

For further information:

respectme, Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service

www.respectme.org.uk

ChildLine, a confidential helpline for children and young people

www.childline.org.uk

ParentLine, a confidential service for parents and carers

www.parentlinescotland.org.uk

HandsOnScotland, an online resource for anybody working with children and young people

www.handsonscotland.co.uk



T: 0844 800 8600

E: enquire@respectme.org.uk



Bullying...

**You can make
a difference**

**A practical
guide for
parents
and carers**

You can make a difference

Welcome

Bullying can have short and long-term effects on the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people. Low self-esteem is one of the most common impacts of bullying and can have damaging effects on a child or young person's aspirations, confidence and quality of life. Problems such as disengaging from schools, clubs and friends, to self-harm and eating disorders can often manifest themselves as a means of coping, and there tends to be high levels of non-attendance at school among children and young people who experience bullying.

But bullying can also have an impact on families and communities and the stress associated with bullying behaviour can impact on parents and carers as well as other family members.

Strained relationships can be caused by disagreements or feelings of blame or guilt when a child is being bullied. Some parents and carers who have experienced bullying themselves are often anxious that the same thing will happen to their child; even though there is no evidence to suggest that this is the case. And a lack of available help and support, or a determination to deal with the situation alone, can leave families feeling helpless and overwhelmed.

Bullying is an emotional issue for us all but our relationships with our children are at the heart of us finding a way forward together. The information contained within this booklet is designed to help you address these impacts by giving you the practical skills and confidence to support your child, and deal with bullying behaviour if it arises.



What is bullying behaviour?

It's important to recognise that children and young people will fall in and out with each other – they will agree and disagree about what's cool and what's not, and they won't make friends with everyone they meet. This is a normal part of growing up. But bullying is never acceptable. It is not a normal part of growing up and it should never be seen as such.

There isn't any one single type of behaviour that defines bullying; it comes in many different forms, which can include:

- **Being called names, teased, put down or threatened**
- **Being hit, tripped or kicked**
- **Having belongings stolen or damaged**
- **Being ignored, left out or having rumours spread about you**
- **Receiving abusive text messages or emails**
- **Being targeted for who you are or who you are perceived to be**

When talking about bullying, it's never helpful to label children and young people as 'bullies' or 'victims'. Labels can stick for life and can isolate a child, rather than helping them to recover or change their behaviour. We need to help children and young people to understand what bullying behaviour is by explaining,

“when you shout nasty comments at x, that's bullying behaviour.

This is how I expect you to act instead.”

This response is much more helpful than,

“when you shout nasty things at x, you're a bully.”

We need to explain why the behaviour is wrong so they can change it – it's easier for a child or young person to change their behaviour, and it's easier for the adults in their lives to support them to change, than it is to shake off a label.

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What signs should I look out for?

There are a number of signs that may indicate that a child or young person is being bullied:

- They become withdrawn
- They have scratches and bruises that can't really be explained
- They don't want to go to school or they are having trouble with school work
- They don't want to go out or play with friends
- Changes are made in the route they take to school
- They complain of headaches, stomach aches and other pains
- They become easily upset, tearful, ill-tempered or display other out-of-character behaviour

Of course this list is by no means exhaustive, and displaying some of the above symptoms won't necessarily mean that your child is being bullied. But as a parent, you will know better than anyone if there's an unexplained change in your child's behaviour that needs to be explored further.



So what should I do?

If you discover that your child is being bullied, don't panic and try to keep an open mind. It's not always easy for a child to tell someone that they're being bullied, so your response is vital. It's important that you **listen and reassure them that coming to you is the right thing to do**. Take time to ask how they feel. Try to find out more about what has happened; who was involved, what type of bullying they have experienced, and where and when it has taken place. This isn't so much about establishing a set of facts; it's more about encouraging talking and listening. Children and young people generally don't have the capacity to deal with bullying by themselves, so being told to "sort it out yourself" or "hit them back" really won't help.

Listening

Children and young people appreciate adults who take the time to listen. When it comes to bullying behaviour, our capacity to listen can help us to understand young people, how they are being affected and what we can do to help.

Good listening is 'active listening', which means much more than simply 'hearing' the words. To really understand children and young people we need to pay attention to all of the key elements of their communication. Listen carefully to what they're saying but also how they're saying it, and pay attention to their body language and facial expressions – you can often learn a lot from these alone.

