on the bus

## **What does it feel like to be bullied?**

Bullying hurts. It makes you scared and upset. It can make you feel embarrassed in front of others. It can make you feel that you are all alone and that you have no friends. It can make you so worried that you can't work well at school. Some children have told us they have skipped school to get away from it. It can make you feel that you are no good, that there is something wrong with you. People who bully you can make you feel that it's your fault but it is not your fault - it is their fault. (The label 'bully' for a bullying child is problematic. The word 'bully' as a verb for the action is better, e.g. a child who bullies.)

## **Why do some people bully?**

There are a lot of reasons why some people bully. They may see it as a way of being popular, or making themselves look tough and in charge.

Some bullies do it to get attention or to get something, or to make other people afraid of them. Others might be jealous of the person they are bullying. They may even be getting bullied themselves.

Some people who bully may not even understand how wrong their behaviour is or how it makes the person being bullied feel.

## **Why are some young people bullied?**

Some young people are bullied for no particular reason, but sometimes it's because they are different in some way – perhaps it's the way they talk, their size, their looks, their name or just because they are very good at something.

Sometimes young people are bullied because the bullying person thinks they won't stand up for themselves.

## Some research.....

Boys were found to engage in three times as much bullying as girls. Research found that the popular belief that children who bully feel insecure and anxious inside is NOT true. In fact, children who bully have a low level of anxiety. The typical child who bullies has 'an aggressive personality pattern' combined, at least in boys, with physical strength.

The factors which were found to help create an aggressive personality problem were: negative emotional attitudes of the primary caretaker characterized by lack of warmth, permissiveness by the primary caretaker for the child's aggressive behaviour, use of 'power-assertive' child rearing methods such as physical punishment and the child's temperament. (If this document is for pupils as well as teachers I'd simplify the language in this paragraph completely).

## If you're being bullied what can you do?

Always remember – It's not your fault! It's the bullying person who has the problem, not you. Don't put up with bullying. Ask for help.

- **Believe in yourself.** Don't believe what the bullying person says of you. You know that's not true.
- **Say 'no' emphatically,** then walk away
- **Check out your body language.** Practise walking with confidence, standing straight with head held high and taking deep breaths.
- **Practice assertiveness.** Stand tall, look the bully in the eye, breathe steadily, speak calmly and firmly. This can help you to feel stronger, and also makes you look more confident.
- **Don't suffer in silence** – talk to someone you trust. It always helps to share a problem and to know that you are not alone. In schools and clubs, adults in charge have to pay attention to any complaints you make about being bullied.
- **If an adult is bullying you, then look for help from another adult you can trust.** You have rights, and you must insist on them. There are rules and procedures to deal with adults who bully at home, in school, in sport clubs and where people work. If you are too nervous, take along a friend.
- **Choose when to resist.** Sometimes the only sensible thing to do is to give in. Just get away and tell someone.
- **Try not to use violence.** It never solves anything, and usually just makes the situation worse.
- **Keep a diary.** Keep a record of details – who, where, when, how – as this will make it easier for you when you tell your story.
- **Have an answer ready.** Well chosen words can often make a bullying person look foolish, and that's the last thing they want!
- **Try not to show you are upset or angry** (even if you are). Reacting to the bullying person is only giving them what they want.
- **If there's a gang involved try to approach each person on their own,** rather than when they're together. If you talk straight to them, you'll probably find that they're not so confident without the protection of the group.

- **Ask your friends to support you.** People who bully don't like being outnumbered or isolated.
- **Try to make new friends** if the ones you have at the moment seem to enjoy trying to make you feel bad.
- **Change your routine.** Try to avoid being on your own in places where you are likely to be picked on.

### **Do you bully others?**

- Have you ever hurt someone on purpose?
- Have you ever used your size or strength to win against someone weaker?
- Do you repeat rumours, even if you're not sure they're true?
- Have you ever tried to turn your friends against someone?
- Have you ever watched others bullying someone without doing anything to stop it?
- Have you ever used the excuse 'I was only messing' when you knew you weren't 'only messing'?

If answering these questions made you feel uneasy, maybe you should look at the way you treat other people.

### **Talking to someone always helps.**

Choose a trusted friend or maybe one of the organisations listed in this booklet.

**Remember that bullying is always wrong** – feeling good shouldn't mean having to make someone else feel bad.

## **Signs of bullying**

### **As an adult, what are the signs I should look out for?**

One of the most terrible effects of bullying is that the bullied child will very often deny that it's happening.

It's important that you don't put even more pressure on a child who may be bullied. Forcing someone to tell when they don't want to can itself be a form of bullying. **But there are certain signs to look out for if you have suspicions.**

These can include:

- A change in behaviour, such as suffering a lack of concentration and/or becoming withdrawn, excessively clingy, depressed, fearful, emotionally up and down
- Afraid and anxious when going to or coming from school
- Happy at the weekend but not during the week. A drop in performance in school.
- Physical signs: stomach aches, headaches, sleep difficulties, bedwetting, bruising
- Bingeing on food
- Unexplained bruises
- School performance steadily getting worse

- Being generally nervous, tense, unhappy
- Not explaining suspicious incidents
- Signs of being isolated from others of the same age
- Signs of regular interference with personal property, books, etc.
- Frequently asking for (or perhaps stealing) money.

