

Understanding bullying

What is bullying Bullying can be defined as verbally, physically and emotionally inflicting unwanted pain and suffering. In other words, bullying can be described as a forceful assertion of power or control through aggression. It is **deliberate behaviour** and often **repeated over a long time**.



It can happen **anywhere** and at **any time**. Bullying can take place in the classroom, the playground, around the school lavatories or even at home.

Often **peer pressure** is responsible for this type of behaviour. It can hurt a child both **physically** and **emotionally**. Bullying that happens online, whether through social media sites, **chatrooms**, **Whatsapp**, **Facebook** or just through **text messages** is called **cyberbullying**. This is very waring because a child feels like there is **no escape** from their ordeal. Indeed because of modern communication cyberbullying can take place at **any time of day or night**.



Bullying includes

Verbal abuse, such as name calling and gossiping

Non-verbal abuse, such as hand signs or text messages

Emotional abuse, such as threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone

Exclusion, such as ignoring or isolating someone

Undermining, by constant criticism or spreading rumours

Controlling or manipulating someone

Racial, Religious, sexual or homophobic bullying

Physical assaults, such as hitting and pushing

Making silent, hoax or abusive calls

Online or cyberbullying.



Signs of bullying It can be hard for parents to know whether or not a child is being bullied. A child may well **keep quiet** about it because they're **scared** the bullying will get worse. They might think that they **deserve to be bullied**, or that it's **their fault**. It is often difficult for teachers or parents to detect what is bullying behaviour if it is well disguised. But some of the signs include:

Being afraid to go to school, being "sick" too often in order to skip class

Belongings getting "lost"

Books and clothes being torn

Physical injuries such as unexplained bruises

Not doing as well at school

Asking for money to give to a bully or even stealing it

Being particularly nervous

Losing confidence

Becoming easily distressed and withdrawn

Problems with eating or sleeping

Bullying others

Who is affected by bullying Nearly all children will be affected by bullying in some way. They might be a **victim** of bullying, they might **bully others**, or they may **witness bullying**. Even if they aren't directly affected, it's likely **they'll know** another child who is bullied or who bullies others.



How bullying happens Any child can be bullied. It usually happens over a period of time, rather than a single event. However, every single incident instills **fear** and **anxiety** for the future. It occurs mostly today in or around **peer group settings**, either at school or via the internet or social media. It can be when children either **don't fit into a set group** or are **pushed out**, or have a **falling out** with another child. There are many ways in which bullying manifests itself and goes unnoticed from the **physical** disguised as 'hard play' to '**name calling**' passed off as 'extreme teasing'.

It can happen to people who are different It happens too as a result of **competition** with others, in situations where children are **forced to mix** with others they don't get along with, or just because they are **different in some way** to the rest of the group. They can have **learning difficulties**, be **disabled**, or just even **super bright** or **attractive**.

The consequences Some children who are bullied are able to **bounce back** from their experiences but they mostly **need help** in order to do so. Otherwise they may become anxious and hypersensitive. If this happens, they are likely to **lose confidence** and the ability to **concentrate**. Bullied children may **perform poorly** at school and **appear timid**, which may in turn **encourage** more bullying. The effects of bullying and the pain of this form of rejection can lead to **depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems**. Some cases have resulted in anorexia, alcoholism, a significant change in personality and even suicidal tendencies. The impact may well carry through to **adult life**. Adults who have suffered while at school or during the years just following it often report **confidence issues** as a result. Others who have had their school disrupted by bullying pay heavily by having **not reached** their academic potential and fulfilled their ambitions.



The difference between banter and bullying Teasing and intimidation are not the same. And it is **not possible** to protect children from all the rough and tumbles of modern life and community living, nor is it always advisable to do so. They have to learn to **integrate** in the world around them and find **their special niche**. However, bullying is a **very serious** matter. It has become more intense, more prevalent and more insidious **since the advent of the internet and social media age**. Therefore, **we must all work and stand up together** to reduce and confront bullying whenever we come across it.

Stand up together Often bullies want to **isolate** their victims before they bully them. Bullies rely on the fact that most people will not want to get **involved** for fear of the consequences. If you are **aware** of bullying and you do **nothing** you are **condoning** bullying and the bullying will spread and **increase**. Next time it might, be **you?** It only takes **one person** to say '**no**' first to give others **confidence** and then together you will all have the combined **confidence** to **stand up** and say **no to bullying**, only then it will begin to **reduce**.



What if my child is a bully?

