

Beating Bullying

Bullying is not just a problem for a minority of children; it is a widespread problem that can tragically affect **1 in 3** young people. Bullying is not the same as disputes and squabbles between friends – though these can sometimes cross the line. It is repetitive behaviour, done over a period of time, to deliberately harm, harass or hurt someone. As new kinds of technology emerge, cyber bullying is also becoming more common – this is where people are targeted over the Internet or on mobile phones.

Bullying can affect anyone and can have devastating effects for children in terms of feelings of self-worth, self-confidence, school performance, and in the worst cases it can lead some young people to contemplate suicide.

Beatbullying is the leading bullying prevention charity in the UK. It gives the following advice for parents and carers on how to tackle bullying.

Recognising signs of bullying

Some of the effects of bullying are easy to spot even without being told that bullying is taking place, but others are less obvious. Here are some signs to look out for if you think your child is being bullied. By picking up on these clues, you can then raise the subject of bullying with your child if they haven't been able to speak to you about it yet.

- Signs of emotional distress – nervousness, anxiety, being withdrawn, tearful, aggressive, depressed or lacking in confidence
- Bruises or scratching on a young person or attempts to hide physical injury
- Torn or damaged clothing
- Unusual bed wetting
- Fear of going to school – excuses of illness often made to avoid going to school
- Coming home without money or belongings that they should have

- Having trouble with school work or grades for no apparent reason
- Lack of interest in doing things they would usually want to do

If your child shows one or more of these indicators he or she is not necessarily being bullied. However, these signs are a good indication that something is causing them difficulty and distress. They are your cue to try and find out what is wrong and support and help your child with any problems that they may be experiencing.

How to talk to your child about bullying

If you have recognised some of the above signs and you think that your child could be being bullied, find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted to speak to them. Tell them that you are worried about them, explain why you are worried and let them know that you are there to listen. The following are some more guidelines on how to talk to your child:

- 1. Praise them for talking to you.** Being bullied is not an easy thing to admit to, so praise them for telling you about it.
- 2. Listen without judging.** Children will have many fears, for example that you will think they are 'weak' or will be angry at them. Be sensitive to your child's feelings and reassure them that it is not their fault that they are being bullied. Be careful not to show any anger you might be feeling. Try not to interrupt and ask them to tell you about what's happening in their own words.
- 3. Let them know that they have a right to get help.** Let them know that they have the right to stop what is happening to them. Tell them that you are there to support them, and will work alongside them to get help from school staff.

How to help



How to help if your child is being bullied

If your child has been brave enough to tell you that they have been bullied, you will probably feel very angry and upset. The following are some pointers on what to do:

- **Try not to fly off the handle.** You may be so angry that you want to sort things out yourself. But this just might make things worse. Try and keep a calm and level head.
- **Ask your child what they want to happen next.** Can you both agree some first steps? It is important that you work together and that your child is happy with things you do to help. If you do things behind your child's back they may stop telling you things.
- **Start small.** Can you and your child think of ways to stop the bullying? If your child is bullied on the way to school for example, can they take a different route?
- **Don't ignore things in the hope they'll go away.** It's best to address bullying before things get any worse.

If you are worried about your child, you can always let them know that they can talk to other young people trained to give advice on bullying, or a fully qualified counsellor, at www.cybermentors.org.uk.

Working with schools to tackle bullying

Step 1: Meet your child's teacher

If your son or daughter is being bullied at school, a good first step is to meet one of your child's teachers, along with your child. If your child is at primary school, the best person is usually their class teacher. If they are at secondary school, your son or daughter may want to approach their form teacher, teacher of a certain subject, a favourite teacher, or someone who deals with bullying.

Together with the teacher, you can address what is going on and the school should set out what they will do to address any conflict between pupils. You should ask to see the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and find out what the school should be doing to deal with bullying effectively.

Step 2: Meet with your child's Head Teacher

If you don't think that the bullying problem has been resolved, make an appointment with the Head Teacher. Again, you should mention the school's Anti-Bullying Policy – and ask the Head what practical steps the school is taking to follow it.

Together with the Head Teacher, you can agree on how you, your child and the school can work together to deal with the bullying. You can set some action points which should be recorded by you or the Head Teacher in writing. It's a good idea to follow-up any meeting with these agreed actions set down in writing.

Step 3: Taking things further

If you still feel that the bullying has not been dealt with, you can ask the school for the contact details of the Board of Governors. They make sure the school carries out its duties properly. You can write to them telling your story of what has happened so far and why you still think that there is a problem. They will hopefully help you and the school sort things out.

