

Bullying

Kids are often cruel to one another (and sometimes to their parents) and some adults say it's part and parcel of childhood. It's not: bullying is behaviour that in the adult world would often be regarded as criminal, and children who bully others need to be made aware that their behaviour is unacceptable.

What does bullying involve?

- Physical abuse – hitting, pushing, kicking, hair-pulling
- Verbal abuse – spreading untrue stories, calling names, unpleasant teasing
- Emotional abuse – cutting people off, tormenting, humiliating, using homophobic or racist language towards them
- Cyber abuse – cruel and threatening text messaging, sending scary or upsetting photos or posting them on websites, spreading rumours online

Tackling bullying advice

- Keep a log of any incidents that happen and make sure that you follow up any meetings with the school with a written letter. That way everyone is clear about exactly what is happening and when it happened. AJ2008
- Form a plan of action that your child agrees with. Children worry a lot that parents contacting the head could make things worse. Maybe start with a few self-help ideas that might be worth trying before getting other adults involved. Pointydog
- Contact the police, even if your child is not keen. My son hated that we contacted the police and was terrified of reprisals, but I was not prepared to sit back and see him come home in such a state every day. Wilts
- Would your child consider taking up a new hobby, such as drama or martial arts? Great for building self-confidence, and for meeting children from other backgrounds ie not just school mates. VioletBaudelaire

Children who are bullied often become anxious, depressed, don't want to go to school, achieve poorly and become socially isolated.

It's a very serious, and unpleasant problem, as one Mumsnetter describes:

"Tuesday night he was hit very hard with his own scooter, pushed to the ground, piled on by three lads and then had his face rubbed in the soil. One lad jumped on his back and simulated sex, saying repeatedly that 'I'm gonna rape you'. Then they pulled his trousers down when he tried to get away. At school, one of the lads makes little comments, winds my son up and he is also 'teased' a lot by other kids." TheMitsubishiWarriorress

What to do if your child is being bullied

Bullying affects children in both primary and secondary school. If you suspect it's happening to your child, you can:

- Talk to your child about it. Make it clear that you take the problem extremely seriously. Don't agree to keep it a secret: explain to your child that bullying is behaviour that would be criminal if it involved grown-ups and that it's crucial to stop it – for other kids as well as for your own.

- Talk to your child's teacher and/or head. Ask to look at your school's anti-bullying policy, and ensure the steps outlined are being followed for your child.
- Help your child devise strategies for how to cope if there's trouble.
- Encourage friendships with other children in your child's class. Have more friends round for tea, do all you can to get your child invited to other houses.
- In extreme cases, don't rule out getting the police involved, especially as serious bullying is likely to be taking place off as well as on school premises. Several Mumsnetters have reported helpful action from the police.

What to do if your child is the bully

Bullying isn't always someone else's kids – you might find your own child is involved in cruelty to a classmate. If so, act fast – this is totally unacceptable behaviour and your child needs to be clear on that.

Admit, atone, apologise: your child needs to acknowledge what has happened, to understand it has been hurtful and harmful, and to say sorry for it.

Break the pattern: try to work out when bullying happens and what situations provoke your child so you can remove him from them or help him to get through them without resorting to horrible behaviour.

"I was really shocked when I was telephoned by school regarding my daughter and her behaviour. She was part of a group of girls and one of them had been increasingly left out of things or ignored. I think it had started as a bit of fun but had got out of hand. The school had dealt with it and we reinforced the message at home - that the behaviour was unpleasant and unacceptable and there was no excuse and no discussion. She was a bit subdued for a few days, as were the others in the group, but within a week it was all over and they were friends again." MrsWobble

Finally, do keep believing that even though bullying is an awful thing to be dealing with when it affects your family, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

"A year later and he has no more problems, is house captain and generally happy at school. There was a lingering issue around a hurtful nickname, which one of them invented, but I asked him yesterday and even that doesn't seem to be a problem now. He doesn't yet seem to have a best friend yet but he does seem happy at school now."

Christywhisty

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Bullying in schools: how to tackle it

Have you heard headteachers say "we have a zero-tolerance policy here", but found that nothing is being done to stop the bullying of your child?

Just telling children that bullying will not be tolerated is not the answer. Simply punishing the bully - while it may make the victim feel temporarily better - is insufficient. Bullying may become more secretive or new targets could be selected.

There is no magic formula that can, at a stroke, change human behaviour, but by asking badly bullied pupils how effective they think their school is at dealing with bullying, the [Bullying Intervention Group](#) (BIG) has come up with a blueprint.

Signs a school is ineffective at dealing with bullying

- Pupils don't know if there is an Anti-Bullying Policy or not
- Pupils, parents and staff aren't engaged in the approach together
- There is too much reliance on assemblies and lessons to spread the anti-bullying message
- Pupils aren't trained to support each other
- There are low levels of e-safety teaching
- Little is done to teach pupils to respect people who are different
- Bullying on the way to or from school is not dealt with
- It is not easy to report bullying
- There are poor strategies in place for when bullying was reported, so that telling often makes it worse (in ineffective schools, 51% of those who did report bullying said it made it worse and for 38% it stayed the same)

Signs a school is effective at dealing with bullying

- Everyone is consulted on the anti-bullying policy, so they have a sense of ownership
- It's reviewed regularly to make sure it's still effective
- Pupils, staff and parents are engaged in the approach together
- Everyone knows how to report bullying
- Pupils are taught how to be safe online
- Pupils are taught to respect people who are different
- Pupils are trained to support each other, via schemes such as Playground Pals, Buddies or Peer Supporters
- Bullying on the journey to or from school are dealt with
- Incidents are far more likely to be resolved successfully

BIG has found that it is a combination of all these actions, and the way schools keep them going all year, that makes pupils feel safe - and confident that if bullying did occur, there was a good chance it would be dealt with.

Related pages

BIG looks for these criteria when it assesses schools for the national BIG award, given to schools that embed and maintain good bullying management practice.

If a school achieves this award, parents can feel reassured that there is some skilled focus on caring for their child's wellbeing (a list of award-winning schools is online).

What parents can do to promote effective anti-bullying tactics in schools

Obviously, good practice on bullying starts with the school, but there are many things you can do to encourage it, and to get involved yourself. Here are some areas which you should consider.

- **Get to grips with your school's anti-bullying policy**

All parents should have access to the school's anti-bullying policy. Is it on the website? Is it explained to new parents and pupils? Ask about it on your school visits.

On visiting a prospective school, ask up-front how they respond when bullying occurs. Do you like the sound of their approach? Schools will take notice if lots of parents ask these questions.

How up to date is the school's policy? Check when it was last reviewed and see if it includes e-safety and refers to the 2010 Equality Act.

Is there a child-friendly version of the policy, and does your child know about it? If not, ask when children will receive this. Your question could trigger action.

- **Find out who is in charge**

There should be a designated school governor with responsibility for behaviour and bullying - someone who oversees the reviews of policy and monitors the school's strategy. Ask who this person is, and when the next review is due if the policy appears out of date.

- **Call for action**

Ask your parents' representative to suggest setting up an Anti-Bullying Focus Group in school, on which pupils, staff and parents are represented, and which sets the strategy for the next term. This is recommended practice.

- **Talk to the children**

Check if your child's school runs anonymous pupil surveys to find out what pupils think.

- **Take a look at the reporting channels**

Ask how the school wants parents to report any concerns. Are there safe methods for pupils to report incidents, so that they don't get called a grass?