



## TALK ABOUT BULLYING

Some helpful information for parents

Many parents become concerned about bullying at some stage in their child's education. Bullying can seriously affect the quality of learning and causes misery in the lives of the children involved.

What is bullying?

One useful definition of bullying is:-

"the wilful, conscious, desire, time and again to hurt, threaten or frighten someone who is unable to defend themselves".

However, finding a definition which children understand is more difficult. One teacher, in a school following a whole school policy approach to health and safety, found that her class came up with twenty-six definitions of a bully. There are many forms of bullying. We are all probably familiar with the image of a bully as a person bigger, stronger and more aggressive than others. This can be misleading as name calling, taunting, threatening and isolating can be every bit as distressing as being attacked physically.

Bullies tend to be assertive and have aggressive attitudes. They cannot imagine what their victim feels, and don't feel guilty. They may even feel that their victim deserves what they get!

The traditional stereotype of a bigger child, who may be inadequate in some way, bullying the smaller or younger child can also be misleading, as pupils who bully are not always this easily recognised. Relying on the stereotype may mean that children are not believed if the accused bully does not fit the description.

Bullies themselves may be victims of abuse or neglect. They may feel inadequate, stupid or humiliated. They need help to face the consequences of their actions and to relate to those they bully.

Who is bullied?

Bullies pick on vulnerable children but it is difficult for adults to judge who is vulnerable.

Although some children are picked on more than others, at some time and in particular situations virtually any child could become a victim.

Victims may be anyone who is:

- | a newcomer;
- | different in appearance or speech;
- | known to react in a particular way when bullied, for example by having a tantrum;
- | simply in the wrong group e.g. a boy/girl, someone who is more or less successful academically; lives in a particular street or area; of a different colour; or a supporter of a different team.

How do parents know?

Parents may suspect that their child is a victim from the child's behaviour. Some children might be frightened to walk to and from school, or to go to school at all. They might begin to do badly in school work, lose possessions or money without good reason.

What can parents do about bullying?

Parents can ask the child directly and take bullying seriously. They should not agree to keep bullying a secret. They can talk to the teacher or head teacher about the problem. It is important to be seen to take action as bullying thrives in an atmosphere of secrecy. Onlookers need to see that action against bullies is effective to dissuade them from joining in.

Bullies often provide false excuses for incidents. But, it's worth asking:- if it was just for a laugh, was everyone laughing? If it was a game, was everyone enjoying it? If it was an accident, did everyone help, get assistance or offer sympathy?

Your child, the bully!

If you suspect your child may be a bully what can you do? Try to find out why the child is bullying and get as much information about the situation as possible, from others as well if necessary. Ensure that the victim receives an apology, and try to help your child find something he/she is good at to improve his/her self-image.

What can schools do?

A school which says "bullying isn't an issue here" is probably wrong, but there is no simple solution. It is a complex and variable problem so each school needs to develop its own policy.

There is a difficulty for many pupils in knowing the difference between telling tales and reporting bullying, and this can hamper progress if it is not acknowledged. A successful policy needs recognition that there might be a problem, open condemnation of bullying and an encouragement to discuss worries and fears. Policies developed with the involvement of teachers, pupils and parents will also have a greater chance of success. Publicity and posters are good ways of bringing problems to the notice of those concerned, and prompting ideas for solutions.

Further Information



The [Antibullying network](http://www.antibullying.net) is a great source of information and advice. You can download various Scottish Executive leaflets and ABN sheets from their website on [www.antibullying.net](http://www.antibullying.net) or you can write to them at:

Anti-Bullying Network, Moray House of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ.

They also have a helpline which provides information on how bullying can be tackled and where to go for advice. It can be contacted, Monday to Friday, 9.30am - 12.30pm and 2.00pm - 4.30pm during term-time, on 0131-651 6100 or email [abn@education.ed.ac.uk](mailto:abn@education.ed.ac.uk)

You can also contact the following helplines:

- | Childline run a freephone bullying helpline, available Monday to Friday 3.30 pm to 9.30 pm, on 0800 44 1111
- | Parentline is a free and confidential helpline for parents and carers. Their number is 0800 800 2222

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