

Bullying: Including Bullying Online

What is Bullying?

Experiencing any type of unkindness from another person can be very upsetting for both you and your child. Sometimes it is not always possible or sensible to 'ignore' hurtful comments or online bullying.

Bullying can happen in the real world and online and is designed to have a direct impact upon another person. Bullies aim to cause maximum distress, fear, harm and embarrassment as quickly and as effectively as possible, with little thought or care about the short, and long-term consequences of their actions.

The nature, speed and ability of the technology offers countless opportunities for the anonymous targeting of victims through messaging, emailing, photo, image and video sharing using an ever growing number of social media channels, apps and platforms. It can be undertaken anytime, in any place and from any location, with very little thought or consideration given to the person on the receiving end.

Active tips for preventing Online Bullying:

- Be aware of **fake profiles** and people pretending to be someone that they are not – encourage your child to question who may be friending or messaging them – don't accept them if they are suspicious.
- Encourage your child to only accept requests from genuine friends who are known in the 'real-world'.
- If someone posts or messages inappropriate or upsetting material, give them an opportunity to remove it – if this persists, take screenshots and copies of messages, times and dates as evidence for any legal or disciplinary routes.
- Remind your child that nothing can ever be 'deleted' from the internet and will remain online forever and things that they send or share may cause them or others upset in the future.
- Remind your child not to share personal information online that may make them a target for cyberbullying.

Tips for you as a parent/carer to help your child or any child who is being bullied?

- **Listen** – It might be difficult for your child to talk about what is happening to them. Be patient and give your child quiet time to think and talk.
- **Let them speak** – Try and allow the child an uninterrupted opportunity to tell you what is happening. No one appreciates being interrupted and it could stop your child telling you everything.
- **Get the facts** – Remember, you are listening to your child and their feelings and there will always be another point of view. Being totally prepared with all of the available facts will help address the problem. Having access to inappropriate digital messages can help demonstrate what has been going on.
- **Reassure** – Comfort and reassure your child and try and get them to a point where they are calm and less anxious about what is happening to them. You will need to reassure them that the situation will get better for them, not worse as a result of telling you.

- **Control your own reaction** – When you see your child in distress you will automatically engage your protective instincts. Common emotions may be anger, getting upset, shouting or acting upon impulse. Over reacting, may put your child off telling you things in the future. Your child has told you because they are looking to you to help them not create more issues.
- **Keep calm** - It is not possible to control the behaviour of others but we can be empowered through the control our own. Despite how angry, upset or worried you may feel about what your child is telling you, try and remain calm. You will help your child feel more positive and reassured about the situation if you model a calm and supportive response.
- **Be positive and proactive** – Telling you will bring your child relief that they have been able to talk about what is happening to them and will empower them to become part of the solution to their problem. Discuss what you will and can do to help them and follow through with what you have agreed.
- **Empower them** – Agree upon some simple things that your child can do to help themselves whilst the issue is being sorted.
- **Be realistic** – It can take time to deal with and stop a child being bullied so be patient and allow others time to investigate and establish the facts of a situation. Work with others to find short term strategies for your child to use. This will show them that they are supported but also have some control over what is happening.
- **Avoid confrontation** – It is natural to want to get the situation sorted out as quickly as possible. Dropping in uninvited at another parent or carers house may make the situation worse for your child. Try to avoid confronting another child, this will often make the situation worse for you and your child.

Bullying in school

- **Don't be afraid to ask for help** – Situations that involve another child in the same school are best sorted out with the help of the school themselves. They will be able to offer everyone involved support and will remain neutral throughout the process. Be honest and communicate with the school to help find a solution.
- **Be patient** – Schools are very busy places and require staff to prioritise how and when an allegation can be dealt with. Do not expect the situation to suddenly be resolved just because you have passed your concern to the school. It is likely to take time and co-operation from all of those involved. Depending on when you reported an incident will depend on how quickly the school is able to respond.
- **Follow up** – If you have not heard from the school after 24 hours, contact your child's school and ask about progress.
- **Behaviour Policy or Anti Bullying Policy** – Familiarise yourself with the school's Behaviour or Anti Bullying Policy. This document will give you an idea of the procedures and responsibilities that the school has when it comes to dealing with bullying.
- **Every case is different** – Remember, every case of bullying will be different and some may be more complex and more serious to sort out than others. Allow the school to do their job and work with them to help ensure a quick solution.
- **Be clear about your responsibilities** – As a parent/carer you along with the school have certain responsibilities to ensure that your child is protected and supported when it comes to bullying. If you agree to do certain things, follow through with them.

Bullying outside of school

It can be difficult to know your roles and responsibilities when your child is being bullied outside of school.

- State schools have the legal power to make sure that children behave outside of school premises, this includes bullying, including online, that happens anywhere off the of the school site.
- You are able to go directly to the police if you are concerned that your child is being bullied and depending on the nature of the complaint, they will be able to offer you the correct advice and support.