

What is bullying?

a Q and A guide for parents about bullying and how to support your child

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What is bullying?

Bullying, or peer on peer abuse, is defined as: “behaviour by an individual or a group, repeated overtime that intentionally hurts another individual either physically or emotionally”. (DfE “Preventing and Tackling Bullying”, July 2017)

Throughout school children will learn that bullying is:

- repeated behaviour that happens regularly;
- deliberate. The bully wants to hurt, humiliate or harm the other child;
- an imbalance of power. It involves someone (or a group of people) who are stronger in some way that the person who is being bullied. They may be older, stronger, there may be more of them or they may have a ‘hold’ over the person (e.g. they know a secret about them).

We teach our pupils about four different types of bullying:

1. Verbal e.g. hurtful comments and threats, name-calling (this includes Hate Crime - racist and homophobic, biphobic or transphobic comments)
2. Physical e.g. hitting, kicking, taking belongings
3. Emotional e.g. staring, glaring, leaving people out, spreading rumours
4. Cyber e.g. using technology to hurt someone through a variety of media – e.g. text messages, comments on social networks
5. prejudicial

Children will learn that bullying is not a one-off fight or argument or when a friend is sometimes thoughtless.

Why do children bully?

- They don't realise how much it hurts
- They dislike or are jealous of someone
- It makes them feel powerful or respected
- It gets them what they want (sweets, money)
- They are bullied themselves and are taking out their hurt and anger on someone who won't fight back
- They are having problems in their life that are making them feel bad.

REMEMBER: People who are happy with themselves do not need to bully other people!

Can my child totally avoid bullies?

Probably not! At any age and stage of life, it is possible to come across people with unpleasant personalities or bullying tendencies, and it is a valuable life lesson to learn skills to deal with them.

You should aim to support them to develop the awareness and skills to protect themselves when necessary (both physically and emotionally), and to seek help when they're in over their head.

Why is it normal for children to fall out?

All children want to get their way – and as they develop and grow as individuals, it is normal to abuse power, and to some extent to be mean at times.

Banter and teasing is often intended to be light and playful, it is an attempt to be funny and make others laugh – although these jokes can still be hurtful. And of course, some forms of banter are illegal – eg racial, sexual.

If your child is not being picked or included in games, it doesn't always mean they're being bullied but they will still need help with how to join in with other games and extend their friendships. Some games, particularly for boys, are really physical; if your child gets knocked, it might not be bullying – it could just be a consequence of rough play. Fighting is physical aggression; again, there does not have to be an imbalance of power and it doesn't have to be systematic – like "bullying" would be.

It is helpful to understand how children develop empathy and understanding (through some of the falling out described above) - it sounds bizarre, but it can make them better people. This is why school does not always deal with all incidents of "falling out" the way you might expect – and we don't always label unkind behaviour as bullying. That said, if a child/ren repeatedly call your child names, say nasty things, physically hurt them or keep making fun of them, this is bullying and it's not okay. Please encourage your child to talk to us, with or without you, depending how they feel.

What does school do about bullying?

At Kingsmoor we hold an Anti-Bullying week and use all opportunities in the class and playtimes to teach children about our zero tolerance to bullying. We have an Anti-Bullying policy which explains what to do if bullying is reported and what the school is doing to stop bullying happening in the first place:

- Making sure that all children and adults mean the same thing when they talk about bullying
- Helping children to understand how bullying feels for the person being bullied
- Making sure that all children know exactly what to do if they are being bullied, and feel confident that something will be done to stop it
- Making sure that all children feel confident about telling an adult when they know that bullying is going on
- Helping children enjoy, celebrate and respect the ways we are all different, as well as the ways in which we are similar, and to feel good about themselves.

How can I help at home?

The most important things that you can do to help your child to understand, help prevent, and deal with bullying are to:

- Know *what* your child will be learning about bullying at school (by reading this booklet or looking at the school's website)
- Talk openly to your child about the different types of bullying and how it might feel to be bullied
- Be a good role model in the way you talk about others – so your child will learn that everybody deserves respect; *"Don't worry that your children are not listening to a word you say – worry that they are watching everything you do!"*
- Model empathy for others – talk about how other people might feel in different situations

Normal Conflict Vs. Bullying

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Equal power or friends□ Happens occasionally□ Accidental□ Not serious□ Equal emotional reaction□ Not seeking power or attention□ Not trying to get something□ Remorse-takes responsibility□ Effort to solve the problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ Imbalance of power, not friends□ Repeated negative actions□ Purposeful□ Serious with threat of physical or emotional harm□ Strong emotional reaction from victim; little or no reaction from bully□ Seeking power, control□ Attempts to gain power□ No remorse-blames victims□ No effort to solve problems |
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- Make it safe for your child to share their worries about bullying with you, so they know they can rely on you to listen to them and support them
- Encourage your child to report bullying – if they are the victim or the bystander – to a teacher, in the suggestion box etc
- Teach them how to use be online and social media safely, as well as supervising or limiting access to technology as appropriate to the child's age
- Encourage and support them to try out the skills they are learning in school.