All behaviour communicates how we feel. If your child hasn't told you that they're being bullied but their words, tone, body language or facial expression give cause for concern then take time to talk to them and explore the reasons behind this.

'Active' listening is also about **responding** appropriately to what your child is communicating. For example, they might be reluctant to verbally tell you that they are being bullied but might display subtle cues, such as becoming withdrawn. Noticing this change and taking time to ask your child how they are can help. Your response will make it easier for them to tell you about the bullying and gain your support.



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Top tips:

- **Don't Panic!**
Remaining calm supports good listening and is reassuring for your child
- **Give your full attention**
This is reassuring and shows you are taking them seriously
- **Explain the reasons for your concern**
Feeding back sensitively what you have noticed can help your child to see more clearly how bullying is impacting on them
- **What do they want you to do?**
Exploring this will make your child feel valued and will help you to understand what support they need
- **Keep Listening!**
If they are reluctant to talk straight away, remind them that you are always available to listen and they can talk to you at any time

- **Children and young people often 'test' adults to see how they will react to smaller issues**

If you react well to these, they're more likely to come to you when something is wrong



What children and young people tell us about bullying

Children and young people are usually very clear about what they want to happen when they tell someone. Listening to their concerns and reflecting on their feelings and experiences can help you to address the situation sensitively and effectively.

“We don't want a big fuss - we just want the bullying to stop!”

This message is loud and clear from young people of all ages and backgrounds. Fear of an over-reaction fuelled by anger or anxiety is a common barrier to reporting bullying. Recognising this will help you to resolve the situation together.



“Sometimes all we want you to do is listen”

Simply taking time to listen can help a child or young person who is being bullied to feel better. Having shared their concerns and being confident that you won't do anything further at this stage will help to reassure them that they can approach you again.



Listening for You

Sometimes parents and carers need someone to listen too. ParentLine Scotland operates a confidential helpline service.

For more information see Page 12

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Other key messages:

- **“Telling can be tough”**

Bullying behaviour attacks self-esteem. You need to be sensitive to this and reassure your child that they have done the right thing by telling you.

- **“I don’t want my bullying to be a burden”**

Some children and young people want to protect a parent or carer from stress or worry. There are usually other adults, such as a teacher or friend, who they can go to instead. You can help by reminding them of this.

- **“Ignoring bullying doesn’t make it go away”**

Experience shows that this advice often makes the problem worse. Bullying is a problem which needs a helpful and considered response.

- **“Names can hurt me”**

Name-calling can be just as hurtful as physical bullying. Children want complaints of verbal bullying to be taken seriously.

- **“Adults can set a bad example”**

Young people learn from the adults in their lives, make sure their learning experience is a positive one.

- **“Adults can make a difference”**

Children agree that parents and carers can offer vital support and make a positive difference when it comes to bullying behaviour.

The way forward

Once you’ve established what’s happened and how your child is feeling, you need to discuss and agree a way forward together. Approaching a school or other organisation about a bullying incident may seem like a daunting prospect – but remember it’s in their best interests to help you resolve the situation and reach a satisfactory outcome.

Make an appointment to speak to the Head Teacher, senior youth worker or other adult that your child feels comfortable with. Calmly tell them what has been going on – it would be helpful if you have details of when the incidents have taken place – then discuss what you would like to happen next and how you can proceed together.

The school or organisation should not suggest that the bullying is your child’s fault, or that they should change their behaviour. Neither should they suggest that your child should move to another class or even move to another school as a solution to the bullying.

Don’t expect the situation to be fully resolved at the first meeting, that won’t always be possible. Neither should you expect them to automatically exclude the person(s) involved. Exclusion alone will rarely change bullying behaviour. Schools and other organisations often employ a variety of methods to prevent and tackle bullying; some will have an immediate effect, others may take longer.

They will also need time to investigate the incidents, so agree a plan of action and set a date to meet again to review the situation. Keep in touch with them and be a ‘pushy parent’ if you need to be, but try to keep the relationship on a positive basis – this will be more beneficial to all parties in the long run.

You should also ask for a copy of the school or organisation’s anti-bullying policy, which sets out how they will deal with bullying behaviour if it occurs. If you have time, it would be useful to get a copy of the policy before your initial meeting so that you can familiarise yourself with these practices.

