

Bullying – How to Help



What is bullying

Bullying can have many different guises; it does not just happen in school. Bullying can be when someone hits or kicks you, or when people call you names to take things which belong to you, or when no-one will talk to you or be your friend, name calling, teasing, threats and extortion, physical assault to an individual or their property and one single unresolved incident can cast a shadow over a child's life. All of these are bullying. Bullying is often a deliberate act, done to cause distress and to give a feeling of power, status or other gratification to the bully.

Bullying can and must be stopped. It is not always the sole responsibility of the child and their parents to resolve, it is a school discipline problem and if left unaddressed, bullying may lead to low performance, truancy, illness (real or not) and occasionally death.

What do I do?

Children/people bully, usually as the result of a lack of understanding and knowledge regarding something/someone who is different. One of the main ways to assist and help a child with a visual impairment to get over bullying, is to provide information and raise awareness of the visual impairment and the resulting issues for the child. Information relating to the disability could be provided to, for example, the whole school, by way of an assembly, questions and answers, or classroom presentations on specific disabilities.

When it has been established that your child is being bullied you should: Reassure your child that you are going to do something to help and that what is happening to them is not their fault. The best way for the school to help to try to stop the bullying is to make sure your school knows that you are being bullied and who is bullying you, as soon as possible. You can tell anyone at school, the Head Teacher, Class Teacher or any other Teacher you get along with. Or ask your parents or someone else to tell the school for you, or ask someone to go along to school and they can speak to the school for you. Ask for an investigation and ask to be told of the outcome of this and the action to be taken. Make a note of the people you have spoken to and the main points of the conversation. Ensure that the Head Teacher is informed of your meeting.

Keep a diary of incidents, including the name, place, time, details of injuries, visits to doctors or casualty departments, incidents can then be checked out easily.

Do not accept that, "You are the only one to complain, there must be something wrong with your child", or "Its only horseplay, bullying is not a problem in our school."

The statistics indicate that these statements are almost always standard replies from schools that cannot cope with bullying. Always ask for an appointment with the Head Teacher. The school have to make sure your child is safe from any danger, most schools have an anti-bullying policy, you can ask for a copy.

A problem may have taken months or years to develop and so it will take time to resolve, you have to be realistic in your expectations of the school, if they have agreed to sort things out. For your child to change schools is not always a good idea, as this leaves the bullying unresolved.

If you feel you have got nowhere in your contacts with the school, talk to someone on the Board of Governors. Parents have the right to complain to the Governing Body, who is legally bound to hear the complaint and treat it within the law under sections 68 and 99 of the 1944 Education Act. All Boards of Governors have Parent Members and the school must inform parents of their names and addresses (In Scotland, the equivalent of the Governing Body is the School Board).

If you disagree with evidence presented following an investigation, with regard to your child's behaviour, ask for a school-based assessment by an Education Psychologist. School Governors and parents must sort out bullying by investigating, this is an essential part of any school's educational responsibilities. The majority of bullies are mishandling quite common feelings of fear and inadequacy and the individual needs to be taught better ways. Untreated bullies may continue to use violence in adult life and may fail to make stable, happy relationships. Off-loading the problem solves nothing for anyone

CHECKLIST

For your child to feel better they need to:

- Tell a responsible adult
- Feel that something is being done about the bullying
- See that you are taking steps to protect them

Telling is the first step towards help. The child needs to identify a sympathetic teacher and impress on your child, the need to tell the teacher whenever bullying occurs.

The teacher can be asked to encourage other children to report incidents of bullying, informing the children that this is bring responsible rather than seen as "Telling Tales".

During any meetings with school staff, as a parent, be assertive not aggressive. Prior to the meeting, create a list of main points you wish to discuss. Return to the points until you receive a satisfactory answer. Do not lose your temper, shout or swear this

is unproductive. The relationship between the school and the parent needs to be a good working partnership.

Encourage your child to talk about things in general, friends, family, feelings and listen closely to what they have to say, it will be a lot easier to recognise when they are having a problem with things, this will help early detection of any difficulties and enable you to talk this through with your child and helps to establish preventative measures.

All schools have a bullying problem from time to time and do not be put off by the school saying "bullying is not a problem". Ask the school to start a support group, run by teacher and/or social workers, this will help both victims and bullies.

Do not let your child or yourself be treated as a culprit, bullying makes people unhappy and robs victims of a well-balanced childhood. Do not give in, be persistent and insistent.

TACKLING BULLYING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The following are a few notes to make your school days the **happiest** days of your life instead of the **worst** days of your life,

What to do if you are bullied - TELL ! TELL ! TELL!

Tell your friends. Your friends may be able to help and protect you. Maybe one of them will tell the bully to "Shove off", this may help.

Tell your Teachers. Teachers, working with other teachers should tackle the problem and get it stopped.

Tell your Parents. Your parents can make an appointment and visit the school, to demand action against the bullying.

What if you are bullied by a Teacher –

If a teacher regularly calls you names and punishes you unfairly, it is really important that you **tell your parents** and that they make an appointment to complain to the Head Teacher.

What if the Teacher or the Head Teacher will do nothing about the bullying after being told again and again?

Your parents should contact the Board of Governors and report the bullying to the Education Officer. There are no innocent bystanders when it comes to bullying, if you witness an attack and do nothing to help, you become part of the bullying, so always **tell and seek help. All bullying should be reported.**

MYTHS

1. **It's natural, character forming, can't be helped. The child must learn to mix more. He/she asks for it!**

Mixing more will help if it is possible. If your child is never alone, bullying might stop, but many victims are ostracised by other children, who fear that they too will become victims of the bully. Victims can often be natural 'loners' through lack of shared interests and abilities by choice. Learning to mix more can mean hiding what you

really are and pretending to be something you are not, which can be stressful. To be accepted may mean adopting activities for example, drinking, drugs, smoking, petty crime, often done under pressure to be accepted as “one of the crowd”. A good school will use and value pupil’s differences, at the same time encouraging group co-operation and good citizenship.

2. If your child can’t cope with bullying, he/she should be at another, or special school.

To fear bullying is normal, this is a common ploy for frightening you into silence, or getting rid of your child. Special schools are not for victims of bullying.

3. Keep changing your route home, come late to avoid the other children, or what happens outside school is not our responsibility.

This suggests to staff and children that bullying is either to be condoned, or is impossible to control, both are wrong. Bullies are not receiving the help they need and children learn most by example, especially adult examples.

4. Fight back and learn to look after yourself.

Do not fight back, get away as soon as possible and tell a responsible adult. The Family and School together must deal with the bullying. Fighting back confuses the issue and alienates the adult help.

Victims can sometimes lash out in their frustration and panic, even towards innocent children, sometimes this can be misnamed as bullying and should be understood for what it is, if bullies and victims are seen to be in need of help.

5. Without names we can do nothing.

It makes it harder, but something can be done. Un-detailed warnings can be given in assembly,

Disclaimer: Information sheets have been produced to provide information and advice for the parents of visually impaired children. Changes may occur in theories and legislation, however, the information sheets have been written in good faith, as a general guidance tool. If you have any questions with regard to issues raised by the information sheet, please contact the National Blind Children’s Society, National Family Support and Information Manager.