



ALL ABOUT BULLYING

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Unfortunately, many children will experience or witness bullying during their school years: they may be the target of bullying, may be involved in bullying others, may stand by while others are being bullied, or may take positive action to stop bullying. When attempting to tackle bullying, it's important that we are all on the same page and understand exactly what bullying is (and isn't).

The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as:

The **repetitive, intentional hurting** of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an **imbalance of power**. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online.



To watch a video explanation of the definition of bullying and its 4 key elements, click [HERE](#)



The person bullying may target aspects about what makes a person who they are - this could include disability, race, faith, gender, sex, sexuality, poverty, talent, appearance, hobbies, or situation at home.

Children are influenced by the home, community, and society they grow up in, by the things they see, read, and hear, and the people around them. **As adults, we all have a role to play in creating communities where children feel safe and valued: where we always choose respect, stand up to prejudice and are united against bullying.**

As a parent you have a vital role to play in helping your child recognise bullying and understand how you can help to stop it.

What bullying isn't: 'falling out'



It's common for children to have arguments and friendship fall outs (often referred to as 'relational conflict') and they will need our guidance to resolve conflict, make amends, and move on.

Not all incidences of conflict can be understood as bullying. Relational conflict usually involves individuals who are friends, or a situation with no power imbalance involved. It is generally behaviour which happens occasionally, and offence might be accidental. An example might be an argument or falling out with a friend, or experimental 'banter' that unintentionally offended the person on the receiving end.

Knowing how to identify and respond to relational issues and conflicts are an important part of a child's development and preventing situations from escalating into potential bullying.



CHOOSE
RESPECT

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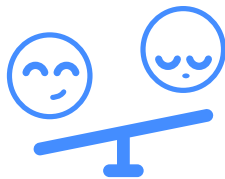
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BANTER OR BULLYING?

Banter is when friends tease each other in a fun and friendly way. It's meant to be playful and helps build relationships, with both people joining in. However, to someone on the outside, it might seem like friends are being mean to each other because the teasing can sound offensive, even though there's no intention to hurt feelings.



Since banter can be confusing, children and young people might sometimes get it wrong as they learn how to interact with others. Even adults sometimes mess up and accidentally say something more hurtful than they meant. The key thing to remember is that banter should never be hurtful. If it makes someone feel bad, it's no longer banter but hurtful behaviour. When this happens and the person delivering the banter is made aware of the hurt caused, action should be taken to stop that behaviour quickly. If this behaviour fits the definition of bullying (see page 5), it could actually be considered bullying.

It's okay to make mistakes, but it's important to know the difference between playful banter and unkind behaviour that could turn into bullying. Parents can help their children understand these differences by talking to them about what banter and bullying are.

HOW DO I KNOW MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

Unfortunately, it's common for children to choose not to tell anyone about the bullying they are experiencing. However, there are often signs we can look out for that may indicate bullying is occurring.

You know your child best so will be aware of any changes to their behaviour, or if something seems wrong. Some types of behaviour that might be an indication of bullying are:

- A reluctance to go to school.



- Unexplained tummy upsets or headaches.



- Showing signs of distress on a Sunday night or at the end of school holidays.



- Becoming quieter or more withdrawn than usual, or 'acting out' and getting in trouble more often.



- Torn clothes or missing belongings.



- Seeming upset after using their phone, tablets, computers etc.



- Wanting to leave for school much earlier than necessary or returning home late.



- You may also find that their sleep is disturbed, or they are showing other signs of sadness or anxiety.



If your child has been seriously harmed or is at risk of serious harm, either physically or mentally, this is a safeguarding issue and you should **seek immediate help (e.g. call 999 and/or your local children's services team).**



If your child has been on the receiving end of prejudicial behaviour because of their race or faith, disability, gender, sex or sexuality, even if this was a one-off incident and you don't consider it to be bullying, it's important to alert the school as it may point to a wider issue in the school that needs to be addressed.



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HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD IF THEY ARE BEING BULLIED?

If your child is being bullied, don't panic. Your key role is listening, calming and providing reassurance that the situation can get better when action is taken.

This is where an understanding of the definition of bullying, relational conflict and banter will be useful, so that you are able to discuss with your child what they have experienced and consider the best approach.

