



Bullying

Bullying takes on many forms, from name calling to manipulative behaviour and physical threats, and more recently by text messages or on social networking sites. It is important to realise that every bullying experience is unique, and while this guide offers a summary of ways to deal with bullying, further information needs to be sought in each individual situation.

As an adult, it is sometimes difficult to know when you are being reprimanded and when you are the victim of office bullying, so it's easy to understand how children are often in a position where they don't realise they are being bullied, but they know they are unhappy with the people around them or the situation.

As a parent, the signs to look for are not always as visual as bruises, or frequently missing /destroyed property. The side effects of bullying are often manifested in physical illness (head and stomach aches) real or imagined, difficulty sleeping due to worry or nightmares, a change in school performance levels, negative feelings toward themselves or life in general, or a sudden change in friendship circles.

These symptoms are not exclusive to bullying nor are they exhaustive but they do give you somewhere to start.



Cyber bullying

Not all bullying is physical or verbal - cyber bullying is on the increase. Cyberbullying is any form of bullying which takes place online or through your mobile phone. Unfortunately nowadays, especially with increased use of social media, online gaming, and mobile phones, most young people will experience cyberbullying at some time. Children can become the target of cyberbullying, or can all too easily become a cyber-bully themselves.

Like all bullying, cyberbullying can have a devastating impact on a child's confidence, happiness and self-esteem. These effects can be long lasting, and may have a negative impact on a child's performance at school.

Sometimes, children are bullied online by people they have met face-to-face, or even friends. Bullies may use online technology because it's more difficult to recognise senders, while others may take part by circulating videos and emails. For all involved, it can get out of hand very quickly as it's not easy to identify who is responsible, and children may find themselves caught up in the cyber mob mentality.

Coping mechanisms

Everyone deals with being bullied differently, but according to a study by the Child Development Journal there are three main coping mechanisms invoked to cope with the pressures surrounding being bullied:

- Some children will actively **seek out new friends** in an attempt to counter the feeling of isolation associated with bullying
- Others will **look for approval** from their peer groups by being the best, the coolest or the most popular, often pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable
- Children may seek to be **model citizens**, drawing no attention to themselves, but assimilating to the perceived average. These children want to avoid embarrassment as well as praise or criticism.

How do you help a child who is being bullied?

It's every parent's worst nightmare to find out that their child is being bullied, but knowing ways to help can make the situation easier for both of you.

Offline

- **Talk to your child**, and reassure them that they haven't done anything wrong to deserve to be treated in this way. It isn't uncommon for children to feel as though they deserve this treatment so regular reassurance is vital
- If you can see that your child is struggling to talk, **don't pressurise** them. Let them know that you will always be there for them when they feel ready to talk
- Ensure you **liaise with the school** and obtain the name of a teacher that your child can go to if they feel frightened
- **Encourage your child** to always stay with friends to avoid them being targeted on their own
- **Introduce other strategies** to help them cope - writing things down or drawing pictures will mean that they have a release for their feelings which might avoid bottling things up
- Try some **role play** with them and act out a scenario with their toys; this might help you to get a clearer perspective on what might be going on
- Encourage them to **talk about their feelings**. Short sharp bursts and a calm environment are vital but don't be put off if you don't get results straightaway
- Never insist that your child stands up to bullies. No two children are the same and this might actually put your child under additional pressure
- If your child is older, think about whether an **assertiveness workshop** might help. Kidscape, based in London, offer free one day workshops for children between the ages of 9 and 15; children will learn strategies to help them deal with bullying and will be around others who have been through similar experiences
- Lots of children **chat with mentors**; we suggest BullyingUK or Childline for advice if you think it would help.



Online

- Where possible, try to keep any computer or handheld devices in a room used by all the whole family and **monitor how much time** your child spends on the computer and encourage them to talk openly about what they're looking at
 - If you feel that you don't understand the technology or platforms your child uses, find ways to **familiarise yourself with computer and mobile technology**. Spending time with children looking at how websites function, and exploring how to block unwanted emails and the GPS facility is a good place to start - It's important to continue to increase this knowledge as children grow older and migrate from PCs to laptops and handheld devices
 - Talk to your children about **how, when and why** they use their mobile phone or internet
 - If your children seem distressed after a phone call or time spent on the internet, **try and find out the reasons** for this. Vulnerable children can become so consumed by negative online comments towards them, it is crucial that a sense of perspective and proportion is injected by a role model to avoid issues spiraling out of control.
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When your child is the bully

Whilst the focus is rightly on 'victims', it is important to work with the families of bullies is a preventative measure: parents and professionals must engage with children who bully and their parents. Doing so can help prevent hurtful behaviour towards others in the future, can avoid the social and financial cost of exclusion, and prevent the potential negative outcomes that are associated with bullying, such as future criminal behaviour.

Families may want to discuss the topics of pranks or malicious calls, text messages and emails, alongside what you and they can do if this happens. They can report it to you as a parent, or to a teacher if this happens at school or it's happening to a friend they know at school.

If you suspect your child may be engaging in bullying behaviour, you may want to discuss how they may feel if they were the person being ridiculed or humiliated.

You may also want to explore the reasons that explain why your child is displaying bullying behaviour - which can sometimes be a result of changes within the home - such as the loss of a relative, or if a divorce or separation is taking place. If talking to your child doesn't help, seek further help from family members, teachers or support lines.



Further information

For more information on topics related to bullying, please see the resources below.

Resource	Website	Contact
Tinies	www.tinies.com/our-favourites/ways-to-deal-with-bullying.html www.tinies.com/our-favourites/ways-to-deal-with-cyberbullying.html www.tinies.com/our-favourites/ways-to-find-support-if-your-child-is-a-bully.html	Telephone: 020 7384 0322 Email: info@tinies.com
Work+Family Group	www.linkedin.com/groups/Work-Family-4455201/about	N/A
Work+Family Place	www.facebook.com/workplusfamily	N/A
Family Lives	www.familylives.org.uk	Helpline: 0808 800 2222
BullyingUK	www.bullying.co.uk	Helpline: 0808 800 2222
Childline	www.childline.org.uk	Helpline: 0800 1111
CyberMentors	archive.beatbullying.org/dox/what-we-do/cybermentors.html	N/A

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If you need any further advice please contact
My Family Care on 0845 676 7690 (UK) or +353 (0)1 513 3008 (RoI).
All information and advice contained in this factsheet are meant as guidance only.
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