What should I do if I think my child is being bullied?

Your child may not tell you or us that he or she is being bullied. If you suspect it is happening, look out for the possible signs of bullying (this is in the parent leaflet, the anti-bullying policy on the school website or there are loads of online resources to help you).

- Be calm – it can be upsetting to learn your child is/may be being bullied
- Do not get angry or threaten to visit school or parent of the other child – this may only frighten your child further
- Praise your child for telling you and reassure them that they have done the right thing. Reassure them it is not their fault
- Listen to your child, accept your child's feelings and encourage them to talk about their worries – minor feelings are very real
- Don't jump in with advice or try solve the problem for them. Listen to their ideas on finding a solution, unless they are likely to end up in serious danger or trouble
- If you tell your child to fight back or say something 'clever' to the bullies they may well end up feeling twice as bad. Not only are they being bullied, but they have failed to stop it as well
- Help your child to think about what they would like to happen, and ask how you can help
- Talk to your child about strategies to deal with a bully (see below)
- You may want to look at anti bullying websites for advice on assertiveness training and building self-esteem
- Work doubly hard to help them feel valued and important
- Tell your child that you have to inform your child's class teacher at this point and agree how you can do this in the best way so your child does not feel anxious about this happening. School can only deal with bullying that we know of – if your child only suddenly confides about a problem, it is likely that the school is unaware of it too.

When you talk to school please be specific about what has been happening – if you can, keep a diary of exactly what was said or done, when and where, keep any text messages, or posts on social media. It might be useful to consider these questions as preparation for coming into school -

How is it affecting your child? How long has the bullying been going on? What's been happening? Where? Who's involved? Where other children around? Did the child tell a teacher or any other adult?

Ask us what we will do and what we would advise you to do. Remember that we all want the best for your child. We will draw up a plan together with follow up steps. Working with school is critical to success, efforts to address bullying are unlikely to succeed unless school and home work together.

What strategies can I suggest to my child who is being bullied?

There are some very practical steps that children can employ –

- avoid areas which allow the bullying students to avoid detection by teachers
- stay with other students
- talk to an adult at school or home who can help stop the bullying
- go somewhere else/safe
- get support from your friends
- keep asking for support until the bullying stops.

It can also be helpful to explain to your child that while they can't control the bully, they can always control their response to the bully – and their response will either inflame the situation or defuse it and it can make it harder or easier for them to deal with emotionally themselves.

Your child needs to avoid getting "hooked" no matter how mad the bully makes him and some of these strategies can offer tips on how to achieve this.

Ignoring children behaving in a bullying way is very effective – don't react, bullies want an audience - *"Pretend they're invisible," "Walk away without looking at them," "Look completely uninterested."*

Another strategy that some children use is to **pretend they don't care**, acting unaffected or unimpressed - 'okay, yeah, maybe' – while standing and walking with a posture of confidence.

Trying to deflect/calm the bullying (e.g. agreeing with the bullying when they say offensive or negative things) is known as 'fogging' and might be a strategy your child wants to try... it takes the wind out of their sails without any escalation.

"You're dumb." Child: "Yeah, but I'm good at it."

"Hey, four eyes." Child: "You're right, I wear glasses."



Communication experts suggest teaching your child to address the bully beginning with "I want" and say firmly what he wants changed: "I want you to leave me alone." or "I want you to stop teasing me."



Give your child words to stick up for themselves: "It's my turn now." "Hey, stop that." "Hands off my body." "It's not okay to hurt." "I don't like being called that. I want you to call me by my name."

Role-play bullying scenarios with your child practicing their responses – let them know if they are getting their message across assertively. Being assertive is clearly explaining what you need or want from someone, without being pushy or trying to frighten them. Talk about how voices, bodies and faces send messages just the same way words do. Practice verbal replies until your child has a strong, self-assured tone.

Teach your child the "**Broken record**" technique of dealing with situations.

Fighting with the other child (as distinct from defending themselves from a physical attack) can escalate the situation, and your child may be reprimanded for their part in a fight.

Sometimes children want peer acceptance so much that they continue to hang around a group of peers even when one of the group leaders begins to mistreat them. If you suspect your child might be vulnerable, listen to what he says about peer interactions to help him learn to check in with his own inner wisdom, and work to provide healthy relationship opportunities for him.