If the bullying is happening in the community and you need to talk to a neighbour or another parent, do so tactfully and carefully. Again, it’s important to keep the channels of communication open – and remember your child will probably want the situation resolved with the minimum of fuss.



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Anti-bullying policies

Although they're not legally obliged to have a policy, most schools and organisations that work with children and young people would be expected to have one. A robust anti-bullying policy helps organisations to openly address bullying behaviour and to provide support to children, young people, parents and staff. It enables them to challenge bullying behaviour, deal with it appropriately when it occurs and provide information to parents, carers and the community on what is expected of everyone involved.

Some of the things you might want to look for in an anti-bullying policy include:

- **Who to contact if you have a concern**
- **What will happen next**
- **How those involved will be supported**
- **How you will be kept informed of progress/action**
- **What the timescales are likely to be**
- **What to do if you are unhappy with the outcome**
- **What to do if your child requires further support, and signposts to other sources of information and help**

What if my child is displaying bullying behaviour?

Children and young people can become involved in bullying behaviour for a number of reasons – there is no such thing as 'typical' bullying behaviour. Again, all behaviour communicates feelings, so it's important that you explore the reasons behind their behaviour, which might include:

- **They do not recognise their behaviour as 'bullying'**
- **They are unaware of the impact their behaviour is having on other people**
- **They feel challenged and are trying to regain control over a person or situation**
- **They are being encouraged to join in as part of a group and they're going along with it to save face**
- **They have experienced bullying themselves and want to avoid being a target**
- **They are trying to draw attention to problems they are experiencing themselves**
- **They are in a culture where bullying behaviour is acceptable**
- **They have 'learned' bullying behaviour from a role model or peer**

The advice for parents whose child is involved in bullying is not that different from the advice given to parents whose child is being bullied.

It's natural to be angry and upset, but it's important that you remain calm, take the time to discuss the issue and LISTEN to your child's explanation. When you've established the reasons behind the bullying, explain why their behaviour is wrong.

Ask them to consider the impact that their actions are having on the other person or people involved. How would they feel if they were being bullied; what if they were the one who was left feeling anxious, isolated and filled with dread when they left the house?

Agree what you're going to do to stop the bullying behaviour. All behaviour carries consequences and your child has to realise that they are accountable for their actions. At school, this might mean finding a way forward that gives them the chance to make amends or repair relationships with the other person – but be crystal clear that their behaviour is unacceptable and clearly state how you expect them to behave.



You might also want to alert the parents of the other person involved to make sure they're aware of what's been happening and to ensure that their child gets any support that they need. It might be helpful to get support for both families from a third party, such as a teacher. It's also important to get support for your own child. Revisit the reasons for their behaviour and identify the best way of doing this.

Be prepared to deal with prejudiced attitudes. The behaviour behind the bullying might stem from racism, homophobia or ignorance about a different culture or religion. Addressing this can be difficult, challenging and emotive, but prejudiced attitudes must be explored and dealt with.

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Role modelling

The way we, as adults, choose to communicate has a considerable impact on children and young people. Despite what we may think, it's family members that children and young people view as role models, not famous celebrities! This is a huge responsibility and there are a few things to consider when we think about what this means.

Do we show our children how to deal with problems effectively? If we are calm, reasonable and respectful of others, they can learn to act in the same way. But similarly if we fly off the handle or over-react to situations, they can learn that it's okay to act that way.

Does the language we use reinforce that being different is okay? Racist, sectarian, homophobic and other language that promotes negativity towards others can encourage prejudice-based bullying behaviour. We need to show respect for other people and their cultures and beliefs to encourage children and young people – as well as other adults – to value and appreciate difference.

Children are very good at knowing who they can and who they can't talk to. Our challenge as adults is to be someone that children and young people can look up to for all the right reasons; someone they can respect, not fear. When it comes to bullying behaviour, you can make all the difference.

Helping your child to cope

There are valuable things you can teach your child regardless of whether bullying is taking place. We know that children and young people will fall out and disagree with each other as they form and build relationships. This is a normal part of growing up and they have the natural ability to bounce back from this type of behaviour.

