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Bullying

A Guide for Parents and Carers



Nurturing, Inspiring, Committing and Succeeding at Canberra and Beyond

What is bullying?

In 2017 the Scottish Government produced Respect for All, a document outlining their approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children.

It defines bullying as:

"Bullying is both behaviour and impact; the impact on a person's capacity to feel in control of themselves. This is what we term as their sense of 'agency'. Bullying takes place in the context of relationships; it is behaviour that can make people feel hurt, threatened, frightened and left out. This behaviour happens face to face and online."

This behaviour can harm people physically and emotionally and, although the actual behaviour may not be repeated, the threat may be sustained over time, typically by actions, looks, messages, confrontations, physical interventions, or the fear of these."

This behaviour can include:

- ◇ *being called names, teased, put down or threatened face to face/online*
- ◇ *being hit, tripped, pushed or kicked*
- ◇ *having belongings taken or damaged*
- ◇ *being ignored, left out or having rumours spread about you (face-to-face and/or online)*
- ◇ *sending abusive messages, pictures or images on social media, online gaming platforms or phone*
- ◇ *behaviour which makes people feel like they are not in control of themselves or their lives (face-to-face and/or online)*
- ◇ *being targeted because of who you are or who you are perceived to be (face to face and/or online).*

What to do if your child is displaying bullying behaviour

If you suspect your child is bullying others the issue must still be dealt with in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Talk to your child in a non-judgmental way to establish all the facts. Explain to them that they must expect some sanctions and consequences if this behaviour continues, and that it may have an impact on future decisions they wish to make. Encourage them to show empathy and kindness, and to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. It's equally important to establish what is prompting the behaviour.

Some causes of bullying behaviour in children can be:

- ◆ low self esteem
- ◆ to gain the admiration and/or attention of their peer group
- ◆ fear of being left out
- ◆ don't understand others especially those they perceive as 'different'
- ◆ if they are exposed to a culture of bullying and aggression themselves

Useful websites

www.childline.org.uk

www.youngminds.org.uk/bullying/facts

www.kidpower.org

www.actagainstbullying.org

The Canberra anti-bullying policy can be found on the school website:

www.canberra-pri.s-lanark.sch.uk

Bullying out of school

Due to money and time constraints schools are unlikely to get involved with incidents which occur at the weekend or during school holidays. However trouble can spill over from home to school life so it may be worth mentioning to your child's school. There is often safety in numbers so it may help for children to stay in groups with their friends, and perhaps suggest taking a different route to and from school. If a problem is occurring with children in your street/neighbourhood it can help speak to the other parents but it is important to remain calm and impartial. Invite friends round to play so your child doesn't feel excluded from other groups. Don't let bullying dominate their life by encouraging your child to engage in new activities or clubs such as self defense classes. This will improve confidence, teach them new skills and introduce them to new friends, while hopefully putting the bullying into perspective. It may help to ease up on other pressures at home such as helping out with housework.

What are the signs that your child is bullying others?

- ◆ has friends or peers who show signs of bullying behaviour
- ◆ gets into fights or shows increased aggression
- ◆ gets into trouble in school with teachers and/or head teacher
- ◆ comes home with unexplained property
- ◆ blames others and won't take responsibility for own actions
- ◆ becomes very concerned with their reputation/popularity or being overly competitive



When is it 'something else'?

It is important that children learn that managing relationships and conflict is a part of all of our lives. Friends often 'fall-out' and it can appear that one party may have the upper-hand. These situations may still have to be dealt with so it doesn't escalate into bullying. Discuss with your child how they are feeling and help them develop the skills to bounce back from these conflicts.

Some behaviours may appear to be bullying but can in fact be something more serious. Criminal offences such as hate crime, sexual harassment or assault and physical assault are very serious incidents. There are laws in place to protect children from these types of offence and they should be dealt with accordingly.

What are the warning signs that your child is being bullied?

There are many warning signs that may show your child is being affected by bullying - either being bullied or bullying others. Not all children will want to ask for help so it is crucial to talk to your child if you suspect something is wrong. Raising the subject whilst carrying out every-day tasks can take the pressure off and provide a casual way to bring the conversation around to bullying. These warning signs can also indicate other problems, another important reason to talk to your child is to find the true root of the problem.

Being bullied;

- ◆ unexplained injuries
- ◆ loss or destruction of property, money or belongings
- ◆ illness or faking illness to avoid going to school
- ◆ sudden change in eating habit such as comfort eating or loss of appetite
- ◆ sudden change in sleeping patterns such as trouble sleeping or nightmares
- ◆ not wanting to go school, struggling to keep up with or loss of interest in school work

- ◆ low self-esteem and/or lack of confidence
- ◆ self destructive or self-critical behaviours

Effects of bullying

Bullying can have long lasting effects on not just the bullied but also the perpetrator and any witnesses. The negative repercussions on mental health can last into adulthood and can include depression, anxiety and loneliness/ social isolation.

Why children might not want to tell an adult

Many incidents of bullying go unreported to an adult. Children who are being bullied often feel a great sense of loss of control and helplessness, and by telling an adult the situation can quickly escalate further out of their hands. They may also fear reprisals or further social isolation from their peers. It can be a very humiliating experience and the child may not want anyone else knowing what has been said. They may also fear being accused of being weak, 'telling tales' or being judged. Children could worry that they might face rejection by adults or their group of friends, or that no-one cares or understands their situation. They may also fear they have brought the bullying upon themselves by something they have done wrong.



What to do if you suspect your child is being bullied

No one likes to think their child will be affected by bullying but more than half of children will be involved, whether as a victim, as bully or as a witness, at some point in their lives. Its vital to recognise the warning signs early, whether the problem is caused by bullying or other issues its important to act anyway. Don't ignore behavioural or emotional changes that are out of character for your child. If you suspect they are in danger it crucial to get help right away. Parents and carers must learn what is bullying and what isn't, and consider what is the right strategy to resolve the problem.

It has be shown that children value choice so it is often best to give a variety of options of how to proceed. This will address the loss of control often felt and can restore self-worth, develop resilience and promote positive approaches to future relationships and conflicts. It is important to listen without getting angry or upset, and to not pass judgement. Reassure the child that its not their fault and perhaps ask them how they would like to proceed.

Key things to avoid are advising children to hit or name-call back (this will only add to stress and anxiety in child how is already suffering low confidence) and saying a child should "sort it out themselves". Telling a child to ignore bullying sends the message that bullying is something that is to be tolerated.

What can the school do?

It is important to make sure you have a clear grasp of the facts before approaching your child's school. Its a good idea to make an appointment in advance with the head teacher and raise any issues in a non-confrontational way. Avoid apportioning blame and work with the school to find a solution that satisfies all parties involved. It is important to give the school time to deal with the problem and maintain good contact and arrange a follow up to see how the situation is progressing. Keeping a diary of incidents as and when they occur can help establish a pattern of behavior which can in turn help the school to resolve the issue. By law every school must have an anti-bullying policy outlining the process the school will follow to deal and with bullying, and to avoid it occurring in the first place.