Talking About Bullying

Support guide for parents and carers

Bullying can have a significant impact on a child's emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing. As practitioners, we can support parents and carers to address the issue of bullying with their child.

This guide provides suggestions and practical steps to help families understand what to do if their child is being bullied or is showing bullying behaviour, and how to address cyberbullying.

What is bullying?

In order to offer the best support to your child, it's essential to understand what is meant by 'bullying'.

While most children and young people will occasionally have issues with their friends and peers, bullying is:

- Intentional
- Sustained
- Repetitive



Bullying can be verbal, such as teasing, mocking, or making threats, or physical, such as kicking, punching, or slapping. It can happen in-person or online, also known as cyberbullying.

Some children may not disclose what is happening to them, so it's important to be alert to signs of suspected bullying.

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What to do if your child is being bullied

It can be upsetting to discover that your child is being bullied, either at school, online, or somewhere else. You can sometimes struggle to know what to do, especially if you are not sure exactly what is going on.

These suggestions can help you address the issue of bullying and enable you to best support your child.

1 Make time to actively listen to your child

Often, simply listening can be an effective way to open up a discussion around bullying, to find out what might be worrying your child.

- Create a safe and open environment where your child feels comfortable talking about their experiences.
- Stay calm and avoid reacting with anger, judgement or panic. This will help your child feel heard and supported.
- Let them share their feelings without interruption and reassure them that it's not their fault.

2 Be alert to subtle signs of bullying

Sometimes, children are reluctant to talk openly about being bullied so it's important to be alert to any changes, physically, emotionally, or behaviourally:

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- Unexplained injuries, like bruises or cuts
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Reluctance to attend school
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Feelings of low self-worth or self-confidence
- Decline in academic performance
- Increased anxiety or emotional distress

3 Establish open communication channels

Not all children will want to discuss what is going on in their lives, but it's still vital to set up clear communication channels.

- Encourage dialogue and reassure your child that you are always available to speak to them and listen to them.
- Through discussion, develop strategies such as walking away or seeking help from a trusted adult.
- Stay involved and regularly check in with your child about how things are going at their school, setting, or service.

4 Seek professional support and guidance

It is advisable to involve staff from your child's school or service, and seek further support and guidance.

- Contact your child's teacher, head of year, or the member of staff who deals with bullying.
- Provide specific information about when and where the bullying happens.
- Ensure there are clear policies and procedures in place to address bullying, and ask how staff plan to handle the situation.

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What to do if your child is bullying others

Seeing your child show bullying behaviour can be hard to accept. You may feel upset and disappointed by their behaviour, worry you are somehow to blame for it, or feel frustrated because you have taught them that bullying is never okay.

It's important not to jump to conclusions, but instead allow your child to share their perspective. That way, you can decide on the best next steps.

1 Understand what is driving the bullying behaviour

Bullying behaviour can mask worries and anxieties or be a sign that your child needs support. Understanding why they are behaving this way can help you find the best ways to support them.

- Have open conversations. Talk about why bullying is harmful and help your child reflect on their actions.
- Discuss feelings of power, control, and empathy, to help them understand the impact their behaviour has on others.
- Take a holistic approach to see what else is going on in their life, for example exam stress, peer pressure.

2 Collaborate and take decisive action

As soon as you become aware that your child is involved in bullying behaviour, it's important to take swift action to address it.

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- Set clear boundaries, making sure your child understands that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- Encourage positive behaviour. Reinforce behaviours by acknowledging when your child behaves in a kind, compassionate, and inclusive way.

3 Help your child build positive relationships

The ability to build strong relationships and understand how behaviour impacts other people can help reduce the likelihood of your child bullying someone else.

- Encourage your child to participate in group activities and hobbies where they can form positive relationships with others.
- Talk to your child about respecting differences and embracing diversity, and how to relate to others in a kind and inclusive way.

4 Seek professional support and guidance

You can involve staff from your child's school or service and seek further support and guidance.

- Contact your child's teacher, head of year, or the member of staff who deals with bullying.
- Enquire about interventions to help children who bully others develop empathy and learn better ways to communicate and interact.

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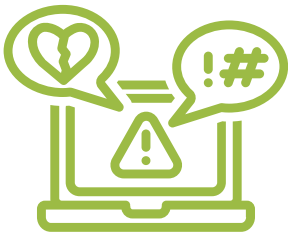
Guidance on cyberbullying

Online bullying, or cyberbullying, is when perpetrators use the internet or other technology to harass their victims. This can happen publicly for others to see, for example on social media, or privately, for example by emailing or texting.

Cyberbullying may include:

- Sending hurtful or threatening comments
- Sending inappropriate or sexual images, or asking for them
- Spreading rumours online
- Posting embarrassing images or videos without consent
- Posting private information online without consent
- Impersonating someone online or tampering with their profile

Signs of cyberbullying



It's not always easy to spot when your child is being bullied online, especially if you do not have access to their devices. However, these are some common signs to look out for:

- Appearing distressed or anxious after being online
- Increase in anxiety or low mood generally
- Avoiding social situations or meeting up with friends
- Reluctance to attend school
- Being secretive about mobile phone or device use
- Increase in emotional outbursts
- Withdrawing or self-isolating
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Self-harming behaviour

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Addressing cyberbullying

Many of the ways you can address cyberbullying are the same as those you would use to address bullying that happens in person: keep communication channels open, listen to your child without judgement, help them build strong relationships, understand what is driving the behaviour, and explore ways to seek further help and support.

It can be tricky to address cyberbullying as it happens online and children and young people may not share what they are experiencing on their phone or device. However, there are some steps you can take that relate specifically to cyberbullying.



1 Open up lines of communication

- Have conversations about online safety. Regularly talk to your child about what they do online, who they interact with, and what to do if they experience or witness cyberbullying.
- Establish trust. Encourage your child to come to you if they encounter bullying online and reassure them that they won't get into trouble for reporting it.

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2 Help your child respond to cyberbullying

- Block and report. Show your child how to block the bully and report inappropriate behaviour on social media platforms and gaming sites.
- Save evidence. Encourage your child to save screenshots or messages as evidence if they experience online bullying.
- Avoid retaliation. Advise your child not to respond to the bully as this may escalate the situation.

3 Get in touch with the relevant authorities

- Many social media platforms have procedures in place for reporting cyberbullying. Encourage your child to use these tools to report harmful content.
- If the bullying is severe or threatening, contact the police. Cyberbullying can be a criminal offence, particularly if it involves threats of violence or harassment.

Addressing bullying requires a collaborative effort between parents and carers, children and young people, and schools, services and settings.
Whether your child is experiencing bullying, engaging in bullying behaviour, or encountering cyberbullying, early intervention and ongoing support are key to resolving the issue.

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