If this doesn't help, you can contact the education department at your local council. They should investigate what has happened, and advise you and the school what should happen next to resolve the problem.

Step 4: More contacts

If you have been through all of the previous steps and you are unhappy with how things have turned out, then the following people might also be able to help: your local MP, your Local Government Ombudsman, Ofsted, and the Department for Education. For more details, and information on your legal rights, visit www.beatbullying.org and click on the 'help' tab.

Cyber bullying



Bullying outside of school

Schools should be able to deal with bullying on the way to and from school, especially if pupils are in their school uniform. Schools can find it difficult to deal with bullying at weekends or in school holidays, but if it involves children from the same school, you should still report it. If the bullying is serious and a crime has been committed, then you should contact the police.

Cyber bullying

The most common ways of cyber bullying are through abusive text messages, live 'chat' rooms on the Internet and through messaging on sites like Facebook.

Bullying in any of these ways, or on the school email system, should be covered by the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and their 'Acceptable Usage' Policy for mobile phones and the Internet. This means you can talk to your school if you think they are not doing enough to protect your child from cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying can be more traumatic than 'physical' bullying in many ways and messages about someone can be put on a website for the whole school and more people to see. Young people often do not know who is behind cyber bullying as people try to hide behind fake usernames. The below are tips to help protect your child from cyber bullying:

- **Encourage your child to speak out.** Let your child know you are there for them if they are ever cyber bullied. Encourage them to talk to you about this kind of problem, but also let them know that they can turn to a teacher, friend or a CyberMentor.
- **Talk about privacy settings.** Ask your child if they have their privacy settings set to 'high' on websites like Facebook that they use. Can they change them if not?

- **Tell your child to block and save any messages or 'posts'.** Advise your child to 'block' people who have sent abusive messages and to save and print messages as evidence.
- **Advise your child to report cyber bullying to the website they are on.** Your child can report any abusive messages they get by clicking on 'report' buttons on sites like Facebook. Together you can contact the company who provides your Internet or a phone company if relevant, who may be able to help. If your child gets messages of a sexual nature, they should report this to CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk/report-abuse).
- **Advise your child to never meet strangers they've spoken to online.** They should never go to meet people they have met on the Internet without you or another known adult present.
- **Pass on Internet safety tips.** Your child should not give out their personal details online. They should keep their passwords private and never give out their full name, mobile phone numbers, addresses, where they go to school or post pictures of themselves. All of this information could help bullies target them.

How do I know if my child is a bully?

Children who are bullying are highly unlikely to talk about their behaviour, either because they are afraid of your reaction or because they don't believe that what they're doing is wrong.

As parents and carers, we hope that children in our care can talk to us if they are having problems, if they are in trouble or if something is making them scared or miserable. However, even if you have a good relationship with your child this can be difficult.

About Beatbullying

There are many reasons why a child might bully someone else. Often young people bully because they are being bullied and harassed in some way themselves. This may be at school of course, but it can also happen at home. Other children bully because they think it makes them look popular, or because their friends are doing it and they're scared that if they don't do it first, it will happen to them. Some young people do it because they are angry about something going on in their own lives, whilst others are simply copying behaviour they have seen themselves.

See www.beatbullying.org and click on the 'help' tab for information on signs that your child might display if they are bullying and what to do if this is the case.

About Beatbullying

Beatbullying is the UK's leading anti-bullying charity (registered no. 1097631), and is currently the only charity funded by the UK Government to deliver bullying prevention programmes across the country.

Beatbullying runs CyberMentors – the first online peer-mentoring programme. Here, 'peer-to-peer' support and education, as well as professional counselling, is accessible in 'real time' through a safe, purpose built social networking site.

In the past eight years, Beatbullying has worked with more than 1.6 million children and young people. It has been recognised time and time again for its expertise in anti-bullying work. Beatbullying's programmes are independently proven to reduce incidents of bullying by an average of 40%.

Beatbullying has been named Charity of the Year twice, in 2005 and 2006, and Children's Charity of the Year in 2005.

To support Beatbullying and its work with young people, please visit www.beatbullying.org.

More information

To read more advice for parents, carers and teachers visit www.beatbullying.org and click on the 'help' tab.

Young people affected by bullying can visit www.cybermentors.org.uk to chat to trained people their own age, Beatbullying staff and fully qualified counsellors. The site is safe and secure and there is advice on staying safe online in the 'Safety Centre' including a guide on how to report bullying across different social networking sites.

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