1. Listen and reassure them that coming to you was the right thing to do. Try and establish the facts. It can be helpful to take notes of what your child says, particularly names, dates, what happened and where it happened. Keep any evidence such as pictures of injuries or screenshots of online messages.
2. Assure them that the bullying is not their fault and that they have family that will support them.
3. 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.
4. Request a meeting to discuss the situation with your child's teacher or Headteacher - or the lead adult wherever the bullying is taking place. Remember, every child has a right to a safe environment in which to learn and play. See page 6 for more detailed information about working with the school or setting to resolve a bullying situation.
5. Encourage your child to get involved in activities that build their confidence and esteem, and help them to form friendships both inside and outside of school.



WHAT IF MY CHILD HAS BEEN BULLYING OTHERS?

Children are developing physically, emotionally, and socially and need our help to understand how to behave towards others and when they have crossed a line. For some children it may be particularly difficult to regulate their behaviour or actions, and they may need additional support. Others might be copying prejudicial or harmful behaviour they have learnt from others. **What is important is that we recognise this type of behaviour and endeavour to stop it, and where we have hurt others, learn to take action to put things right.**

If you have been told by others that your child is showing bullying behaviour, it is important to:

1. Stay calm, and ask for examples of the things they have said or done, and the impact this has had on others.
2. Take time to listen to your child's side of the story - but keep an open mind.
3. Remember we are all capable of bullying behaviour: try not to see it as a permanent reflection of their character, but make clear the behaviour you would like to change. Talk about the impact this has had on others and encourage empathy.
4. Make sure they are not bullying others in retaliation for bullying they have suffered.
5. Help your child to realise that no one has the right to pressure them into something they don't want to do - this includes bullying others.
6. Discuss whether there is anything that has upset or hurt them that might have led to that behaviour.
7. Talk about what needs to change about their behaviour, and the actions they can take to show they are sorry.



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8. Make it clear that you do not tolerate the use of disrespectful and hurtful language and behaviour as a family (it's vital that you model this as parents).



Many children who bully others are in a difficult place themselves and will need help to explore how they are feeling, what led to the behaviour, and what needs to change.

Ultimately you are not the first, and you will not be the last, parent to have to face this. Don't blame yourself - today is the time for change.

WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL

It can be a worrying or daunting experience to contact your child's school about a bullying incident, but remember that schools in the UK have a legal duty to prevent all forms of bullying and harassment. When approaching a school (or other setting) about bullying, here are our top tips:

1. **Familiarise yourself with the school's approach:**

Your child's schools should have an anti-bullying policy or strategy (sometimes found within their behaviour policy) which should detail their general approach to bullying, including how to report it and their procedure for responding to it. You should be able to access this on their website or you can contact them to send it, which they must provide you with by law. Familiarise yourself with this document so that you know what to expect when working with the school.



2. **Prioritise working together to address the bullying:**

While it's natural to feel upset and angry, it's crucial to approach the school with a calm demeanour and concentrate on collaborating to resolve the issue. This may be the first time they become aware of the problem, so be realistic about what you want them to do depending on the context of the situation. Remember that the school may have a different view of the situation and it is important to keep an open mind. The school should look into the allegations, take reasonable steps to stop the bullying and support those involved.



3. **Keep a record:** It is advisable to keep a record or log of what your child has told you - if you have this, bring it to the meeting at the school. At the meeting, ask for a timeframe for action to take place, and make notes of what you do, the date, to whom you speak and what they say and do.



4. **Include your child:** It is vital for your child to feel included in any discussions that have happened or actions that have been agreed, even if they aren't present at meetings with the school. Prior to any meetings, ask your child what they would like to happen next, and bring that information to the meeting. If your child isn't present at the meeting, reassure them afterwards of what was discussed, and make sure they are aware of any actions that were agreed and any timeframes. If they are the target of the bullying, they may need to be reminded that what happened to them is not OK, and that they have done the right thing in reporting the bullying. If they are the person bullying others, they may need support in exploring how they are feeling, what led to the behaviour, and what needs to change.



5. **Check in:** You may be able to tell from your child's behaviour whether the issue has been resolved or if it might be continuing after you have reported it to the school. Check in with your child to find out if they are happy with how things have been resolved, or if they still have any worries. The school may contact you to check in in the months following the incident. If they don't and you are still concerned about your child, you may want to contact them to ensure agreed actions have been completed, and that there have been no further issues at school.



What should the school be doing?

Your child's school is required by law to determine measures to encourage and promote good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying. Headteachers also have powers to respond to bullying outside of school premises. If you have concerns with the way your child's school handles bullying, it might be helpful to refer to government guidance about bullying: [click to view for England, Wales or Northern Ireland](#).

Most of the time schools are willing and able to manage concerns about bullying but sometimes children and their parents and carers feel that the school are not listening and that they need to take further action. [See our website page about making a complaint about bullying](#)



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