Most advice today is about how to cope with bullying. But **common sense** decrees there must be someone on the other side of the behaviour. Parents, quite understandably, are **loathe to admit their child** is the one actually doing the bullying. It conjures pictures of hoodlums and gangsters. This is not how **we tend to see** our own children. In fact some bullies present very differently. Bullying and **aggressive behaviour** is present in modern society right across the board. Life is **less formal** than it used to be. Children are often **reflecting** what they see around them. Football violence, competitive work place practices and the struggle for daily economic survival can bring out the worst in adults too.

So the first thing that parents should do is **accept** no family is totally immune from hearing that their child is a **bully**.

However there is much that can be done from a **home point of view** if your son or daughter is being accused of upsetting other children in this way. Let's dispel the myths. Not all bullies are **oversized and underprivileged**. Bullies come in all shapes and sizes, as do their victims. And today, **physical fighting** is not the only assault weapon of choice. It can be **internet-based**, or **ganging up** behaviour to **isolate others**. It may be they are using **threats of retaliation** on their victims to get them to do what they want and **exploit their power** over them. Bullies can be **highly intelligent** and use wide-ranging and **psychologically based** ploys. Or, if not, they can be **deeply insecure** (and in need of **extra academic tuition**) and find being **verbally abusive** highly effective in getting **their own way** over children who are more academically gifted.

What degree of bullying traits is being displayed? **Behaviour** can range widely from **making nasty comments** at school to **physical attacks** on other students. If you mark these from 1 to 10, with the lowest number being more minor incidents, you will be able to assess the **seriousness of the situation**.

Consider at these areas

Check their social reference points Today's society promotes many examples of powerful people **exerting their strength** over others as 'cool'. TV soaps which are written around heightened drama and conflict that promote **aggression** as the normal way to behave. Clearly **it is not**. What do they watch on TV? What games are they playing **online**? Are you **comfortable** with it? If not, don't ban it completely, but maybe **suggest** some old movies or comedy shows. Research clearly shows that aggression on television can have **an impact on mood** and also encourage **copycat behaviour**.

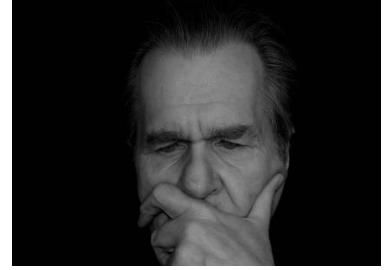


Check At Home 'Not in front of the children' is the saying that springs to mind. When parents use **threats of violence** as a form of discipline, often so will their children. Or maybe there is a brother or sister, even a younger sibling, who they are **modelling on**. Is someone in the family particularly **critical or abusive**? Maybe you are not even **aware** of it. Or is a parent going through **money stress** which is causing your child to **act out** in the same way at school.

Bullying behaviour can be a cry out from children who feel **angry, helpless and worried**. Sometimes it is because they have been **victims** too and have found bullying back is the best way to survive a **competitive** school society. Get to the bottom of their concerns. Help them to plan for a different approach. They may well be seeking **your approval** all along and using this behaviour to **attention-seek**.



Accept the Fact If it has been brought to your attention that your child is bullying, there is probably **some truth** in it. Even if the bullying is minor. They need **parental guidance** to overcome the stigma of being labelled this way. **Talk through** thoroughly all the small details **leading up** to the incidents being flagged up. This is vital before you have any meeting with the school. Let your child know that if you go into the school you are primarily on **their side**, but you need to **correct** their bullying behaviour as well for **their own** good.



Tell Them to Stop Human beings are **social creatures**. Explain to them that anyone who bullies people ultimately **loses their friends**. While they may pay lip service to it, those around them grow **wary and fearful** of being dropped or **threatened** and eventually avoid them altogether. **Peer popularity** is a powerful tool, because it is how we are programmed.



Talk it Through Asking questions about **specific situations** is the best way to start building up a picture of what is going on. Why does he or she **feel the need** to put the other person down/nag/criticise? Does your child have friends who **join in** when this is going on? **Tell a story** using a situation which has happened to you, either now or in the past, to make your child realise **the pain** that is incurred when they bully others. Were you the **victim** of a bully as a child? Or are you encountering bullying **at work**? Children will always remember tales that resonate, particularly if it comes from their **mother, father or guardian**.



Don't Play-Act It can be very **disturbing** to be told your child is acting in a bullying manner. However, don't lose your **temper**. Many parents feel that they can **play-act** to show what a bullied child goes through, but this is **not helpful**. Your child is looking for **new references**. So instead, explain as calmly as possible how the victim **must feel**. Let your child know that you are **disappointed** by their conduct, but also how you want to **help them** change it.