Although these can also indicate problems other than bullying, it's important that you don't ignore them. Try to encourage the child to talk about what's going on, either to you or to another trusted adult.

### **How to approach the subject**

- Broach the subject obliquely, giving the victim the option to talk about it or not
- Let them know that you are willing to listen at any time
- When they start to talk, listen carefully to what they have to say
- Once they begin to discuss the bullying, it may seem to be all they can talk about. Be patient and let them go on – it's better for them to let it all out than to bottle it up.

### **What to do next**

- Don't over-react – victims need rational advice and help, not emotional overload
- Believe the victim. No one should have to put up with bullying.
- Ask victims if they have any suggestions about changing the situation
- Contact the school as soon as you are satisfied that the allegation is well founded
- Seek advice from an individual or a support group with experience in this area.

### **What should I do if my child is being bullied?**

- Discuss bullying openly and regularly with your children – don't wait for them to raise the issue.
- Thank the child for disclosing the problem. Confidence is the first casualty of bullying, so let your child know you believe them and will support them. Tell them it's not their fault.
- Listen carefully. Don't rush the story. Show you are concerned and sympathetic.
- Get all the details – what, who, when, where, etc.
- Write down the details and check the information with your child. This will be important for any meetings which may come later.
- Take action. Don't wait to see if it all blows over.
- Make appropriate changes that may help prevent your child being singled out and to build their confidence at the same time (e.g. new clothes, different hairstyle, etc.)
- Seek professional help if necessary (e.g. speech therapy, dental work, etc.)
- Bring your information to the relevant authority, and insist on getting an adequate response.

## **How do I approach the School?**

- Make an appointment
- Speak to an appropriate teacher as soon as possible.
- Think about asking someone to accompany you for support.
- Don't exaggerate. Be honest and stick to the facts as you understand them.
- Use your notes to make sure you don't forget to mention any important points.
- Recognise that you may be upset when you speak to the teacher.
- Accept that your child may not have told you all the facts, and that there may be another side to the story.
- Ask for a copy of the school's policy on bullying.
- Find out what action the school intends to take.
- Arrange for a follow-up meeting with the teacher to measure any improvement in the situation.
- After the meeting, you may wish to make a note of what was agreed and send a copy to the teacher.
- If you are not happy with the teacher's response, make an appointment to see the principal.
- If you still feel dissatisfied having talked to the principal, contact members of the Board of Management who are there to represent your interests. Remember to keep copies of all letters you send and receive.
- If your child is happy to have you attend, you can request that all interviews with him or her on this issue are conducted in your presence.
- If the problem persists, then you should consider moving your child to another class or even another school if this is possible.
- You should consider carefully whether further aftercare is needed following a move to another class or school.

## **How can I tell if my child bullies others?**

Here are some indicators of bullying behaviour:

- a tendency to bully family members
- being a victim of bullying
- regularly witnessing bullying behaviour in their environment
- being frequently short-tempered and/or aggressive
- having past experiences which can still cause negative feelings
- bringing home items that you know weren't bought
- speaking of others in a negative way, perhaps on the basis of their appearance or beliefs of social status
- showing an interest in violent behaviour
- showing little sensitivity towards others
- having low self esteem
- being the subject of previous complaints or suggestions of bullying behaviour

Although these can also indicate problems other than bullying, it's important that you don't ignore them. Try to encourage the child to talk about what's going on, either to you or another trusted adult.

## **Directory of Support Services**

Anti-Bullying Centre

(01) 6082573

CAB – Campaign Against Bullying	(01) 2887976
Childline Freephone	1800 666660
Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy	(01) 2300061
ISPCC	(01) 6794944
The National Association for Parents Support (NAPS)	(0502) 20598
Parentline (Parents under Stress)	(01) 8733500
Samaritans (Callsave)	1850 609090
Sticks and Stones Theatre Company	(01) 2807065
Trinity College Dublin – Anti-Bullying Research Centre	(01) 6601011
Victim Support	1800 661771

### **Some Useful Websites**

Bullying @ school information – [www.scrc.ac.uk/bully](http://www.scrc.ac.uk/bully)

Bullying information on Bullying Child/Parents/Teachers [www.lfcc.on.ca/bully](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/bully)

Bullying in schools [www.ericece.org/pubs/digests/1997/banks97](http://www.ericece.org/pubs/digests/1997/banks97)

What Parents should know about Bullying –  
[www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/bully](http://www.accesseric.org/resources/parent/bully)

Anti-Bullying Campaign Tools for Teachers - [www.antibullyingcampaign.ie](http://www.antibullyingcampaign.ie)

### **Appendix**

*ABC Bullying at School*, the Anti-Bullying Research & Resource Centre  
Trinity College, Dublin

*You Can Beat Bullying - A Guide for Young People*, Kidscape

*The abc of Bullying*, Marie Murray & Colm Keane, 1998 – Mercier Press

*What do You know about Bullying*, Pete Sanders, 2000 – Aladdin Books Ltd.

*Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace*, Lucy Costigan, 1998 – Columba Press

*Bullying – don't let them suffer in silence*, Save the Children (Resource Pack)