Very often children and young people can be more resilient than we give them credit for, but they have to learn from the adults in their lives. Role modelling, consistency and seeing how adults cope and respond to little things, lets children and young people know that you will listen and value them and help them to develop the skills to recover from bullying behaviour.

But if bullying is ignored it can strip away at this resilience, making it harder for them to talk about it, look for help and cope with the impacts. Children and young people need secure relationships around them. They need love, praise and recognition. They need to learn how to socialise and have friendships and interests in and out of school. These are the things that give them the ability and the support needed to cope with difficulties; the things that promote mental wellbeing and provide them with skills they will use and value all of their lives.

Where to get help

Further information on dealing with bullying behaviour can be found on the [respectme](http://respectme.org.uk) website:

www.respectme.org.uk

T: 0844 800 8600

or email: enquire@respectme.org.uk

If your child is being bullied and would like to speak to an adult in confidence, they can contact the Childline Bullying Line on **0800 44 1111**. Lines are open Monday to Friday 11.30am-10pm and Saturday and Sunday from 2pm-8pm.

If you are worried about your child and would like to talk to someone in confidence, you can call **ParentLine Scotland on 0808 800 2222**. Lines are open Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am to 5pm Tuesday and Thursday 9am to 9pm.

ParentLine Scotland

ParentLine Scotland is the free, confidential helpline which offers support, advice and information to anyone caring for a child in Scotland. Each year it receives a number of calls from mothers, fathers, grandparents, step-parents and other family members who are concerned about a child being bullied and want to share their worries with someone who will listen.

Below is an example of a typical call that ParentLine receives:

A concerned father called about his daughter (13) who was being bullied at school. Her nature had changed as a result of the ongoing bullying and he had serious concerns that the school didn't believe his

daughter and were in fact blaming her for the behaviour.

He also believed that one of the teachers was bullying her. There was an incident where this teacher would not let his daughter go to the toilet - said that she did not need to go and she would have to wait or "pee in her pants".

The father had been to the school but was very dissatisfied with the outcome. He had removed his daughter from the school that day, stating that "she is not going back there". He had also been in touch with the local education authority and had spoken to the police, who he found to be very supportive.

The ParentLine call taker gave the father space to explain the situation and reflected on his feelings of anger, frustration and injustice and reaffirmed that the daughter was believed at home.

They discussed the action the caller had already taken and what the outcomes were. The call taker advised the caller to look at the [respectme](http://respectme.org.uk) website for some practical advice on what to do next, and suggested that it might be helpful to keep a diary of events.

They confirmed that caller's daughter was aware that she could call ChildLine and verified the telephone number. The call ended after they had discussed helping the daughter to cope with the situation by keeping the lines of communication open.

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Example: Quotations from ParentLine calls:

“The school said that it’s my child’s fault that he gets bullied - that he needs to learn how to stick up for himself and then the bullies won’t target him.”

“When I asked to see the school’s anti-bullying policy, I was told that they don’t have one - they just deal with it.”

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ParentLine
SCOTLAND 0808 800 2222
Because being a parent isn't easy

Conclusion

There is no easy answer when it comes to bullying behaviour. Every situation is different; the reasons behind the behaviour will differ, and each incident will require an individual approach.

What we do know is that children and young people need and value good role models in their lives. And it’s the people that they see every day that can make a difference; people they can learn from and look up to – and who make mistakes just like everyone else! They need you to be the person who can make a difference – the one who notices when something’s not right and takes the time to talk to them, and the person they can turn to when they need help.

Children can be embarrassed or scared of what will happen if they tell an adult that they’re being bullied. They need to be confident that you will take them seriously and LISTEN to them. They want to know that you will help to make the bullying stop without over-reacting and by considering their feelings and wishes. And this might mean agreeing not to do anything except monitor the situation for a while, which can be difficult, but children and young people tell us that often it helps just to have told someone.

If they do want you to act, make sure you agree a way forward **with** your child, give them a say in how they would like the situation to be dealt with – and remember they’ll probably want a minimum of fuss.

Sadly children and young people have told us that, on some occasions, telling makes no difference. None of us wants our child to think,

“I’m not telling you because it won’t make any difference.”

We can rise to this challenge. Be someone that they want to tell. Showing your child that you can listen, being able to ask for help when needed and working at your relationship together can make all the difference.


respectme
Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service