Teach your child that there is no shame in being frightened by a bully, in walking away, in telling an adult and asking for help.

What strategies might help children with conflict resolution?

A critical part of growing up is learning how to get on with others and what to do when there is conflict. The following steps are useful in helping children find peaceful ways of solving problems with other people.

You can change the way you ask the questions depending on the age of the child, but the general steps are the same for all ages.

- ❖ Begin by letting children know that it is **possible to find a good solution**. Parents could say something like: "I'm sure if we all think about this, we might find a way of everyone getting what they want".
- ❖ Help children **identify how they are feeling**, and help them to label and express their emotions. (e.g. 'You're looking cross – I'm wondering if you're maybe feeling cross, but also a bit sad and hurt that you can't join in their game. How do you feel about it?').
- ❖ Help children to **work out what they really want** by asking them what they would like to have happen. Help them to work out what the underlying need is, (e.g. 'You say you wish your friend would go away. I'm wondering if you are also wishing that you could join in their game?').
- ❖ Help your child to **understand the other person's point of view** and to learn how to take their perspective. Ask them what they think the other person might be feeling, or how they might feel if they were in the same situation. You could get them to ask the other person to say how they are feeling and what they would like to have happen.
- ❖ Encourage all the children involved in the potential conflict to brainstorm **different ways that they could solve the problem**. Encourage them to come up with several different and interesting ways that they could go about it.
- ❖ Help the children to **choose the option(s) that they think work best for everyone**, and get them to have a go at putting them into practice. Stay around to see how they get on, and help them fine-tune the solution if needed.
- ❖ Reading children books that teach conflict resolution skills through stories can also be helpful.

What should my child do if they witness bullying?

Encourage your child to talk about what happened; they may not know what to do and they won't want to make the situation worse - feeling worried about the impact of taking action on their friendships or being anxious that they will be bullied as a result of intervening. Let them know you understand their feelings and fears. Respect their feelings and their assessment of the situation.

Tell your child that reporting the bullying is okay because kids often need help from adults to stop it. Point out that if they don't do anything the bullying will only continue. If other students are confident to take safe and effective action there is a greater possibility that the bullying will stop.

Talk to your child about what they can do to support a child who is being bullied. They could befriend the child and be kind to them, include them in their games and they must tell an adult what is going on. We work in school to teach all children how to be an 'Upstander' and not a bystander – for example - tell the person who is bullying you will get a teacher if they don't stop; tell the person bullying you don't think what they do is cool or funny; walk away and tell a teacher right away; encourage your friends to walk away or tell the person to stop. Talking to your child about this at home will be helpful.

Why don't schools just get rid of bullies?

Parents are often surprised when schools don't automatically exclude children who are bullying others. If schools excluded every child who has ever bullied that would include many children, and children aren't born bullies or victims – they change roles according to where they are and who they are with and they can learn not to be bullies. Helping the bully to understand how the other child is feeling and the effect of bullying on them, teaching them to stand up to peer pressure from others, giving them support to manage the problems they are facing in their own lives – all of these things can change bullying behaviour for good.

The best thing to do is to deal with the problem and try to stop the child from bullying altogether. At Kingsmoor we will always have the right to exclude them if the behaviour does not improve following all necessary actions. When children who are bullied are asked what they want to happen they very rarely mention punishing the other child or revenge, they almost always say: 'I just want it to stop.'

What should I do if my child is bullying others?

- If you are told that your child is bullying others don't immediately dismiss the idea or rush into punishing them
- Try not to call them a bully as we are all capable of bullying others
- When you talk stay calm and remind them that it is the behaviour you do not like not them. Listen to what they have to say Model warm and respectful relationships yourself
- Try to understand why they are behaving in this way - Have any major events taken place recently to upset your child (parents separated, death in the family, significant illness in the family, siblings bullying your child)? Is the bullying happening because your child is feeling sad or stressed? Do other issues need to be resolved?
- Help them take responsibility for their behaviour and to see bullying is unacceptable – talk to your child about how the other person feels– they may not realise how much they are hurting, frightening or upsetting the other person
- Ask them what they think will stop them bullying
- Help your child problem solve, learn social skills, deal with strong emotions and learn more appropriate ways to behave
- Research how to help your child deal with conflict and practice these tips
- Help your child to develop confidence to make friends – happy people don't need to bully others
- Apply your family rules and decide if consequences for their behaviour should apply at home as well as sanctions school may use
- Seek outside help if you feel your child's bullying behaviour is part of a bigger behavioural or health problem
- Working with school is critical to success, efforts to address bullying are unlikely to succeed unless the school and home work together.